

tucumán burns

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Beginning in 1968, a series of aesthetic works started to be produced in the Argentinean art world which broke with the avant-gardist pretense of the artists associated with the Di Tella Institute. Until then, this institution had adjudicated responsibility for legislating and proposing new models of engagement, not only for the artists linked to it, but for all new artistic affairs that arose in the country.

These works ruptured the celebrated and precious aesthetic atmosphere of the false avant-garde events produced in the official cultural institutions and began to suggest the emergence of a new attitude that would lead to the deployment of artistic phenomena as positive and real actions intended to initiate a modification of the environment in which they were generated.

This attitude pointed towards the development of implicit political content in all works of art, and to propose them as actively and violently charged so that the work of the artist would be incorporated into reality with a truly avant-garde and, thus, revolutionary intention. Aesthetic works that denounced the cruelty of the Vietnam War or the radical falsity of American policies would speak directly to the necessity of creating not only a relation between the work of art and the mass media, but an artistic object capable, on its own, to produce modifications as effective as a political act.

The recognition of this new conception drove a group of artists to postulate aesthetic creation as a *collective and violent* act destroying the bourgeois myth of the new forms of art. To be violent in this manner is to possess and destroy the old forms of art that reinforce the institution of individual property and the personal pleasure of the unique art object. Violence is now a creative act with new content: it destroys the system of the official culture, opposing it with a subversive culture that integrates the process of transformation, creating a truly revolutionary art.

Revolutionary art is born from an awareness of the actual reality of the artist as an individual inside the political and social context that surrounds him.

Revolutionary art proposes the aesthetic work as a hub that integrates and unifies all the elements that conform to human reality: economic, social, and political. It is an integration of the contributions of the different disciplines eliminating the separation between artists, intellectuals and technicians in a unitary action of all of them directed to modify the totality of the social structure—that is to say, it is a *total art*.

Revolutionary art activates reality through a process of collecting the elements that compose it, through an extraordinary ideological conception based on the principles of materialist reason.

Revolutionary art, in this way, presents itself as a partial form of reality that integrates itself into total reality, destroying the idealistic separation between the work and the world, as it maintains a truthful transformation of the social structures—that is to say, it is a *transformative art*.

Revolutionary art is the manifestation of those political contents that fight to destroy the obsolete artistic and aesthetic philosophy of bourgeois society, integrating into the revolutionary forces that fight the forms of economic dependency and class oppression—it is, therefore, a *social art*.

The work that is realized by this group of avant-garde artists is the continuation of a series of acts of aggression aimed at institutions that represent bourgeois culture, for example the nonparticipation and boycott of the Braque Prize, instituted by the Cultural Service of the French Embassy, which culminated with the detention of several artists that settled their rejection violently.

The collective work that realizes and supports itself in the actual Argentinean situation was radicalized in one of its poorest provinces, Tucumán, subjugated by a long tradition of underdevelopment and economic oppression. The Argentinean government, determined to carry out a disastrous colonizing policy, had proceeded to close the majority of Tucumán's sugar

refineries, a vital resource in the province's economy, spreading hunger, unemployment and all their social consequences. A "Tucumán Operation," developed by government economists, is intended to obscure this attack on the working class with a sham economic development plan based on the creation of new and hypothetical industries financed by North American capital. The truth hidden behind this operation is the following: it attempts to destroy a real and explosive union extending across northwestern Argentina, breaking up worker groups by balkanizing them through small acts of industrial exploitation and obliging workers to relocate to other regions to look for temporary work that is poorly paid and without stability. One of the consequences that arise from this fact is the dissolution of the worker's nuclear family, left to improvisation and luck to survive. The economic politics the government has followed in the province of Tucumán has the character of a pilot program which it is using to evaluate the level of resistance of the worker population, that will, subsequently, result in the neutralization of union opposition, and which could be transported to other provinces that represent similar social and economic characteristics.

This "Tucumán Operation" is reinforced by a "silencing operation" organized by government institutions in order to confuse and stifle the serious Tucumán situation to which the "free press" has been subject to for reasons of common class interests.

In light of this situation, and assuming the responsibility of artists compromised by a social reality that includes them, avant-garde artists have responded to this "silencing operation" with the production of the work "TUCUMAN ARDE".

The work consists of the creation of an *informational circuit* to demonstrate the distortion that the activities in Tucumán suffer from a mass media that holds official power along with the bourgeois class. The media is a powerful interceding element, susceptible to being charged with different kinds of content; the positive influence that the media produces in society depends on the realism and truthfulness of its content. The information about the facts produced in Tucumán given by the government and the official media tend to silence the serious social problem unleashed by the closing of the sugar refineries, and give a false image of economic recuperation in the province which the real facts refute in a shocking manner. To gather these facts and make evident the false contradiction of the government and its supporting class, a group of avant-garde artists traveled to Tucumán, along with technicians and specialists, and proceeded to verify the social reality in the province. The artists' program reached a high point with a press conference, where their repudiation of the actions by the official authorities and the complicity of the media that collaborated in maintaining a shameful and degrading state for the working population of Tucumán was made public in a violent manner.

The artists worked in collaboration with student and worker groups with that collaboration being integrated into the artistic process.

The artists traveled to Tucumán with extensive documentation of the economic and social problems of the province and a detailed knowledge of all the information that the media had produced regarding the problems. This last body of information had previously been submitted to critical analysis in order to evaluate its degree of distortion. In a second instance, the information gathered by the artists and technicians was developed for the exhibit that is presented at the workers' union hall. And finally, the information that the media has produced about the artists' activities in Tucumán is to be incorporated into the informational circuit of the first phase.

The second part of the work is the presentation of all the information gathered about the situation and about the performance of the artists in Tucumán, part of which would be disseminated in union halls and in student and cultural centers in the same audiovisual form as the show at the General Confederation of Labor of the Argentineans in the city of Rosario, and subsequently in Buenos Aires.

The informational circuit, whose basic intention is to promote a de-alienation of the mass-media image of the Tucumán reality, would reach a high point in the third and last phase of generating publicity in a formal publication where all the processes of conception and realization of the work would be described as well as all the documentation produced, along with a final evaluation.

The position adopted by the avant-garde artists demands that their work not be incorporated into the official institutions of bourgeois culture, and establishes the necessity of having them transferred to other contexts. This exhibition is happening, then, at the General Confederation of Labor of the Argentineans because it is the institution that functions as the nucleus of the vanguard class in a fight whose ultimate objectives are shared by the authors of this work. (. . .)

This text was published as a mimeo by the General Confederation of Labor of the Argentineans in Rosario, Argentina, in 1968. Translated by Trilce Navarrete, this is its first appearance in English.

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