

DISSENTING EXHIBITIONS BY
ARTISTS (1968-1998). REFRAMING
MARXIST EXHIBITION LEGACY.

OLGA FERNÁNDEZ LÓPEZ

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the Royal College of Art for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2011

The Royal College of Art

This text represents the submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. This copy has been supplied for the purpose of research for private study, in the understanding that it is copyright material, and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgment.

ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis is to look at the critical and dissenting value of exhibitions through the examination of four cases studies, based on six exhibitions taking place between 1968 and 1998 in Latin and North America. The exhibitions belong to the history of modern and contemporary exhibitions and curating, a field of research and study that has only started to be written about in the last two decades. This investigation contributes to it, in its creation of new genealogies by connecting previously overlooked antecedents, or by proposing new relations within established lineages, at the intersection of a specific historiography; to address exhibitions, a tradition of artists acting as curators and an emerging history of curating.

The examined exhibitions were put together by artists or artist collectives and were placed in a liminal position between artistic and curatorial practice. All the cases presented a distinct proposal in relation to art and social change, a fact that connects them, in their aims and *modus operandi*, to a Marxist and neo-Marxist critical and transformative legacy. The cases address the following connections: exhibition as political site (*Tucumán Arde*, 1968); exhibition as social space (*The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)*, 1981); exhibition as encounter (*Rooms with a view, We the People, Art/Artifact*, 1987-88); and exhibition as an exchange situation (*El Museo de la Calle*, 1998-2001).

Key to their analysis is the concept of dissensus, as put forward by Jacques Rancière. Within this theoretical framework, these exhibitions put into practice particular cases of dissensus in a given distribution of the sensible. All of them tried to deal with their thematic concerns by performing them as a praxis. They dissent with the way in which reality was formatted in their historical moment and challenge the exhibition medium itself opening new ways of doing and making in the exhibition field. Therefore, in this thesis the dissenting value of exhibitions is closely related to its main features as a medium, namely their temporality, heterogeneity and flexibility, which contribute to their potential for creative analysis and propositioning. In the case of these exhibitions, this capability is brought into play for institutional interrogation, for offering alternative cultural narratives and also for inspiring new imaginary realms.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. **Introduction / 1**

2. **Exhibition as political site: the case of *Tucumán Arde* / 20**
 - 2.1. *Tucumán Arde* and the Argentinean context of 1968: Anti-institutionalism and political radicalisation / 22
 - 2.2. *Tucumán Arde* and Exhibition History / 36
 - 2.3. Marxist aesthetics: activism, documentary media and allegory / 53

3. **Exhibition as social space: the case of *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* / 70**
 - 3.1. We learned from New York, we learned from each other / 71
 - 3.2. Display concerns: exhibition as means of production / 91
 - 3.1. Beyond representation: participation and equality / 101

4. **Exhibition as Encounter: the cases of *Rooms with a View, We the People, and Art /Artifact* / 106**
 - 4.1. Coincidental shows / 107
 - 4.2. Exhibitions at the perimeter / 128
 - 4.3. Between post-colonial and de-colonial aesthetics / 139

5. **Exhibition as an exchange situation: the case of *El Museo de la Calle* / 146**
 - 5.1. Colectivo Cambalache and the street as public space / 147
 - 5.2. The aesthetisation of economics in the 1990s context / 153
 - 5.3. *El Museo de la Calle*: Between museum and exhibition / 167

6. **Conclusion / 174**

- Bibliography / 180**

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Exhibition as political site: the case of *Tucumán Arde*

Fig. 1: Artists' field work in Tucumán. (Archivo Graciela Carnevale).

Fig. 2: Graffiti from the second phase of the media campaign in Rosario. (Archivo Graciela Carnevale).

Fig. 3: Poster from the third phase of the media campaign in Rosario. (Archivo Graciela Carnevale).

Fig. 4: Opening of *Tucumán Arde* in Rosario. Installation view. (Archivo Graciela Carnevale).

Fig. 5: Opening of *Tucumán Arde* in Rosario. Installation view. (Archivo Graciela Carnevale).

Fig. 6: Opening of *Tucumán Arde* in Rosario. Installation view. (Archivo Graciela Carnevale).

Fig. 7: *Tucumán Arde* in Rosario. Entrance corridor. (Archivo Graciela Carnevale).

Fig. 8: *Tucumán Arde* in Rosario. Entrance corridor. (Archivo Graciela Carnevale).

Fig. 9: *Tucumán Arde* in Rosario. Press clippings panel. (Archivo Graciela Carnevale).

Fig. 10: *Tucumán Arde*. Charts with connections between owners and Government. (Archivo Graciela Carnevale).

Fig. 11: *Tucumán Arde* in Rosario. Installation view. (Archivo Graciela Carnevale).

Fig. 12: *Internationale Presse-Ausstellung des Deutschen Werkbund* (1928). Installation view. (IVAM. Institut Valencià d'Art Modern).

Fig. 13: *Internationale Hygiene Ausstellung* (1930). Installation view. (Stiftung Deutsches Hygiene-Museum, Dresden).

Fig. 14: *Sala 0. Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* (1932-34). Installation view. (Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Roma).

Fig. 15: Spanish Pavilion. *Exposition internationale des arts et techniques dans la vie modern* (1937). Installation view. (Biblioteca MNCARS, Madrid).

Fig. 16: *Art from the Age of Imperialism* (1931). State Russian Museum (Leningrad). Installation view.

Fig. 17: *Art from the Age of Imperialism* (1931). State Russian Museum (Leningrad). Installation view.

Fig. 18: *Tucumán Arde* in Buenos Aires. Installation view.

Fig. 19: *Tucumán Arde*. Photographic panel. Peasants working. (Archivo Graciela Carnevale).

Fig. 20: *Tucumán Arde*. Photographic panel. Sugar mills. (Archivo Graciela Carnevale).

Fig. 21: *Tucumán Arde*. Photographic panel. Peasant. (Archivo Graciela Carnevale).

Fig. 22: *Tucumán Arde*. Installation view. (Archivo Graciela Carnevale).

Exhibition as social space: the case of *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)*

Fig. 1: *The Real Estate Show* (1980). Front of 125 Delancey Street. (Photo by Ann Messner)

Fig. 2: *The Real Estate Show* (1980). Installation view. (Photo by Christof Kohlhofer)

Fig. 3: *The Real Estate Show* (1980). Installation view. (Photo by Christof Kohlhofer)

Fig. 4: Fashion Moda. *The City Maze* (1980). Installation view. (Photo by Lisa Kahane).

Fig. 5: Fashion Moda. Jody Culkin's *Cardboard constructions* and David Wells' *Cranach Cutouts* (1981). Installation view. (Photo by Jody Culkin).

Fig. 6: Fashion Moda. John Fekner's *Danger Live Artists* as part of *Graffiti Art Success For America* (1980). Event view.

Fig. 7: ABC No Rio. *International Workers Day Show* (1980). Installation view.

Fig. 8: ABC No Rio. *Murder, Suicide, Junk Show* (1980). Installation view. (Photo by Tom Warren).

Fig. 9: ABC No Rio. *Murder, Suicide, Junk Show* (1980). Installation view. (Photo by Tom Warren).

Fig. 10: *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)*. Installation view. (Group Material Archive).

Fig. 11: *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)*. Detail. PEZ dispenser collection. (Group Material Archive).

Fig. 12: *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)*. Leaflet. (Group Material Archive in MoMA).

Fig. 13: *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)*. Leaflet. (Group Material Archive in MoMA).

Exhibition as Encounter: the cases of *Rooms with a View*, *We the People*, and *Art /Artifact*

Fig. 1: Longwood Arts Project. *Rooms with a view*. Installation view. 'Ethnographic museum' room. (Bronx Council of the Arts Archive).

Fig. 2: Longwood Arts Project. *Rooms with a view*. Installation view. 'Salon-style' room. (Bronx Council of the Arts Archive).

Fig. 3: Center for African Art. *Art/Artifact*. Recreation of the curiosity room from the Hampton Institute, ca. 1905. (Center for African Art Archive).

Fig. 4: Center for African Art. *Art/Artifact*. Display in the style of a natural history museum. (Center for African Art Archive).

Fig. 5: Center for African Art. *Art/Artifact*. Diorama in the style of a natural history museum. (Center for African Art Archive).

Fig. 6: Center for African Art. *Art/Artifact*. African figures and utilitarian objects exhibited as in an art museum. (Center for African Art Archive).

Fig. 7: Center for African Art. *Art/Artifact*. African objects presented as pure form. (Center for African Art Archive).

Fig. 8: Artists Space. *We the People*. Installation view: Jimmie Durham's *On Loan from the Museum of the American Indian*. (Jean Fisher Archive).

Fig. 9: Artists Space. *We the People*. Detail: Alan Michelson, *Up-Biblum God*. (Jean Fisher Archive).

Fig. 10: New Museum. *Damaged Goods*. Installation view. (New Museum Archive).

Fig. 11: New Museum. *Damaged Goods*. Installation view. (New Museum Archive).

Fig. 12: New Museum. *Damaged Goods*. Installation view. (New Museum Archive).

Fig. 13: Whitney Museum at Federal Reserve Plaza. *The Desire of the Museum*. Installation view. (Silvia Kolbowski Archive).

Fig. 14: MoMA. *Indian Art of the United States* (1941). Installation view. (MoMA Archive).

Fig. 15: MoMA. *Indian Art of the United States* (1941). Installation view. (MoMA Archive).

Fig. 16: MoMA. *Arts of the South Seas* (1946). Installation view. (MoMA Archive).

Fig. 17: Longwood Arts Project. *Rooms with a view*. Installation view. 'Ethnographic museum' room. (Bronx Council of the Arts Archive).

Fig. 17: Longwood Arts Project. *Rooms with a view*. Installation view. 'White cube' room. (Fred Wilson Council of the Arts Archive).

Exhibition as an exchange situation: the case of *El Museo de la Calle*

Fig. 1: *El Museo de la Calle*. Installation view. (Colectivo Cambalache and Federico Guzmán Archive).

Fig. 2: *El Museo de la Calle*. Detail. (Colectivo Cambalache and Federico Guzmán Archive).

Fig. 3: *El Museo de la Calle*. Detail. (Colectivo Cambalache and Federico Guzmán Archive).

Fig. 4: *El Museo de la Calle*. Detail: Toys. (Colectivo Cambalache and Federico Guzmán Archive).

Fig. 5: *El Museo de la Calle*. Detail: Technology. (Colectivo Cambalache and Federico Guzmán Archive).

Fig. 6: *El Museo de la Calle*. Detail: El Veloz. (Colectivo Cambalache and Federico Guzmán Archive).

Fig. 7: *El Museo de la Calle*. Detail: Bartering. (Colectivo Cambalache and Federico Guzmán Archive).

Fig. 8: *El Museo de la Calle*. Detail: El Veloz. (Colectivo Cambalache and Federico Guzmán Archive).

Fig. 9: *El Museo de la Calle*. Detail: Treasure Box. (Colectivo Cambalache and Federico Guzmán Archive).

Fig. 10: *El Museo de la Calle*. Detail: *Chuzos, Pipas y Drogas* [Guns, Pipes and Drogues] (Colectivo Cambalache and Federico Guzmán Archive).

Fig. 11: *El Museo de la Calle*. Installation view of its presentation in *Worthless (Invaluable) The Concept of Value in Contemporary Art*; Modern Gallery of Ljubljana in Slovenia, in 2001. (Colectivo Cambalache and Federico Guzmán Archive).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is indebted to individuals and institutions that have helped me while I was pursuing ideas and trying to grasp them in the writing process. The Royal College of Art and the Curating Contemporary Art Department has been encouraging and supportive throughout the process. Special thanks are due to Mark Nash, Clare Carolin, Fiona Key and Teresa Gleadowe. I am deeply grateful to my supervisors Claire Bishop and Jean Fisher, generous with their time and their insights. I am dependent on the artists' assistance, especially Graciela Carnevale, Fred Wilson, Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, Carolina Caycedo and Federico Guzmán, and on the countless conversations with conversations my colleagues Stefano Collicelli Cagol, Alice Motard, José Filipe Costa, Harriet Edwards, Núria Querol, María Iñigo, Inês Dias, Kari Conte, Colin Perry, Irene Aristizábal, and Kim Schoen. I owe great gratitude for my sister Marta's and my friends' patience. Most of all, this thesis is dedicated to my parents and grandparents, who taught me the value of dissenting.

1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of this thesis is to look at the critical and dissenting value of exhibitions. My point of departure is that the flexibility and plasticity of the exhibition medium, together with its temporal and contextual nature, make it a suitable format to offer creative analysis and imaginative interpretation and proposition. Twentieth-century exhibition and curating history has only recently started to be developed, and my contribution is also aimed at expanding this field with the examination in depth of four case studies based on six exhibitions. Throughout the thesis I will try to shed light on the following questions: *What can be considered a critical or dissenting exhibition? Is there something specific about the way exhibitions perform this criticality and dissensus? What kinds of critique can exhibitions bring about? Do dissenting exhibitions share common features? Are they triggered by similar conditions regardless the time/space? Or are critique and dissensus always contextual in origins and results? On behalf of whom do they dissent?*

The case studies I have chosen are situated in a border position between artistic and curatorial practice, for they are all exhibitions put together by artists or artist collectives. I believe that this type of show is especially receptive to the conditions set up for conventional exhibitions, and that they are able to challenge the limits of the medium. In addition, all the cases put forward a distinct proposal in relation to art and social change, which is a recurrent debate throughout the history of twentieth-century art. Within this framework, each of the cases responded to their own backgrounds, trying to overcome previous contradictions, but adapting to their contexts. Finally, all the cases attempted to supersede the limitations of thematic shows. Instead of representing a specific theme, such as politics or economics, all these exhibitions tried to deal with their thematic preoccupations by performing them as a praxis.

From critique to dissensus

The initial approach of this thesis was to examine the relationship between curating and institutional critique between 1968 and today. During this early stage, I tried to trace the evolution of curatorial practices from a time when institutional critique's focus was on the museum, the gallery and the idea of authorship (1970s) through to a strategic shift that evolved into a symbolic integration of critique in the institution (1980s). Through institutional critique, exhibitions seemed to be an adequate critical tool available to both

artists and curators, just as the latter were gaining a new centrality in the art system. It was important to examine how curators since the 1990s tried to question the system of exhibitions and art institutions, borrowing strategies from conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s. I found that, at this juncture, significant issues were raised: the physical location of an exhibition and the symbolic significance of its space, the value system attached to the circulation of objects and images, the interrogation of museums and galleries as power structures, the development of the exhibition into an interpretive and discursive site, and the possibility of producing critical exhibitions.

Underlying the whole research project at this preliminary stage was an interrogation of the critical value that exhibitions may have. This was based on case studies from 1968 to 2008 in which institutional critique, exhibitions and curatorial practices converged. Initially, I found that the notion of a ‘critical exhibition’ was able to encompass the two traditions underpinning the concept of critique: one from Kant that denoted discernment, and one updated from this tradition by Marx, linking this epistemological operation with a process of social and political transformation. In this way, critical exhibitions could be seen as a transformative practice acting in a specific artistic field. Therefore, the first stages of my research took me to examine in depth the notion of ‘critique’, as it was understood in institutional critique theorisation and practice. A thorough analysis of the idea of critique that informs these types of practices led me to the notion of autonomy and the role it has played in the configuration of the aesthetic regime. However, I realised that institutional critique interpreted the idea of autonomy in a very restricted way, and soon its theoretical construction started to seem insufficient to support a notion of critique that could be useful to put in relation to exhibitions.¹

At the end of this first phase, I observed that a curatorial mode of institutional critique would advocate two contradictory ends. On the one hand, it tried to reveal the aporia of an artistic autonomous field and its necessary dependence on other fields. At the same time, it needed to disclose the constant menacing and instrumentalisation of artistic practices and institutions by other fields, especially economic and political ones. This paradox provoked an unsustainable position in which artistic institutional critique questioned the same issue

¹ The idea of autonomy has been interpreted differently in art theory, as Casey Haskins affirms. He distinguishes between two notions of autonomy, ‘strict’ and ‘instrumental’, which have been used in either ways by different art theories and aesthetic points of views. Casey Haskins, “Kant and the Autonomy of Art”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 47, n° 1, winter, 1989, pp. 43-54.

that it was trying to defend (autonomy).² This contradiction has doomed this type of practice to self-referentiality and melancholy, two features that preclude active critique.³ In addition, the concept of institutional critique is problematic for the Latin American context. Its theoretical formation derived mainly from Critical Theory, and was based on a model produced from and for a western bourgeois historical situation. This framework inadequately addresses two of my four case studies, which are located in Argentina and Colombia.

The notion of critique was central to the research project, so I decided to look for concepts of critique that could bypass the contradictions and melancholic position that its conception in Critical Theory implied. The post-structuralist philosophical realm offered the necessary continuity with the critical tradition, but at the same time supposed a reformulation of some of the previous debates and an updating to new intellectual times. The next step in the search led me to a different notion of critique put forward by Michel Foucault, who re-interpreted Kant's notion of critique. Foucault's article, "What is Critique?" (1978) was subsequently commented and updated by Judith Butler for a contemporary context.⁴ The core of Foucault's proposition about critique is that it should look for breaking points: moments of discontinuity in the continuum of the intelligible. These breaking points help to point out the limits and contingency of a certain formation of power and knowledge, to mark situations of transformability, and to open up opportunities for awareness and change. From this point of view, we could imply that in the artistic field, whenever and wherever a critical mass of defiant artworks/exhibitions appeared, it could be read as an indication that helped to make visible an existing order of things and its correlative critique. The cases studies I have chosen are not 'representative' of a hegemonic model. On the contrary, they belong, but also stand for the limits of that model. In this regard, they could be considered critical: 'breaking points' signalling a rupture within their context, revealing the contingency of the order. For this reason, it is notable that the chosen cases failed to have an immediate impact on their milieu. Only when new circumstances provided the opportunity for a better reception, did they start to

² Peter Bürger, "Aporias of Modern Aesthetics", *New Left Review* n° 184, November-December, 1990.

³ Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions", *October*, vol. 55, winter, 1990.

⁴ Michel Foucault, "What is Critique?" (1978), in Sylvère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth (eds), *The Politics of Truth*, New York, *Semiotext(e)*, 1997 and Judith Butler, "What is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue" (2000) in David Ingram (ed.), *The Political: Readings in Continental Philosophy*, London, Blackwell, 2002.

become significant. This deferred response evidences a potential and a legacy that found its use in the future.

Foucault's idea of 'breaking' invites a connection to the notion of dissensus, put forward by Jacques Rancière. I am aware that in recent times, Rancière's notions have been overused in art historiography⁵. However, his ideas have been more related to artistic practice than to address the exhibition medium. Therefore, I found the challenge of opening the exhibition history field to new theoretical paradigms based on critique and dissensus, and to consider the exhibition as a medium which allows the enactment of a politics of the sensible. Rancière shares some background with Foucault and uses his genealogical methodology. However, Rancière acknowledges the differences: 'where Foucault thinks in terms of limits, closure and exclusion, I think in terms of internal division and transgression'.⁶ Rancière speaks of a certain *partage du sensible* [distribution of the sensible], an order that determines the modes of perception and the modes of common and individual participation in them, which are established through a certain distribution of spaces, times and forms of activity. This order of the sensible defines what is visible, audible, sayable or make-able in a shared space.⁷

The interruption (division, transgression) of the consensus in which the *partage du sensible* is based, provokes a dissensus, something that he considers already to be politics. For Rancière, politics emerges when a 'wrong' is addressed by those who were shared out from the common *partage du sensible*.⁸ Politics comes as an interruption within the division between the visible and the invisible, audible and inaudible, thinkable and unthinkable. If a *partage du sensible* is proved wrong, it may be overthrown, causing a shift. This doesn't mean that the new *partage* does not leave some things invisible, inaudible or unthinkable. Exhibitions are particular configurations in which the visible, the audible and the thinkable can be challenged, and where visual, textual and sensorial arrangements can address a

⁵ See for instance Beth Hinderliter, Vered Maimon, Jaleh Mansoor and Seth McCormick (ed.), *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2009.

⁶ Rancière states: 'So that where Foucault thinks in terms of limits, closure and exclusion, I think in terms of internal division and transgression. *L'Histoire de la folie* was about locking up "madmen" as an external structuring condition of classical reason. In *La nuit des prolétaires*, I was interested in the way workers appropriated a time of writing and thought that they "could not" have. Here we are in a polemical arena rather than an archeological one. And thus it's the question of equality—which for Foucault had no theoretical pertinence—that makes the difference between us', in Solange Guénoun and James H. Kavanagh, "Jacques Rancière: Literature, Politics, Aesthetics: Approaches to Democratic Disagreement", *SubStance*, n° 92, 2000, p. 13.

⁷ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, London, Continuum, 2004.

⁸ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, London, Continuum, 2004.

wrong. Thus, the notion of dissensus offered an opportunity to overcome the self-referentiality of institutional critique and placed aesthetics in a polemical arena.

Rancière compares Virginia Woolf's distinctive 'way of doing' in literature to that of Émile Zola. For Rancière, Zola's intention was driven by a 'social epic': a procedure we can relate to the idea of politics being represented in exhibition through a theme. Contrary to this method, Woolf liberated the political potential in the process of writing, representing while at the same time enacting a different subjectivation process. In Rancière words:

Her way or working on the contraction or distension of temporalities, on their contemporaneousness or their distance, on her way of situating events at a much more minute level, all of this establishes a grid that makes it possible to think through the forms of political dissensuality more effectively than the 'social epic's' various forms. (...) There is also an entire field of play where their modes of individuation and their means of linking sequences contribute to liberating political possibilities by undoing the formatting of reality produced by state-controlled media, by undoing the relations between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable.⁹

In the framework of this dissertation, I would like to explore this mode of complex 'political dissensuality' of the cases; its significance not only in theme, but especially in their *modus operandi*. I will look at their particular way of 'undoing the formatting of reality', which is linked to the specific aesthetic regime in which they are framed. In Rancière's philosophical enterprise, this undoing is intimately linked to concept of equality, which is common to art and politics. In his words, 'art, as we know it in the aesthetic regime, is the implementation of a certain equality and also equality only generates politics when it is implemented in the specific form of a particular case of dissensus'.¹⁰ This could be rephrased as follows: art implements equality (*égalité*) as an act of subjectivation to undo the supposedly natural order of the sensible. My proposal is that we can understand the following study cases with the help of these concepts and consider them as cases of dissensus in relation to a given distribution of the sensible. These exhibitions became political, as they tried to implement a certain equality, in which objects, spaces and persons were all involved.

⁹ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, London, Continuum, 2004, p. 65.

¹⁰ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, London, Continuum, 2004, p. 52.

We can look at exhibitions and museums as instrumental for what Rancière describes as the distribution of the sensible, since both are able to define what is visible, sayable or make-able in a given order. Noticeably, both museums and exhibitions are born under the aesthetic regime. However, museums seem less operative when it comes to making politics, instead of policies.¹¹ On the contrary, exhibitions seem to us a more productive arena from where to stage the elements that he attributes to the new regime.¹² There is a promise of positive equivalence present in the aesthetic regime, which goes against the hierarchical order of things and their search for an intelligible rationale to support it. From my point of view, institutional formations, such as museums, tend to deactivate this promise. In museums, a large number of practices and communities (and their cultural productions) have been left under-, mis-, or non-represented. Exhibitions have been one of the mediums through which these blind spots have been made visible.¹³ This is partly due to their temporary and flexible nature which has permitted a certain degree of experimentation in the way artworks and non-artworks are selected and displayed; something that avant-garde artists knew.¹⁴ What is exhibition-able goes further than what is muse-able and what is actually showcased in museums. Museums struggle to take into account the ever expanding forms, activities, objects (ways of doing and making) that are produced and represent every kind of political subject. Museums represent what it is; exhibitions have the possibility and the potential to, at least temporarily, stage what it could be.

Six dissenting exhibitions

I will address the ensuing case studies as particular cases of dissensus, rather than of critique that challenged the limits of the hegemonic order to which they belonged and

¹¹ I distinguish ‘policies’ and ‘politics’ in Rancière’s sense. Police order is a certain distribution of the sensible and politics is configured by acts oriented to the challenge and redistribution of the given order. Politics is always polemical, is based on disagreement and is engendered by a process of political subjectivation that reconfigures the field of experience. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, London, Continuum, 2004.

¹² To name but a few, in Rancière’s aesthetic model: the implementation of the equality of the subject matter, the indifference regarding modes of expression, the questioning of the neutrality of *techné* and its subsequent distribution of occupations. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, London, Continuum, 2004, pp. 52-54.

¹³ One of the first gestures of a different ‘egalitarian’ regime was the *Salon des Refusés* (1863), established as a protest of the exclusion of the official Salons, still very dependent on the representative, academic order.

¹⁴ Artists belonging to avant-garde movements quickly realized the value of exhibitions for the new art. The use of montage techniques in dada, surrealist or constructivist exhibitions can be considered as one of the ‘formal’ features, cause and consequence of this openness. Nevertheless, before the 1960s, only few artists and curators explored the medium to its full extension. Hans Ulrich Obrist has defended the idea that some curators during the 1950s, mainly in the European context, were already aware of exhibition’s possibilities. Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating*, Zurich and Dijon, JRP/ Ringier and Les Presses du Réel, 2008.

opened new ways of doing and making in the exhibition realm. The first chapter examines the exhibition phase of a wider project known as *Tucumán Arde* (1968). The example addresses the conflictual relationship between art and politics through an exhibition in which the representation of a political disagreement became entwined with a political action. Representing and doing politics were part of the same urge, an outcome of the radicalisation of Argentinean society under the Onganía dictatorship. In the process of exposing the dramatic effects of the regime's economic policy, a collective of artists transformed the notion of exhibition into a broader and rebellious public sphere. The formal aesthetics that they used connected them with a previous series of shows that took place in 1930s and 1940s, in a revolutionary and warfare context, but also with the factographic sensibility that have crossed the twentieth century. The final outcome of the show, based on a combination of informational, communicational and documentary interventions, conveyed a portrait of social reality that was allegorically and narratively relayed through an ideological and propagandistic lens. Due to the political circumstances, the artists that arranged *Tucumán Arde* reduced its dialectical side in favour of an unmistakable message. In hindsight, this decision provokes an ambivalent reading of this experience: one that values its dissenting position, but also questions its spectacularisation of poverty and unreflexive instrumentalisation. In the context of this thesis, the case of *Tucumán Arde* is a foundational reference point for issues that are common to the other case studies: the dialectic of representation and participation, the representation of the Other, the convergence of art and other fields, or the questioning of the forms and contents of conventional exhibitions.

The second chapter looks at *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* (1981), an exhibition framed by the first year of Group Material's activities, when the collective set up different exhibitions and participatory events in their New York storefront. This exhibition is considered in relation to a certain type of show that started to be popular around the end of the 1970s in New York, recently referred to as 'thematic salons', whose aim was to tackle political and social topics in group shows, using objects juxtaposed salon-style. The way that Group Material chose to interrogate cultural and social hegemonic practices was to ask their neighbours what they considered art. The outcome was a heterogeneous arrangement of non-comparable objects that in those moments was read as a portrait of a community. However, further than the immediate assessment, the exhibition put forward a different version of what representation could mean. Since the exhibition, and not the site,

was considered a social space, the medium itself was transformed into a social sphere. The exhibition turned into a means of production, in a Benjaminian materialist sense: participation, decision-making and adding together objects and people transformed the exhibition into an improved, unbound and more public medium. In the context of this thesis, *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* is presented as a model of how to overcome the dead-end to which political and socially oriented shows seemed to have arrived at that historical moment. At the same time, it contributed to a blurring of the boundaries between everyday domestic arrangements and museums, albeit in a poetic, rather than an ethnographic fashion.

The third chapter deals with several case studies diachronically and synchronically. Its main goal is to examine three different shows at the same moment in late-1980s New York – *Rooms with a view*, *We the people* and *Art/Artifact*. These brought into play the historicity of museum display conventions, in order to point out the way in which non-western art had been epistemologically and aesthetically categorized. Contrary to postmodernist theories of that time, the actual position of non-white artists was, at the end of the 1980s, demonstrably separate from the hegemonic mainstream, proving that a continuation of a colonial mindset was still operative in the contemporary art system. These three shows help to shed light on this blind spot. The chapter connects these shows to concurrent exhibitions that self-reflexively interrogated the ideological unconscious of the museum. I also inscribe them within a genealogy of exhibitions addressing the display of non-western cultures throughout the twentieth century. In this lineage, the search to legitimatise both modern and so-called primitive art was a shared difficulty they all sought to overcome. This situation created a state of potentiality based on the uncertainty about how to display. This gap reflects how the encounter between cultures that engendered modernity needs to be approached with an ethical compromise. In the context of the thesis, the three exhibitions underline the stakes of ethics and aesthetics in the exhibition realm.

The fourth chapter examines a three-year project by Colectivo Cambalache known as *El Museo de la Calle* (1998-2001). This museum toured the streets of Bogotá in a push cart, around which the artists collected and bartered everyday objects. When the project received the attentions of the international artistic world, it underwent several contradictions, including the romanticisation of informal economies. The adaptative creativity engendered in situations of impoverishment was understood by the west as a signifier of difference, a

fetishisation of a supposedly less mediated relationship to reality, in this case a specific gaze on the idiosyncrasies of Latin America. At the turn of the millennium, an aestheticisation of poverty accompanied an increasing interest in the new geopolitical and economic scenario instituted in the 1990s. The effects of neo-liberalism simultaneously provoked a questioning of the system and a search for alternatives, such as bartering, time-banking, upcycling or D.I.Y. In this framework, *El Museo de la Calle* acted as an economic laboratory. Furthermore, its nomadic urban nature facilitates its theoretical inscription in a renewed Marxist paradigm: a 'situationist' one, in which confrontation with unbeatable formations of power are replaced by micropolitics and tactical interventions. The revalorization of materiality and work cultures in an environment of increasing immaterial labour had the effect of updating an ethnographic gaze that was already present in the notion of a contemporary museum of the streets. This anthropological side was also useful to understand the apparent contradictions of an exhibition that was always in incessant flux, but that for several reasons chose to keep and to custody specific objects. Creating an upturned situation for the consideration of economic and artistic values, *El Museo de la Calle* staged a collaborative performance of poetic 'transvaluation'.

None of these exhibitions can be considered a 'masterpiece' in a conventional sense. They are not representative of a classical moment, shows that encapsulate the spirit of a certain era. On the contrary, they dissent within a broader intellectual, theoretical and artistic framework. Their disagreement with their surrounding context operates, not as a defining external feature, but as an intrinsic quality that indivisibly encompasses content and form. In this way, they not only dissent with the way in which reality was formatted, but also challenged the exhibition medium itself, transgressing its conventional limits about what can and cannot be presented in a show, how it can be displayed and for whom, and therefore, ultimately, what can be considered an exhibition. For this reason, it is difficult to find a place for them in the canonical Exhibition History that is being written in the last two decades, an issue that I will expand on in the following section.

Histories of Exhibitions

The history of exhibitions in the modern era has usually been addressed through a typological approach, looking at nineteenth-century Salons and Worlds Fairs as formats

that, along with the museum, expanded the 'exhibitionary complex'.¹⁵ All of them are specifically modern institutions, which overcame previous models of displaying art and artefacts, such as *studiolos*, cabinets of curiosities, *wunderkammern*, ecclesiastical treasures and *gallerias*. This typological point of view has had its continuity in the importance attributed to the debate between the 'white cube' modernist type of display and the successive challenges posed to it, especially in a number of representative exhibitions taking place in historical avant-garde.¹⁶ Lately, this viewpoint has preferentially been used to look at biennials, the paradigmatic exhibition type in the last decades of the twentieth century.¹⁷ A comprehensive examination of museum and display cultures was not undertaken until the 1990s. In this decade, especially in the Anglo-American academia, there was a surge of literature examining the way in which museums have embodied power and knowledge formations and have ideologically supported nationalism, coloniality, historical progress, modern economy, and the divide between elite and popular culture. Coming from the field of museum studies, the groundbreaking anthology *Thinking about Exhibitions*, published in 1996, contained a significant number of texts in which exhibitions started to be considered as objects of analysis in their own right.¹⁸

In the introduction to this book, the editors point out the contradiction between the growing importance of exhibitions in the present times and the partiality of the actual writing about them. The authors specifically want to distance themselves from a 'museum culture' approach and propose a variety of texts dealing with exhibition histories, curatorship, exhibition sites and forms of installation, narratology and spectatorship. The anthology, which is considered by the authors to be a format analogous to the exhibition, was designed to create an 'eclectic mix' (exhibition proposals, dialogues, diatribes, position papers, case studies, theoretical analyses and catalogue essays), which tried to bring together texts written between the 1970s and the 1990s, from a variety of languages and contexts, although most of these were actually western. (The attempt to include different voices is symptomatic of the geographical openness that soon was about to prevail in the globalised

¹⁵ Early books and articles on this topic include Kenneth W. Luckhurst, *The Story of Exhibitions*, London, The Studio Publications, 1951; Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale, 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl*, London, Faber, 1969; Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," *Art History* 3, no. 4, December, 1980, pp. 51-70; Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex" (orig. 1988), Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (ed.), *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London, Routledge, 1996, pp. 81-112.

¹⁶ See Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999; and Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998.

¹⁷ Bruce Altshuler, *From Salon to Biennial*, vol. .1, London, Phaidon, 2008.

¹⁸ Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (ed.), *Thinking about exhibitions*, London, Routledge, 1996.

contemporary art world.). One of the editors' key aims was to emphasise certain aspects of exhibitions that distinguish them from museums, such as: the importance of the architectural and spatial surround, the opposition between long term displays and ephemeral events, the increase of exhibitions taking place outside conventional institutions (including new formats, such as alternative spaces and biennials), and also the 'protest or scandal' position that some exhibitions have taken in relation to museums. This feature relates to the trope of dissensus at the centre of this dissertation.

There are, unfortunately, no historiographic overviews that synthesise different approaches to analysing exhibitions. An unpublished essay by Stefano Collicelli Cagol summarises three overlapping 'tendencies' that, around the late 1990s, developed diverse conceptions of what an exhibition can be: the exhibition as text, as event, and as medium.¹⁹ The exhibition as text is associated with a linguistic model, in which the interpretative supplementary material (label, catalogue, wall texts), but also (and above all) the combination of the exhibition elements (the works, the display, the installation design) constitutes a speech act that enunciates a discourse. In Collicelli Cagol's view, this approach can lead to the idea of exhibition as a dialogical forum, a place in which discussion and debate can take place. In the second model, the exhibition becomes an event that extends itself beyond its usual boundaries of space and time, opening itself to non museological locations, to an active search of a different audience, and is considered 'an ideal site to debate social and aesthetic issues'.²⁰ The last category, exhibition as medium, is presented by the author as the most complex one, due to the elusiveness of the term 'medium'.

Collicelli Cagol concentrates on three possible declinations of the word 'medium'. Firstly, the exhibition as vehicle for the display of art works. For him, this model tends 'to limit the experimentalism of an exhibition to the nature of the works of art on display'.²¹ The exhibition's importance is a consequence of the exhibit of artworks. From his point of view, a paradigmatic example of this approach would be Bruce Altshuler's landmark book, *The Avant-garde in Exhibition*.²² Secondly, the exhibition is placed in the realm of mass media and is regarded as a means of communication. The inclusion of exhibitions in

¹⁹ Stefano Collicelli Cagol, "Crossing the exhibition. Meanings and Possibilities in the Contemporary Art Exhibitions", unpublished essay, 2008.

²⁰ Stefano Collicelli Cagol, *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²¹ Stefano Collicelli Cagol, *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²² Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998.

communicative networks opens the door to associate them with reproductive technologies, as in Seth Siegelaub's exhibitions in book or magazine formats from 1969 to the mid-1970s. Finally, the exhibition can be viewed as a medium in itself, an authorial enterprise (sometimes clashing with the presented works of art), in which installation design, 'hanging' and spatial decisions and arrangement play a crucial role.²³ Mary Anne Staniszewski's *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, in which exhibition installations are examined as ideological representations in themselves, would be a pioneering example.²⁴

A complementary point of view is developed by Martha Ward in her 1994 article "What's important about the history of modern art exhibitions?".²⁵ In this text, Ward presents a brief analysis of how nineteenth-century exhibitions were addressed in the 1980's, an interest that she associated with an event-oriented proto-history for the blockbusters then so dominant in the art world. Ward proposes a broader understanding of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century exhibitions in France, in which other issues and questions needed to be taken into account. In spite of her temporal parameters, her approach has a methodological value that can also be used to look at contemporary exhibitions, with some provisos that she articulates. Ward examines four dimensions that help to characterise modern exhibitions. The first one is the notion of exhibition as an artistic public sphere, which is related to the centrality of Salons throughout the nineteenth century. The second is exhibition as representation. This aspect focused on how exhibitions 'have functioned to represent some totality or entity greater than themselves'.²⁶ Ward specifically talks about the representation of politics; of history and memory; and of colonial societies; how they worked to symbolise ethnic, national or gender identities; and how all these materialisations bring about issues of inclusion, exclusion and value. The third dimension is the role of viewers and visitors, an aspect that situates exhibitions as providers of a social and phenomenological experience. In this perspective the exhibition can be regarded as a conscious arrangement that 'creates viewers in its own image' (whether normative, engaged or active).²⁷ For Ward, this point of view requires the analysis

²³ Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollack, "From museum curator to exhibition *auteur*", in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, *Thinking about exhibitions*, New York, Routledge, 1996, p. 235.

²⁴ Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display. A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1998.

²⁵ Martha Ward, "What's important about the history of modern art exhibitions", in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, *Thinking about Exhibitions*, New York, Routledge, 1996, pp. 451-464.

²⁶ Martha Ward, *Ibid.*, p. 458.

²⁷ Martha Ward, *Ibid.*, p. 460.

of spaces, installations and methods of presentation, as well as the new desires and values in viewing. This author highlights how exhibitions can be a conscious apparatus that enhances, multiplies or enforces ways of seeing. Finally, she notes that exhibition forms and demands have affected artistic production; this seems particularly relevant for the analysis of today's site-specific events and biennials.

The four case studies that I am presenting also describe conditions in which exhibitions can be related to different spheres. However, it is not my intention to propose categories that might encompass the variety of possibilities that exhibitions entail. Each of the chapters proposes an intersection between art, exhibitions and a specific area (politics, sociality, coloniality and economics), presenting each exhibition as a crossroads of contradiction and conflict. The chapters are grouped under the following descriptions: exhibition as political site, exhibition as social space, exhibition as encounter and exhibition as an exchange situation. My intention is to map 'exhibition situations' that dissent because of their challenge to not only exhibitions formats but also because they intersect with the intellectual and political history of their time in a polemical way.

Curatorial practice and amnesia

The interest in the history of modern and contemporary exhibitions that arose in the 1990s was concurrent with the publication of a specific body of texts examining curatorial practice and history in the same decade. At the end of the 1980s, we can clearly speak of a 'turn towards curating', based on a number of factors. Firstly, a redefinition of the tasks assigned to the museum curator that came along with the growing importance of the so called independent curator.²⁸ The professionalization of this figure was addressed in those years from a sociological perspective, coming mainly from France.²⁹ Heinich and Pollak stated that the process of de-professionalisation of the *conservateur's* bureaucratic tasks took place alongside the emergence of a new professional position, in which curators started to play a more creative and active part in the production of exhibitions. That this coincided with the exponential growth of biennials and new museums seems self-explanatory: opportunities for independent curators expanded as these exhibition formats were consolidated. A second factor was the establishment of the first curatorial courses at the

²⁸ Paul O'Neill, "The Curatorial Turn: from Practice to Discourse", in Filipovic, van Hal and Ovstebo (ed.), *The Biennial Reader*, Kunsthall Bergen and Hatje Cantz, 2010.

²⁹ The above mentioned article by Heinich and Pollak was written in 1988. See also Yves Michaud. *L'artiste et les commissaires*, Nîmes, Chambon, 1989.

end of the 1980s, a tendency that has continued to grow and which has significantly assisted the academisation and institutionalisation of curatorial practice.³⁰ Thirdly, and originating from the new authorial position, a number of international meetings, summits, symposia and conferences took place, in which as Paul O'Neill has asserted, 'without exception, they placed an emphasis on individual practice, the first-person narrative and curator self-positioning – articulated through primary interviews, statements and exhibition representations – as they attempted to define and map out a relatively bare field of discourse'.³¹ This authorial position accompanied the re-emergence of debates about curating as a form of artistic practice that had been dormant since the early 1970s.³²

The need to articulate a genealogy for a re-discovered curatorial practice, along with a demand for bibliography from the new curating students, among other factors, have contributed in the last two decades to a growth in the number of books dealing both with history of exhibitions and of curating in the twentieth century. In the mid 1990s, however, the number of books and articles available was still limited. This scarcity was characterised as 'amnesia', in the case of Hans Ulrich Obrist³³, and as a 'repressed narrative', in the case of Mary Anne Staniszewski.³⁴ Staniszewski is more interested in highlighting that the history of exhibition design during the historical avant-garde period is one of our most culturally repressed narratives. For her, the institutionalization of modern art display conventions erased the memory of the experimentalism present in installation design before the 1960s, at least in the case of the MoMA. For Staniszewski, this is an ideological ellipsis that 'demarks a configuration of power and knowledge' aimed at producing a viewer

³⁰ Between 1987 and 1995, the most internationally recognised and established courses were founded. In Europe, the pioneers were L'École du Magasin in Grenoble (1987), MA Curating Contemporary Art, Royal College of Art (London, 1992) and De Appel Curatorial Programme (Amsterdam, 1994). In the U.S., the leading ones were the reorganisation of one of the paths of the Whitney Independent Study Program from museum studies to curatorial studies in 1987 and the foundation of the MA in the Center for Curatorial Studies in Bard College (1994).

³¹ Paul O'Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

³² The debate was present in the field since 1972 artists' denounce of Harald Szeemann's practice in *Documenta* 5. However, as Paul O'Neill has asserted an article by Jonathan Watkins on curating as a form of artistic practice updated the debate. Jonathan Watkins, "The Curator as Artist", London, *Art Monthly*, n° 111, November, 1987.

³³ In Obrist words: 'I don't think that the history of curating has been written. It is still unwritten. I think the book is a very, very small beginning. I still think the history of curating is very unwritten. There is so much amnesia. You know, there's always this idea that curating started with Harald Szeemann, who has had a huge influence on me. He is a great hero of mine and he is also in my book. But there have been many, many curators before Harald Szeemann. And all these elements haven't been brought together yet. It seems that there is very much missing in history and it has got to do with amnesia' in Toke Lykkeberg, "Interview to Hans Ulrich Obrist", in *Kopenhagen*, 11/06/2009. Available at: http://www.kopenhagen.dk/interviews/interviews/interviews_2009/interview_hans_ulrich_obrist_in_basel/ (last accessed 21/08/2011).

³⁴ Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display. A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1998, p. xxi.

disengaged from politics and economics, a 'self-sovereign, autonomous, empowered' spectator, blind to the Other and to the de-centering of the self.³⁵ In this framework, her task is to interrogate a narrow version of modernism and to re-discover exhibition design as a tool for a renewed art history. For Obrist, this amnesia is due to a history of art based on the history of objects, and which disregards ephemeral and temporal constructions and processes, such as exhibitions. In order to undo this amnesia, he proposes a 'protest against forgetting', following Eric Hobsbawm's lead. His strategy has been to retrieve, through interviews, the history of a post-war generation of (mainly European) curators, who in the 1950s and 1960s laid the foundations of contemporary curating.³⁶

Artists and curatorial practice

In the bibliographical domain that frames this thesis there is still one more section that needs to be taken into account, due to the authorial position of artists in the four case studies. The debates around the relationship between curators and artists constitute a subdivision of their own. Since the late 1960s, the surge of the contemporary figure of the curator as a new agent in the artistic field has originated a number of questions by artists, regarding the curator's role.³⁷ The history of this susceptibility can be tracked down to the increasing influence of curators at this time, with one of its apex in *Documenta 5*.³⁸ The debate has maintained an alternate state of latency and irruption throughout the years and

³⁵ Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display. A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1998, p. 293.

³⁶ Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating*, Zurich and Dijon, JRP/Ringier and Les Preses du Réel, 2008.

³⁷ Irene Calderoni states "The most frequent accusation being that these shows turned the curator into the main artist. Such critiques included Jack Burnham on Lippard and Sieglaub, Les Levine on Kynaston McShine (curator of Information), and Daniel Buren in his infamous accusation, effectively titled "Exhibition of an Exhibition", against Harald Szeemann's Documenta in 1972", Irene Calderoni, "Creating Shows: Some Notes on Exhibition Aesthetics at the End of the Sixties", *Curating Subjects*, Paul O'Neill (ed.), London, Open Editions, 2007, p. 77.

³⁸ During *Documenta 5* a public discussion was held between Harald Szeemann and several artists participating in this exhibition. Two major arguments were pointed out. The first was their objection to the idea that art merely illustrated the curator's idea and subsequently that the artists could make their own decisions regarding their works and contributions. The second, differently argued by Robert Smithson, Daniel Buren and Broodthaers, put the stress on the curator's role. Smithson insisted on the previous idea ('artists themselves are not confined, but their output is'), distinguishing artist and curator and questioning the new prerogatives taken by the latter in order to build his own discourse. Buren and Broodthaers saw in Szeemann's position a dangerous shift concerning their authorial function. The first argument was expressed in an open letter signed by Carl André, Hans Haacke, Donald Judd, Barry le Va, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Dorothea Rockburne, Fred Sandback, Richard Serra and Robert Smithson, published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 12th, 1972. Smithson's claim was, "Cultural confinement" and Daniel Buren "Sur le fonctionnement des expositions, à propos de Documenta 5" were both published as part of *Documenta 5* catalogue. *Documenta 5. 100 Days of Inquiry into Reality -- Today's Imagery*, Kassel, Documenta 5, 1972. Broodthaers' critique in Marcel Broodthaers, "Der Nullpunkt", *Heute Kunst*, n° 1, Milan, April, 1973, quoted in *Marcel Broodthaers* (exh. cat.), Paris, Éditions du Jeu de Paume, 1991, p. 231.

the changing of the historical contexts, which I have mentioned above, has facilitated the evolution of the topic towards new scenarios. One of the latest episodes took place in the mid-2000s, when a new generation of independent curators came to the artistic scene. Suddenly artists were being asked by museums and art centres to produce so-called 'artists-curated shows', and some artists were concurrently producing pieces which blurred the boundaries between these mediums and playing with the conventions of exhibition design.³⁹.

We need to think that artists were the original curators of their works throughout the modern era. They decided what to show and how to display it. This is especially true for avant-garde exhibitions, as Bruce Altshuler has stated in his books. Specifically in *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition*, Altshuler focuses on a number of exhibitions that were set up by artists and that were instrumental in what has come down to us as the historical avant-garde.⁴⁰ He states that in the exhibition 'artists, critics, dealers, collectors, and the general public met and responded in their various ways to what the artists had done'.⁴¹ This 'community of acceptance and rejection' is a key factor in understanding the avant-garde's social character. In his view, avant-garde artists created radical pieces that subverted cultural and political assumptions and the 'central node' of this confrontation was the exhibition. We could expand his argument by saying that it was precisely within exhibitions that an artistic, political and social confrontation was staged.

The case studies I will be examining are heirs to this tradition in which artists simultaneously questioned artistic practice, installation design and their social, political and economic context. However, Altshuler affirms that this oppositional stance declined after World War II and that avant-garde art was progressively integrated into the dominant culture. At the same time, artists 'found themselves disempowered just as their commercial and social prospects were improving'.⁴² The conditions in which art was evolving in the second half of the twentieth century may have pacified the early avant-garde confrontational impulse, yet still artists continue to interrogate their contemporaneous

³⁹ An overview of this moment can be examined through the following articles: Alex Farquharson, "Curator and Artist", *Art Monthly*, 270, October, 2003, pp. 13-16. Paul O'Neill, "I am a Curator", *Art Monthly*, 275, April, 2004, pp. 7-10; Robert Storr, "Reading Circle", *Frieze*, 93, September, 2005, p. 7; Robert Storr, "The Exhibitionists", *Frieze*, 94, October, 2005, p. 25; J.J. Charlesworth, "Curating Doubt", *Art Monthly*, 294, March 2006, pp. 1-4; Tom Morton, "The Name of the Game", *Frieze*, 97, March 2006.

⁴⁰ Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998.

⁴¹ Bruce Altshuler, *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴² Bruce Altshuler, *Ibid.*, p. 256.

contexts. In this regard, the examples I am examining expand this avant-garde tradition through exhibitions that not only challenge artistic practices, dominant culture and socio-political issues, but also add a critique to curatorial conventions at a time in which curators have increasingly shaped and determined the exhibition medium and the artistic discourse.

Contrary to what Altshuler claims, in the 1960s artists were producing a critique to the artistic system. It is undeniable that group exhibitions were gradually being produced by gallerists, such as Leo Castelli or Iris Clert, and museum curators, such as William Sandberg or Pontus Hulten, but in return artists were setting up 'artists museums'. The practice was so widespread that in 1972, one of the sections of Harald Szeemann's Documenta 5 was devoted to Artists Museums, curated by Kaspar König. This part was installed in Kassel Neue Galerie and included 'museums' by Marcel Broodthaers, Marcel Duchamp, Herbert Diestel, Claes Oldenburg and Ben Vautier. At the end of this decade, two unpublished articles by Walter Grasskamp (1978) and Wulf Herzogenrath (1979), both written in Cologne, indicate the interest that this topic was undergoing in the German scene.⁴³ These authors examined the above mentioned artists, other authors, such as Christian Boltanski, Claudio Costa or Daniel Spoerri and many other concurrent artists that helped to contextualise this tendency in the 1960s and 1970s.

The first compilation of a varied selection of articles and texts that provided a comprehensive look into this phenomenon was only published in 1983.⁴⁴ Significantly, in 2001, a period in which we have observed a critical mass of articles relating artists and curators, the first book devoted entirely to the topic was published by James Putnam.⁴⁵ The first one was determined by the anti-institutional legacy of the 1970s and the progressive deconstructivist orientation of the 1980s. Therefore, many of the articles dealt with the responses that artists had offered to cultural frames and museum ideology and 'their attempts to distance, engage, alter and stimulate as an act of consciousness'.⁴⁶ The latter builds a broad overview of the different uses, interests and approaches that have motivated artists working with museums. This encompassing examination ranges from the already mentioned institutional interrogation, to the recognition of the museum's part in inspiring a sense of strangeness and wonder, or the possibilities of putting forward

⁴³ Both articles reprinted in A.A. Bronson and Peggy Gale (ed.), *Museums by Artists*, Art Metropole, Toronto, 1983.

⁴⁴ A.A. Bronson and Peggy Gale (ed.), *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ James Putnam, *Art and Artifact: the Museum as Medium*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2001.

⁴⁶ A.A. Bronson and Peggy Gale (ed.), "Preface", *op. cit.*, p. 7.

alternative cultural narratives. However, books dealing with this topic tend to be associated with art history, since they are looking at artists, rather than thought of as contributing to curating histories.

My intention in this thesis is to connect these three sides of the same prism, exhibition history, curating history and artists-curators through the examination of the six exhibitions, whose analysis needs to be informed by all of them. This aim is part of a wider generational enterprise. In the last decade, much work has been done in the form of exhibition and written histories examining specific historical exhibitions, the work of individual curators, the investigation of curatorial agendas underlying institutions, curatorial practice and the analysis of exhibition typologies. In addition, several curating-oriented journals have also appeared (*Manifesta Journal*, *The Exhibitionist*).⁴⁷ New monographic publications and websites have significantly expanded the bibliographical domain.⁴⁸ This thesis belongs to the same escalating impulse. Started in 2006, its time framework has coincided with this progress; to a certain extent, the literature review for the thesis evolved in parallel with published debates, symposia and conferences. However, this has not been an obstacle. Research is an open process that contributes to and differs from a shared field of knowledge. From this standpoint, I have tried to join the ‘protest against forgetting’ by connecting this emerging history to contemporary cases, in order to contribute to – and diversify - these expanding genealogies.

⁴⁷ *Manifesta Journal* (2003-ongoing), published by Manifesta Foundation, Amsterdam; *The Exhibitionist* (2010-ongoing), published by Archive Books, Berlin.

⁴⁸ See this thesis Bibliography.

2. EXHIBITION AS POLITICAL SITE: THE CASE OF *TUCUMÁN ARDE*

This first chapter will examine the artistic project known as *Tucumán Arde*, undertaken by a large group of artists from Rosario and Buenos Aires in 1968, paying closer attention to the exhibition that represented its central manifestation and legacy. *Tucumán Arde* is considered one of the landmarks of Argentinean contemporary art history and, in the last decade, has been included in a number of international exhibitions that has re-inscribed it in a wider context.⁴⁹ *Tucumán Arde* tried to find a way to convey political issues in artistic form, in a context characterised by an increasing radicalisation. Fuelled by the event of May 1968 in Paris, and with the prevailing example of the Cuban revolution of 1959, the hope for a forthcoming revolution was sustained – paradoxically - by the dictatorship of Juan Carlos Onganía (who seized power in 1966). In those years, Argentina was a country living under continuous social and political tension and under the violent repression of all suspicious or overtly open dissidence. A rapprochement between artists and unionists led to an avant-gardist action that ended up with the exhibition being closed down in its second iteration, in Buenos Aires. This fact, which was symptomatic of the existing authoritarianism, together with the forced oblivion of the project during the dictatorship years and the subsequent disillusionment of some of the artists, has cast a shadow of failure over the attempt to achieve a balance between art and politics and transformed *Tucumán*

⁴⁹ *Tucumán Arde* has been usually exhibited in an archival format, based on the Graciela Carnevale Archive. In 1997 it was part of the Argentinean contribution to the *I Bienal de Artes Visuais do Mercosul* (Porto Alegre, Brasil). In 1999 *Tucumán Arde* was present in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950-1980* (Queens Museum of Art, New York, cur. Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss) in the context a re-evaluation of conceptual art, extending the practice to a wider geographical framework. In 2000 was present in *Heterotopías. Medio siglo sin-lugar: 1918-1968* (Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid, cur. Mari Carmen Ramírez y Héctor Olea.). In 2004, MACBA (Barcelona, cur. Manuel Borja-Villel) presented the works of *Tucumán Arde* in its second presentation of the museum collection. It was placed in the section called 'Activism/Information', a selection that showed examples of artists and collectives, forerunner in political and social activism. It was also present in *Ambulantes. Cultura Portátil* (cur. Rosa Pera at CAAC, Seville; *Inverted Utopias* (cur. M^a Carmen Ramírez, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston), and *ExArgentina*, Ludwig Museum Cologne, all in 2004. A year later in *Be what you want but stay where you are* (cur. Ruth Noack and Roger M. Buegel at Witte de With, Rotterdam). Also in that year, in *Collective Creativity: Common Ideas for Life and Politics* (cur. What, How and for Whom) Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel, where *Tucumán Arde* was placed in the framework of a political notion of collective artistic endeavour as resistance against dominant capitalist art forms and as a performative critique of social institutions and political structures. In 2006, *Again for Tomorrow* (Royal College of Art, London, cur. Graduating Students on the MA Curating Contemporary Art) presented the work of the Argentinean artist-run collective Trama, that exhibited part of the Carnevale Archive (the archive had been previously displayed under the name Archivo Tucumán Arde). In 2007, the work was present in *Documenta 12* (cur. Roger M. Buegel and Ruth Noack), Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel and in *Forms of resistance* (cur. Will Bradley, Phillip van den Bossche and Charles Esche) in the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, where *Tucumán Arde* was placed among works of art that, from 1871 to the present, have used art to react to society and as a political protestation. An exhibition that took place in Rosario in 2008, curated by Ana Longoni and Fernando Davis, tried to contextualise the project in the Argentinean context. *Inventario 1965-1975. Archivo Graciela Carnevale*, Centro Cultural Parque de España, Rosario, 2008.

Arde into a myth. The project is usually seen as the epitome of the fragility between art and politics and of the contradictions that this relationship brings about.⁵⁰

Tucumán Arde has had some difficulty in being included in the canon of twentieth-century exhibitions, because the latter has usually been articulated as a by-product of art history and privileges an account of art movements and individual artists. However, *Tucumán Arde* can be associated with a parallel lineage of exhibitions, in which art and politics came together, such as propaganda shows in the inter-war and war period in Europe and North America. This chapter will look at *Tucumán Arde* in relation to this genealogy and will place it as a turning point in which these two traditions (political exhibitions and art exhibitions) begin to converge. This view will open up other approaches, forging a link between the established (modernist) history of exhibitions and a contemporary one, broadening the purview of curatorial studies and exhibition history. The key point in this double connection of modern and contemporary art with politics will be how art and politics can interact in exhibitions. This is one of the paths that will contribute towards enhancing the importance of thematic shows in the contemporary artistic scene.

This case study will focus on how the exhibition medium was used by artists to reconcile these two apparently opposite fields: political communication and artistic forms. This project was unique for a number of reasons: it was a collective process to which both artists and non-artists contributed, it resulted from a field trip to uncover the reality of a situation, it privileged the use of documentary and archival material and the subversion of advertising and mass-media, and it was located in a non-artistic venue, a trade union building. All these features, which benefited from the specificity of political and artistic backgrounds, opened up the notion of what could be an exhibition, expanding the limits of any narrow taxonomy. However, above and beyond its 'exhibitionary' and artistic achievements, *Tucumán Arde* was determined by the historical conditions of the Onganía dictatorship; the project's intention to bridge the relationship between art and politics was not exempt from contradictions, such as instrumentalisation and spectacularisation. In fact, throughout the twentieth century, the rapport between art and politics has never been established without conflict, and this is one of the reasons that make its analysis significant and necessary. My examination of *Tucumán Arde* will therefore try to preserve the tensions present in the original project, rather than to resolve these.

⁵⁰ I will discuss the bibliography regarding this point throughout the chapter.

2.1 Tucumán Arde and the Argentinean context of 1968: Anti-institutionalism and political radicalisation

The examination of *Tucumán Arde* can only start with the reference to the historic Argentinean situation in 1968, which triggered the gathering of a number of artists that were not formally organised as a group but who came together under the specific circumstances of the first years of Juan Carlos Onganía's dictatorial regime.⁵¹ The project, planned as a collective artwork with different stages, ended with an exhibition aiming to make visible the economic situation of the city of Tucumán, which was being distorted by the government communication policy and the press. In the development of the project, the artists used diverse strategies that combined previous experiences of local practices, especially environments and counter-media art, conflating political communication and art. The artists assembled around *Tucumán Arde* had formerly worked under the umbrella of Instituto Torcuato di Tella, an institution that they decided to abandon in order to have an actual impact in the situation of the country.⁵² The passage from the Instituto Torcuato di Tella to *Tucumán Arde* has been extensively described in Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman's book, and is essential in understanding this process.⁵³

All scholars dealing with *Tucumán Arde* agree that its anti-institutional progression coincided with the process of political radicalisation. However, there are nuances between them. Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman are most interested in underlining the endogenous political radicality of the artistic process, understood from a classical avant-garde point of view. They speak explicitly of an 'itinerary', a course which is recounted in

⁵¹ In the press releases handed in Rosario the group is named as *Grupo de Artistas de Vanguardia* [Avant-garde Artists Group]. The participating artists were María Elvira de Arechavala, Beatriz Balvé, Graciela Borthwick, Aldo Bortolotti, Graciela Carnevale, Jorge Cohen, Rodolfo Elizalde, Noemí Escandell, Eduardo Favario, León Ferrari, Emilio Ghilioni, Edmundo Giura, María Teresa Gramuglio, Martha Greiner, Roberto Jacoby, José María Lavarello, Sara López Dupuy, Rubén Naranjo, David de Nully Braun, Raúl Pérez Cantón, Oscar Pidustwa, Estella Pomerantz, Norberto Púzzolo, Juan Pablo Renzi, Jaime Rippa, Nicolás Rosa, Carlos Schork, Nora de Schork, Domingo Sapia and Roberto Zara.

⁵² The Instituto Torcuato di Tella was part of a wider project, the Torcuato di Tella Foundation, founded in 1958 by the two sons of an Italo-Argentinean engineer and tycoon. The Foundation used part of the large family business benefits to promote art and science. The Foundation was also sponsored by American funding, especially the Rockefeller Foundation. The mission of the Foundation was 'to promote high level research activities, regarding the scientific, cultural and artistic development of the country, without losing sight of the Latin American context where Argentine is located'. See John King, *El Di Tella y el desarrollo cultural argentino en la década del sesenta*, Buenos Aires, Gaglianone, 1985 and Andrea Giunta, *Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics. Argentine Art in the Sixties*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2007.

⁵³ Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, *Del di Tella a Tucumán Arde. Vanguardia y política en el 68 argentino*, Buenos Aires, Ed. El cielo por asalto, 2000. I have used the 2008 second edition, published by Eudeba.

the book as a chain of events that led from the attack of art institutions to a broader rupture that made political commitment unavoidable. Andrea Giunta, by contrast, is more attentive to the actual conditions that allowed a specific mixture of arts and politics to emerge, taking into account other contemporaneous alternatives for a political engaged art.⁵⁴ Giunta also highlights the differences between the Buenos Aires and Rosario groups and she speaks of a certain rivalry between them.⁵⁵ She argues that the Rosario group not only had the Instituto Torcuato di Tella as its point of reference, but also the Biennials taking place in Córdoba (Kaiser Biennials). Longoni and Mestman pay more attention to the impact of politics on art, whereas for Giunta, *Tucumán Arde* comes from an internal involvement within avant-garde artistic practices, which were willing to incorporate politics in experimentation.⁵⁶ For both authors, the Instituto Torcuato di Tella is considered an essential institutional point of reference in this process.

Since the 1950s the Argentinean art scene underwent a process of change, with the foundation of new institutions, such as the *Museo de Arte Moderno* [Modern Art Museum] in 1956, the *Centro de Artes Visuales* [Visual Arts Centre] of the Instituto Torcuato di Tella in 1960 and the dissemination of modern art carried by the Asociación Ver y Estimar, alongside with a programmatic policy of internationalisation of Argentinean art. A summary of the process is clear in Andrea Giunta's words:

The policies were primarily developed through a network of public and private institutions and involved the 'importation' of exhibitions of contemporary international artists; the sending of grant recipients abroad to study, to 'improve', and ultimately to 'elevate' the local art scene; the organisation of prize competitions involving prestigious international art critics; and, finally, the 'exportation' of exhibitions of Argentine art to Europe and most importantly, to the United States.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Andrea Giunta, *Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics. Argentine Art in the Sixties*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2007, p. 249-255. In her view, committed artists were using other avant-garde languages, such as muralism or social realism.

⁵⁵ Andrea Giunta, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

⁵⁶ In her words: 'The degree of rupture that took place in 1968 cannot be fully explained in terms of the desire for politicisation, but in terms of the search for greater experimentation in addition to which the artists aimed toward politicisation', Andrea Giunta, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

⁵⁷ Andrea Giunta, *op. cit.*, p. 8. The provision during the fifties and sixties the conditions of possibility for a internationalisation policy of Argentinean art and its overambitious expectations is one of the main axes in Giunta's book.

In this background, the Instituto Torcuato di Tella played a significant role, especially after the naming of the critic and curator Jorge Romero Brest as director in 1963. The Instituto di Tella and Romero Brest provided in the years previous to *Tucumán Arde*, a consolidated milieu of modernisation and a model of institutional curating. Modernisation involved both art and science, fully in the spirit of the age, and inside a white cube, ‘modern’ framework, a significant emphasis on experimentation was developed.⁵⁸ In artistic terms the Instituto di Tella was oriented to kinetic, perceptual and participative practices, such as op art, happenings and installations and it reflected the younger bourgeoisie habits, in relation to the flourishing pop culture.⁵⁹ This experimental, procedural and open-ended side was present in the two curatorial events that preceded *Tucumán Arde*, *Experiencias 1968* in Buenos Aires [Experiences 1968] and *Ciclo de Arte Experimental* in Rosario [Experimental Art Series].

A number of works presented in events promoted by the Instituto di Tella, and also in the 1966 Kaiser Biennial, started to be increasingly critical in orientation, either questioning the art institution and the notion of art, or raising social and political concerns.⁶⁰ The most controversial piece in the exhibition *Experiencias 1968* was Roberto Plate’s *El baño* [The Toilet], a piece which was censored, triggering a violent reaction from the artists.⁶¹ In Rosario, during the *Ciclo de Arte Experimental*, many of the works focused on the interrogation of the gallery space.⁶² The most provocative one was *El encierro* [The Lock

⁵⁸ The Foundation sponsored specialised centres in art, economy, social sciences and urbanism. With the assignment of modernising Argentinean art, the *Centro de Experimentación Audiovisual* [Audiovisual Experimentation Centre] was devoted to experimental theatre, performance, dance, happenings and concerts; the *Centro Latinoamericano de Altos Estudios Musicales* [Latin American Centre of High Musical Studies] included a Laboratory of Electroacoustic Music, and the *Centro de Artes Visuales* [Visual Arts Centre], opened between 1963 and 1969, was devoted to modern art.

⁵⁹ Both the Instituto di Tella and the artists were frequently criticised. From the conservative side, they were questioned for the lack of aesthetic values, and from the left wing, for being frivolous, apolitical and subsidised by the North Americans.

⁶⁰ In the event *Experiencias 1968* in Buenos Aires, the artworks ranged from Pablo Suárez’s letter of refusal to participate in the *Experiencias* and Eduardo Ruano’s distribution of a letter and a manifesto in the streets, to Roberto Jacoby’s *Teletype*, which constantly released news of 1968 French May. Another example of social and political awareness was Oscar Bony’s ‘exhibit’ of an actual family of workers, paid to be exposed on a plinth during the time of the show, *La familia obrera* [Workers Family].

⁶¹ Inside the Instituto di Tella venue, the artist built a simulacrum of two restrooms, with the ladies and gents labels, but without any appliance. It white walls immediately prompted graffiti that mixed sexual comments with political questioning of the dictator. Graffiti were reported and the police was called. The exhibition was not censored, but this specific work was. The toilet doors were sealed and a policeman stood in front of them during the rest of the exhibition. In this context, some of the artists decided to withdraw their works in support of Plate, throwing the artworks from the windows into Florida Street, piling them up in the doorway, and destroying them.

⁶² Roberto Púzzolo placed chairs looking from the gallery to the street, as reversed theatre stalls, and Eduardo Favario closed the gallery and invited the public to a bookshop, triggering a *dérive* in the streets.

Up] by Graciela Carnevale⁶³. In parallel to these events, the artists started a series of actions protesting directly against artistic institutions, such as boycotting the Braque Award or the ‘assault’ on Jorge Romero Brest’s lecture.⁶⁴ The former ended with the intervention of the police and with the detention of some artists. An anti-institutional attitude was also present in the Anti-Biennial (1966), which responded to the III Biennial in Córdoba.⁶⁵ It was at the Anti-Biennial that artists from Buenos Aires and Rosario started to come into contact with each other. Argentinean art historians, such as the above mentioned Longoni and Mestman and Giunta, have pointed out how the avant-gardist questioning of the artists, which manifested itself through ‘institutional critique’ type works, went a step further and became anti-institutional. This inclination took first the form of boycotts, protests and direct actions, but ended up with a total split between artists and the art institutional system.

On at least four occasions in 1968, the police turned up to events in which artistic and political protest were nearly indistinguishable.⁶⁶ The intervention of the police confirmed the vulnerability of the most advanced artistic spaces. In this context, Argentinean artists and intellectuals were gradually driven to a political radicalisation of the contents, forms and goals of their works. Historians agree that the political situation encouraged the progressive discrediting of non-committed activities. Óscar Terán, for example, notes that due to the closure of institutional alternatives (universities, art centres, institutes) the *coup* actually accelerated the radicalisation process.⁶⁷ It was in this context, in August 1968, at the *Primer Encuentro Nacional de Arte de Vanguardia* [First National Conference of Avant-garde Art], that artists from Buenos Aires and Rosario analysed the existing circumstances

⁶³ Carnevale locked out the people attending the opening. The artist understood this locking as a metaphor of violence in everyday life. In her words: ‘Through an act of aggression, the work intends to provoke the viewer into awareness of the power with which violence is enacted in everyday life. (...) The end of the work, as unpredictable for the viewer as it is for me, is nevertheless intentioned: will the spectator tolerate the situation passively? Will an unexpected event –help from outside- rescue him from being locked in? Or will he proceed violently and break the glass?’, quoted from Graciela Carnevale, ‘Project for the Experimental Art Series’, in Inés Katzenstein (ed.) *Listen Here Now! Argentine Art of the 1960s: Writings of the Avant-Garde*, New York, MoMA, 2004, p. 299. The gallery was finally opened from the outside. The work was to end with the arrival of the police and the closure of the venue.

⁶⁴ A detailed description of both interventions in Longoni and Mestman, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-143.

⁶⁵ The *Antibiennial* contested the 1966 *3ª Bienal Americana de Arte* [3rd American Art Biennial], sponsored by an American corporation (Kaiser). In the Anti-Biennial the artists produced street interventions, ambient pieces, happenings, conceptual art and contemporary dance works. See Cristina Roca, ‘Las Bienales de Córdoba como “illusio”’, in *Huellas, Búsquedas en Artes y Diseño*, n° 2, Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, 2002, pp. 99-106.

⁶⁶ Summing up: Plate’s *The toilet*, Carnevale’s *The Lock up*, Intervention in Romero’s Brest lecture and Boycott to the Braque Award.

⁶⁷ The police repressive action in the University in 1966, known as ‘The Night of the Long Sticks’, broke a long-standing tradition of autonomy of universities, confirming the idea that ‘institutionalised forms were not only weak, but also ineffective against authoritarian advances of power’. See Oscar Terán, ‘Culture, Intellectuals, and Politics in the 1960s’, in Inés Katzenstein (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 269.

and decided to break with art institutions and initiate an artistic-cum-political action.⁶⁸ The artists involved in the process differed in their positions, as is made clear in the lectures given at the Conference.⁶⁹ The First Conference coincided with an escalation of political radicalisation, second only to that following Onganía's military *coup d'état*, when workers and students increased their protests in a period of economic uncertainties.

It is in this framework where we need to place the artistic and curatorial dissensus that completed the rupture between the Instituto di Tella and the avant-garde artists. As a result of the political situation, the artists participating in the I Conference decided to dissolve art into social reality. Instead of bringing their denunciation to an art environment that was complicit with political repression, they chose to follow a call from a worker's union, the *Central General de los Trabajadores Argentinos* [Argentinean General Confederation of Labour, from now on CGTA], in which everyone was requested to contribute to the political struggle. The failure of art institutions made the artists look for a different operation field, which was found in the union's political battle against the Onganía regime. The desire for self-determination and independent curatorial initiative was already present in *Experiencias 1968* and *Ciclo de Arte Experimental. Tucumán Arde* only went a step further, proposing an activist collective curatorial event out of the artistic institution. The passage from the latter to the sphere of the workers union is essential to understand *Tucumán Arde*. As we will see in the following section, the change of scenario liberated the artists from the conditionings of the established art scene. However, the new setting pushed the artists into *realpolitik*.

Why Tucumán?

⁶⁸ For instance, we can observe a difference between Pablo Renzi and Leon Ferrari. Renzi states: 'Such limitation implies a real rupture with the prestige mechanisms and institutions used by the bourgeoisie to control cultural phenomena. Moreover, it implies a conscious incorporation into our work of political action, and a definition of our function as intellectuals in society. It means an end to the artist's position of "distance" from the class struggle, and an inclusion of that very problem in our project. It also means assuming the realization that no type of activity is "innocent" (let alone art), and that in the struggle, one is on one side or the other, with the revolution or against the revolution' On the other hand, Ferrari affirms: 'We can demonstrate that what the avant-garde has done is to have constantly enlarged the list of primary materials usable in art, and to constantly innovate the laws according to which they are organised (...) Forgetting that there is absolutely nothing that cannot be used to make art and that whoever asserts that red, time, meaning, or politics are incompatible with art, that they are not aesthetic material, has no knowledge of the avant-garde'. See Juan Pablo Renzi, "The Work of Art as Product of the Ethical Consciousness – Aesthetics Consciousness Relationship" in Inés Katzenstein (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 307 and León Ferrari, "The Art of Meanings", in Inés Katzenstein (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 315.

⁶⁹ An extensive description of the Conference's issues in Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-178; and part of them have been published in Inés Katzenstein (ed.), *op. cit.*

The symbolic significance of Tucumán in the Argentinean imaginary is key to understanding the context in which *Tucumán Arde* took place. During Perón's mandate, Tucumán's sugar industry had enjoyed a protectionist state-directed policy that had benefitted workers and small and medium enterprises. This model began to be non-productive in an incipient globalised economy that took off under the developmental policies of the 1950s. A new state policy was implemented after Perón was overthrown in 1955. It implied a productive reconversion that affected the economy of the whole province. The new situation had an impact on all agents in the sugar industry that started to organise themselves around antagonistic positions against the Government and the sugar mill owners. In 1965, the fall of the international price of sugar precipitated the crisis and activated latent tensions. These tensions were not only economic, but also political. To simplify the scenario, there were three main groups defending different interests: the liberal-developmental, the Peronists and the revolutionaries. The latter comprised different kinds of socialists and communists spearheaded by different unions.⁷⁰ After the sugar crisis of 1965, growing protests, strikes, and occupations of the sugar mills became a matter of national public opinion. Tucumán's significance exceeded the local context and started to be used symbolically in a wider ideological war. The unions led the protest process, obtaining the support of other civil movements.⁷¹ This state of destabilisation was capitalised by anti-communists and 'developmentalists' facilitating Onganía's *coup d'état* in June 1966.

In August 1966, Onganía's economic ministry announced new measures for Tucumán that sought to reorganise the regional economy. Contrary to the expectations of the Tucumanos, the measures deepened the reconversion process, closing down seven more sugar mills and attempting to diversify industrial production. This decision worsened the conditions of the workers and of the whole region and intensified the social crisis. These economic measures, named 'Operativo Tucumán', were part of a wider national economic policy that tried to achieve, at the same time, the promotion of efficient companies (especially the ones linked to transnational capital) and the dismantling of the unionist basis, which had largely developed under Perón. The national plan included the proscription of political activities, intervention in the judiciary and universities, and strict

⁷⁰ The most important unions were, among others, *Unión de Cañeros Independientes de Tucumán* (UCIT), *Federación Obrera de la Industria Azucarera* (FOTIA) and *Central General de los Trabajadores* (CGT).

⁷¹ See Ana Julia Ramírez, "Tucumán 1965-1969: movimiento azucarero y radicalización política", *Nuevo Mundo Nuevos Mundos Nuevos*, Debates, 2008. Available at: <http://nuevomundo.revues.org/38892> (last accessed 26/08/2011).

economic controls, all executed with an unprecedented police repression. The immediate effects of Onganía's economic policy were devastating.⁷² Workers, student and other organisations, especially the church, continued the protests during 1967 and 1968. As the local unions FOTIA and UCIT were undergoing inner tension, the national union CGT had gained broader influence, although during the process the more combative part of this union (CGTA) split with the rest (CGT), and the CGTA started to have a leading role in the crisis. Since the experience in Tucumán had contributed to the rise of the CGTA, reciprocally they took Tucumán as a symbol of the national crisis.

The radicalised protests that took place in Tucumán during May and June, severely repressed by the police and the army, were concurrent with the rupture between artists and the Instituto Torcuato di Tella, and with the First National Conference, in which the artists decided to leave the artistic realm and start political actions. This moment coincided with a call from the CGTA, the *Mensaje a los Trabajadores y al Pueblo Argentino* [Message to the Workers and Argentinean People], also known as 'May 1st Program'. The program's seventh point explicitly summoned intellectuals and artists to mobilise against the regime.⁷³ The Message was published in the CGTA's first bulletin - their official publication, directed by the journalist Rodolfo Walsh, who had previously given artists his support after the arrests following the Braque Award detentions.⁷⁴ The artists gathered in the First Conference decided to follow the call and propose their artistic action within this context. This step implied the voluntary inclusion of the artists in the CGTA agenda. In fact, the artists that travelled to Tucumán accessed the situation through the representatives of the different unions in the city. This kind of political intermediation was formative in the way in which the Tucumán conflict was envisioned by the artists.

⁷² Ramírez summarizes: 'At the end of 1966, more than 9.000 small producers had lost their production quotas and an equal number followed. By early 1967 the closure of the factories and the staff reduction, left 17.000 unemployed (a 35% of the total in 1966). Hundreds of small traders were forced to close their businesses due to recession. In 1967 the unemployment rate was 10% and between 1968 and 1969 it increased to 15%. In the lapse of three years 150.000 people emigrated, from a population of 750.000'. See Ana Julia Ramírez, *ibid.*, (my translation).

⁷³ Its seventh point stated: 'To the university, intellectuals, artists, whose position is not dubious in the face of a non-elected government, which has intervened in universities, burned books, annihilated national cinematography, censored theatre and boycotted art. We remind them: the intellectual field is conscience, by definition. An intellectual that does not understand what is happening in his time and in his country is a walking contradiction; and the one that does not act, in spite that he understands, will have his place in an anthology of crying, not in the living history of his land' (my translation). The full text in Spanish available at http://www.federaciongrafica.com.ar/Programa_del_1_de_mayo.html (last accessed 26/08/2011).

⁷⁴ The artists Ricardo Carreira, Roberto Jacoby, Javier Arroyuelo, Margarita Paksa, Pablo Suárez, Rafael López Sánchez, M. Micharvegas, Eduardo Ruano, Eduardo Favario and D. Sapia were arrested. The CGTA paid the lawyers.

Although the artists might have tried to maintain their independence, the reality was that the union, itself determined by different coordinates and stakes, framed the project in its own political conditions. Whatever the artists did to visibilise Tucumán's situation, at the same time helped the CGTA as a political agents in the national context. The manifesto that was handed out during the exhibition in Buenos Aires was signed by the *Plásticos de vanguardia de la Comisión Artística de la CGT de los Argentinos* [Avant-garde Artists from the Artistic Action Committee of the CGT of the Argentineans]. In that moment, the artists positioned themselves as an agit-prop committee, part of a larger political institution.⁷⁵ This new framework is central to understanding the specific political aesthetics adopted by *Tucumán Arde*. When reports about the exhibition were included in the CGTA bulletin, they were displayed under the subtitle 'Artistic show in Paseo Colón about the reality in the province among other articles about Tucumán's situation'.⁷⁶ From the CGTA's point of view, the exhibition was just one among other actions that were being undertaken in relation to Tucumán. Despite the artists' intentions, which were already far from homogeneous, the CGTA had already positioned the project instrumentally.

How did *Tucumán Arde* unfold?

In October 1968, once artists had agreed at the First Conference that they were going to help the unions with an exhibition denouncing the conditions in Tucumán, two actions took place simultaneously, combining a field work with a cover-up performance to make the former task easier and safer. Some of the artists collected documentary material on the deprived area and gathered press clippings that the government and the official press had published, while another small group of artists undertook a short trip to Tucumán to establish local contacts.⁷⁷ At the same time, other artists started a mock publicity campaign in the streets and public spaces of Rosario, using techniques and practices belonging to political communication and advertising, a combination of posters, cinema tickets and film

⁷⁵ The process is explained by Clemente Padín with the following words: 'In 1968, a group of artists joined the CGTA Struggle Plan and they organized themselves within the Union under the name Committee of Agitation and Propaganda, in parallel to the committees of cinema and journalism'. Clemente Padín, "Tucumán Arde, a paradigm of Revolutionary Cultural Action", in "En las avanzadas del arte latinoamericano", *Escáner Cultural*, n° 13, año 3, Santiago de Chile, April, 2001. Originally published in *OVUM 10*, n° 9, December 1971 and completed in December 1979, (my translation). Available at: <http://www.escaner.cl/especiales/libropadin/libropadin.html> (last accessed 26/08/2011).

⁷⁶ See the different articles about Tucumán in the CGTA bulletins, *Boletín CGT*, n° 30, 21/11/1968; *Boletín CGT*, n° 31, 28/11/1968; *Boletín CGT*, n° 33, 12/12/1968.

⁷⁷ Pablo Suárez, Juan Pablo Renzi, Rubén Naranjo and Roberto Jacoby participated in the first exploratory trip.

stills inserted literally before the movie was screened that were intended to create a state of expectation.⁷⁸

Once the campaign had started, the group was divided in two. One of the teams returned to Tucumán to collect more information about the situation and to contribute to the project with news.⁷⁹ Once there, they organised a cover-up action under the form of a press conference held by the artists at the Museum of Fine Arts in Tucumán, where they stated that they were going to research the cultural context of the region. Representatives of the media, local artists and state civil servants attended the conference. The event tried to spread a false version of their purposes in Tucumán by using an artistic umbrella, gaining time to gather information, while producing news to raise the expectation. During their stay, artists and non-artists of the collective produced photographs and film recordings, especially of the sugar mill workers and their families. They also interviewed different agents: the FOTIA activists, unemployed workers, sugar mill owners, students, journalists and civil servants.⁸⁰ While being produced, the gathered material was regularly sent back to Rosario in order to be processed. When the research in Tucumán was over, the same team staged another press conference, revealing the real intentions of the project and denouncing the situation in Tucumán. In parallel, the team in Rosario continued the campaign, adding the word 'Arde' to the advertised 'Tucumán' slogans (cinema tickets, film stills, stickers, etc).⁸¹ They also wrote 'Tucumán Arde' directly on the walls, imitating political graffiti. Close to the opening, another poster was produced and placed in the streets, announcing the *Primera Bienal de Arte de Vanguardia* [First Biennial of Avant-Garde

⁷⁸ This campaign included three successive steps. The first step involved the production of a poster, saying 'Tucumán' in simple typography black letters over a white background, and placing them in the city walls. They also managed to include the word 'Tucumán' in cinema tickets from the Cineclubes 65 and other independents Cinema Clubs (with a university student's audience). A slide with the word 'Tucumán' was inserted during the advertisement allotment of the movie screenings. These cinema clubs screened late night movies with a socially or artistic oriented orientation. See Ana Florencia Frontini, "Tucumán Arde. Campaña publicitaria de la 1º Bienal de Arte de Vanguardia", in *La Trama de la Comunicación* n°. 10, Anuario del Departamento de Ciencias de la Comunicación (Facultad de Ciencia Política y Relaciones Internacionales), Universidad Nacional de Rosario, UNR Editora, 2005.

⁷⁹ The artists that participated in the second trip were Noemí Escandell, Eduardo Favario, Norberto Puzzolo, Rubén Naranjo, Emilio Ghilioni, Graciela Carnevale, Aldo Bortolotti, Oscar Pidustwa and Carlos Schork (the two latter were the filmmakers). Eduardo Favario was the logistic manager and controlled if there was any risk. See Beatriz Vignoli, "Eduardo Favario o el retrato del artista como lugarteniente", *Página 12*, Rosario, 14 de marzo de 2006. Available at: <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/rosario/12-2609-2006-03-14.html> (last accessed 26/08/2011).

⁸⁰ A vision of the artists of *Tucumán Arde* as journalists in Alfredo Cramerotti, *Aesthetic Journalism: How to Inform Without Informing*, Bristol, Intellect Books, 2009, pp. 62-66.

⁸¹ A week after the first action, the second step was the addition of the word 'Arde'. That week the cinema tickets appeared with the expression 'Tucumán Arde'. Juan Pablo Renzi designed a sticker combining the previous 'Tucumán' letters with a popular typography for 'Arde', which they stick in toilets doors, classrooms, buses seats and shop windows.

Art], giving the opening day and the venue in a fashionable typography. The Biennial reference was an ironic comment on the previous Córdoba Biennials.⁸²

In just one month, then, two groups worked simultaneously, one in Tucumán and one in Rosario. The group in Tucumán produced two press conferences and collected information that was sent to Rosario. The group in Rosario produced the communication campaign, while processing the material that was sent from Tucumán. Finally, the exhibition was installed rapidly and showed a combination of the information they had gathered and produced (press clippings, charts, reports, photographs, films and banners). The show display was a dense amalgamation of materials and layouts, occupying the whole building of the union venue. A full description and analysis of the show will be undertaken

⁸² Longoni and Mestman, *op. cit.*, p. 198.



Fig. 1: Artists field work in Tucumán



Fig 2: Graffiti from the second phase of the media campaign in Rosario



Fig. 3: Poster from the third phase of the media campaign in Rosario



Fig. 4: Opening of *Tucumán Arde* in Rosario. Installation view.



Fig. 5: Opening of *Tucumán Arde* in Rosario. Installation view.



Fig. 6: Opening of *Tucumán Arde* in Rosario. Installation view.

below. The exhibition opened in Rosario on November 3rd and was extended for 15 days, a week more than originally planned. After the exhibition closed in Rosario, it travelled to the CGTA in Buenos Aires, opening on November 25th. Twenty-four hours later, the worker's union representatives decided to close it down, due to the pressure from the dictatorship. A publication of the results was planned, but was never carried out. After the closure of the exhibition, the group dissolved. Some continued working as artists, some changed to a more design-oriented activity contributing to the political struggle, some decided to join the armed movements, some stopped their artistic production. Progressively, all dissident thought went clandestine under the authoritarian regime.

Tucumán Arde's process of mythification

During the dictatorship years *Tucumán Arde* underwent a process of concealment and amnesia. However, one of the participating members, Graciela Carnevale, who had acted as its archivist during the project, continued her task clandestinely over these years, keeping whatever was left and collecting the scattered material.⁸³ When democracy was re-established in 1983, she began to arrange the materials more systematically and the archive became available to researchers.⁸⁴ Initially, the interest in restoring the memory of *Tucumán Arde* and its context came from Argentinean scholars and Latin American curators during the 1980s and 1990s. This resulted in the publication of numerous books about the Argentinean avant-garde in the 1960s.⁸⁵ At the end of the 1990s, *Tucumán Arde* moved to the exhibition realm at a moment when the relationship between art and politics was being reassessed in a wider international context. In the last ten years, *Tucumán Arde* has been part of several group shows, mainly in the European context, as we have commented above. Paradoxically, the good intentions of a new generation of European curators, working from within museum institutions, have contributed to *Tucumán Arde's* canonisation. This expanded visibility has made it easier to inscribe it in a neutralised version of political art ready to be exported to a globalised exhibition world and has made it difficult to draw attention to its specificity. Argentinean literature has been highly sensitive to this fact and

⁸³ She destroyed some of it for self-security reasons. Graciela Carnevale, Interview with the author, London, 27/05/2009.

⁸⁴ Part of the archive is kept by Carnevale, but part of it has been acquired by the Museu d'art contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) and the Essex Collection of Art from Latin America (ESCALA).

⁸⁵ We have mentioned most of the authors, Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, Andrea Giunta, John King, Inés Katzenstein. We could add, among others, Guillermo Fantoni, "Rosario: opciones de la vanguardia", in *Cultura y política en los años '60*, Buenos Aires, Oficina de Publicaciones del CBC – UBA, 1997, and Patricia Rizzo (ed.), *Instituto Di Tella. Experiencias '68*, Buenos Aires: Fundación Proa, 1998.

has tried to reconstruct all evidence and facts accurately, as a way to defend its singularity. In 2008, a monographic exhibition took place in Rosario, the city of the exhibition's first venue, where a full reconsideration was made of the way the project had been presented so far, especially following widespread dissatisfaction with its archival presentation in *Documenta 12*.⁸⁶

The singularity of *Tucumán Arde* has determined its conversion into a paradigm of the complex relationship between art and politics at the turn of the 1960s. Jaime Vindel has pointed out that the construction of *Tucumán Arde*, or rather its re-construction, is a product of 1990s historiography.⁸⁷ For Vindel, *Tucumán Arde* has undergone a process of mythification. This myth is based on a teleological characterisation of the project, because it is considered as the inevitable outcome of the progressive radicalisation of the Argentinean milieu. In this teleology, the unavoidable drive to dissolve art into politics is not seen as an apex, but as a dead-end, after which artists supposedly abandoned art, given that artistic practice was considered incompatible with political praxis. The focus on *Tucumán Arde's* failure contributes to the myth, establishing a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy in relation to art and politics. Since *Tucumán Arde* is considered unique, without an immediate legacy, tied to very particular political and artistic circumstances, and 'failed', its singularity and concealment has become its *originality*, transforming it into a myth of origin. *Tucumán Arde* can be read as a traumatic experience (both in political and artistic terms), following Hal Foster's concept of 'the return of the real'.⁸⁸ In this case, its 'return of the repressed' occurred in its reception during the 1990s in relation to the restitution of Argentinean political art in that decade. Furthermore, its mythical aura has helped to establish an automatic association with the destiny of the Soviet avant-garde (which acts unconsciously, as the primordial signifier), and exacerbates the melancholic sensibility around it. Recently, *Tucumán Arde* has been connected to the practice of factography, discussed below, a fact that has reinforced the idea of a concomitance with the Soviet experience. The comparison between these two episodes in which art and politics tried to become one, but failed, projects them in time with a mythical aura, with no immediate legacy.

⁸⁶ *Inventario 1965-1975. Archivo Graciela Carnevale*, Centro Cultural Parque de España, Rosario (3rd October-9th November 2008). A further contextualisation in Miguel López, "How Do We Know What Latin American Conceptualism Looks Like?", in *Afterall*, 23, spring 2010.

⁸⁷ Jaime Vindel, "Los 60 desde los 90", en *Ramona*, n° 82, julio, 2008.

⁸⁸ Hal Foster, *The return of the real: The avant-garde at the end of the century*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1996. In this article Foster follows a Lacanian perspective to approach the successive returns of avant-garde in the 1950s and 1960s (neo-avant-garde) and 1990s (neo-neo-avant-garde).

However, *Tucumán Arde* needs to be explained in relation to the Argentinean pre-existing artistic context and to the late sixties Latin American neo-avant-gardes. Art historically, this has meant situating the project within contemporaneous coordinates of conceptual art.⁸⁹ In this framework it has also been discussed in connection to environments and media art.⁹⁰ Yet, there remains something elusive about *Tucumán Arde*. Since most versions emphasise teleology, it is as if the artists were carried by the dynamics of the events and as if *Tucumán Arde*'s formalisation was transparent or self-explanatory, despite being so unique. The 'campaign' phase of the project is closely related to the way media art was practised in that moment, but the exhibition needs a further historiographic perspective. My aim in the rest of this chapter is to expand this view and place *Tucumán Arde* in a particular lineage of propaganda and avant-garde shows in the twentieth-century exhibition history, to provide another possible genealogy. With this move, my intention is not only to integrate *Tucumán Arde* into an expanded canon of exhibition history but also to provide a different point of reference that will interrogate the existing myth.

2.2. Tucuman Arde and Exhibition History

In reconstructing the viewer's experience of *Tucumán Arde*, the photographic material kept by Graciela Carnevale is our primary source, but it mainly illustrates the presentation in Rosario. Due to the different spaces available in Rosario and Buenos Aires, the shows didn't look exactly the same, despite a shared structure, spirit and content. My point of departure for a 'virtual' visit to the show will be an anonymous description of the Buenos Aires venue published in the CGTA magazine, since it depicts the exhibition itinerary in a manifestly didactic manner.⁹¹ *Tucumán Arde* cannot be described simply as a juxtaposition of materials arranged in a montage style in a singular space. According to the CGTA description, the viewer needed to pass through a specific narrative organized as clusters of information in different media. Although the artists have subsequently commented in

⁸⁹ Especially after all the debates originated from the above mentioned exhibition *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950-1980*. See Olga Fernández, "Conceptualism, a historiographic necessity for Latin American art?", Center for Latin American Visual Studies, Univ. of Austin (Texas), 2010. Available at: http://www.finearts.utexas.edu/aah/files/latin_seminar_conference_papers/PAPER%20-%20Olga%20Fernandez.pdf

⁹⁰ See M^a Carmen Ramírez, *op. cit.*, and Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, *op. cit.* For the origin of the debate see Simón Marchán Fiz, *Del arte objetual al arte de concepto (1960-1974). Epílogo sobre la sensibilidad "postmoderna"*. *Antología de escritos y manifiestos*, Madrid, Akal, 1994.

⁹¹ The article is not signed. The *Boletín CGT*, n° 31, 28/11/1968 was under the direction of Raimundo Ongaro and Ricardo de Luca.

interviews that the Buenos Aires's show was 'more overtly political', I am interested in pointing out how the union's bulletin emphasised this political reading of the exhibition.⁹²

The primary audience for the union context were unionists, not the bourgeois public that used to attend exhibitions and events at the Instituto di Tella. This was in the mind of the CGTA author who presupposed a worker or a unionist as its ideal spectator.⁹³ The article starts at the Union's building entrance where a banner ironically invited passersby to enter Tucumán, 'a garden of misery'. This provocation, which started with this contradictory advertisement at the entrance, is used by the journalist throughout the article. He returns to this rhetorical trope to punctuate his description of the emotional journey through the show. For the narrator, the surprise continued in the first room, where loudspeakers aired interviews with different Tucumán social agents, data about the living condition of the population, and also local music, such as Palito Ortega's songs. Some steps further, workers and university students offered viewers a Xeroxed booklet containing a sociological study explaining Tucumán's economic crisis in relation to Onganía's policy.⁹⁴ Here the journalist asserts that 'It is really an unusual atmosphere that disconcerts and intrigues to whoever comes off guard'.⁹⁵

The columnist then goes on to describe the corridor leading to the elevators, one of the spaces that (in its Rosario incarnation) would become one of the iconic images of the show. On the wall to the right was a panel with press clippings (León Ferrari's contribution) that displayed two types of information culled from newspapers: rhetorical front page articles in which Onganía explained what the 'Argentinean revolution' would do

⁹² Longoni and Mestman, *op. cit.*, p 207.

⁹³ Graciela Carnevale states that the primary audience were unionists and students. Longoni and Mestman, *op. cit.*, 332. For Longoni and Mestman the audience was wider, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

⁹⁴ The report was by the sociologists of the Centre of Social Investigations of the Instituto Torcuato di Tella.

⁹⁵ *Boletín CGT*, n° 31, 28/11/1968, p. 3.



Fig. 7: *Tucumán Arde* in Rosario. Entrance corridor.



Fig. 8: *Tucumán Arde* in Rosario. Entrance corridor.



Fig. 9: *Tucumán Arde*. Press clippings panel.



Fig. 10: *Tucumán Arde*. Charts with connections between owners and Government.



Fig. 11: *Tucumán Arde* in Rosario. Installation view.

for Tucumán, and local news reports in which a more accurate description of the situation there was revealed. On the wall to the left, another large panel displayed charts showing the connections between Onganía's government and the sugar factory owners. While on the floor of the corridor, the visitors trod on banners (acting as carpets) on which the names of the factory owners were written. Once presented the ground floor, the reporter inquires 'But, what is this?', and he answers: 'This is *Tucumán Arde*, an exhibition of revolutionary art made collectively by 40 artists'.

The emotional journey that visitors would have experienced in the occupied building reached its climax on the ninth floor. The largest room, where significant unionist meetings had taken place, was transformed into a film theatre. On a modest white cloth, a ten minute documentary film was screened; showing moving images of Tucumán's dismantled factories, abandoned villages and impoverished inhabitants. After the screening, a twelve minute slide show showed the photographs taken by the team who went to Tucumán, synchronized to a recorded interview with the son of Hilda Guerrero, a unionist killed in one of Tucumán's demonstrations. In the journalist's words; 'the woman was murdered for defending her family's bread, the dignity of her people, and the sovereignty of her country'.⁹⁶. At this narrative summit, the columnist gives the floor to the artists, excerpting their manifesto, in which it could be read: 'We want to return the words, the dramatic actions and the images to the places where they can play a revolutionary role, where they can be useful, where they can be converted into weapons for the struggle'.⁹⁷.

The CGTA journalist expands then on the artists' attitude towards public and politics, acknowledging their break with convention regarding the venue, the nature of the works and their choice of medium. He notes that, 'Instead of experimenting with artistic forms (...), that separate artists from their public (...), they use the most modern technical media to refer in the most direct language to specific topics that everyone can understand. Instead of reflecting the world, as art has always done, they propose that their work contribute to transform it'.⁹⁸. The article didn't focus on what was art, but on what language did art need to speak in order to be transformed into a 'weapon for the struggle'.⁹⁹. It was taken for granted that artists produce images of the world, and that the only thing needed was to produce images that everyone could understand. This implied the use of new media (film,

⁹⁶ *Boletín CGT, Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Boletín CGT, Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Boletín CGT, Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Boletín CGT, Ibid.*

photography, audio recordings) that were already consumed by large audiences, which had been a key strategy in early Soviet art. The value of the show was therefore based on its communicational efficacy, since 'experimenting with forms' was not considered to be the way to fight for the revolution. The rest of the article in the bulletin reported extensively on the inaugural speech that the Unionist higher representative, Ramon Ongaro, gave during the opening.

A factographic sensibility

Tucumán Arde didn't look like any other exhibition or artwork of the time in Argentina. Without doubt it was informed by an existing artistic tradition, based on environments and media art, as Longani and Mestman have shown. However, *Tucumán Arde* went beyond any previous experience and built up a singular assemblage. If we were to establish visual comparisons, we could relate it formally to a previous tradition of photo-montage and propaganda shows, such as El Lissitzky exhibitions to endorse the Soviet Revolution (1928-1930), the *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* (Rome, 1932), the Spanish Republican Pavilion in Paris (Paris, 1937) and the exhibitions undertaken by the United States during World War II, such as *The Road to Victory* (New York, 1942).¹⁰⁰. The birth of propaganda exhibitions cannot be dissociated from El Lissitzky experiments with the *Demonstrationräume* in Hannover and Dresden (1926) that led him to create exhibition spaces in correspondence with the new representation, production and distribution systems originated by the collective reception and participation of masses as historical subject: his best-known are the *Internationale Presse-Ausstellung des Deutschen Werkbund* (Cologne, 1928) and the *Internationale Hygiene-Ausstellung* (Dresden, 1930). They were conceived as a new means for the public reading of images, they shared a dynamic conception of the space and they imagined an active relationship between author and public, through the intervention in the psychic and emotional processes of the viewer. The exhibitions took an architectonic

¹⁰⁰ Jorge Ribalta has recently edited a compilation of texts that examine these shows. Jorge Ribalta (ed.), *Public photographic spaces. Exhibitions of Propaganda, from Pressa to The Family of Man, 1928-1955*, Barcelona. MACBA, 2009.



Fig. 12: *Internationale Presse-Ausstellung des Deutschen Werkbund* (1928). Installation view.



Fig. 13: *Internationale Hygiene Ausstellung* (1930). Installation view.



Fig. 14: *Sala 0. Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* (1932-34). Installation view.



Fig. 15: Spanish Pavilion. *Exposition internationale des arts et techniques dans la vie modern* (1937). Installation view.

dimension, playing with scale, multiple perspectives, and dramatic effects, with outsized photographs and photo-murals presenting masses of ordinary people. The exhibitions were also punctuated with politically charged texts and slogans, so as to raise political and historical consciousness in the visitor. El Lissitzky's formal experimentations were expanded in Europe and the US in the 1930s and early 1940s, a moment in which the different conflicting States increasingly demanded the type of politically effective demonstrations that inevitably led to propaganda.¹⁰¹

Despite the highly significant formal similarities between *Tucumán Arde* and propaganda exhibitions, and of the fact that they took place under an explicit political agenda in a context of intense radicalisation, it is surprising that art historians have not used the term 'propaganda' in relation to *Tucumán Arde*, even though some artists did use this word at the time.¹⁰² Historians have preferred to apply the word propaganda to Onganía's *Operativo Tucumán* and therefore to circumvent the problem of describing *Tucumán Arde* in those terms.¹⁰³ The solution has been to substitute propaganda with avant-garde or with artistic praxis, forgetting the extent to which some avant-garde practices were intimately intertwined with propaganda. It is undeniable that the word bears negative connotations both in artistic and political fields, due to its usage during the Second World War by Soviet, Nazi, Fascist and Allied forces. Moreover, the indoctrination that forms the core of propaganda is in conflict with the autonomous and liberal self-image that art has in the aesthetic regime. The conflict of this self-identification with a pejorative category, that is to say the linkage of *Tucumán Arde* with propaganda exhibitions, however evident in its formal layout, is nevertheless difficult to establish when considering only its formal attributes.

The problem is that the art historical defence of *Tucumán Arde*'s aesthetic and material solution is always positioned in relation to its local origin, as a result of an autochthonous avant-garde linked to an oppositional reaction to the Instituto di Tella, and therefore cannot draw a genealogy that connects it to the shows of the 1930s mentioned above. Such a lineage would need to prove a link that connects the Argentinean project with geographically distant avant-garde contexts: one would have to establish a plausible

¹⁰¹ The architect Herbert Bayer expanded the language first in Germany and then in the US, in parallel to Italian *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* (1932) or the *Spanish Pavilion* in the Paris International Exhibition of 1937.

¹⁰² For instance in the Manifesto the artists handed during the exhibition in Buenos Aires. A transcription of it can be found in Longoni and Mestman, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

¹⁰³ Longoni and Mestman talk about 'official propaganda' in their *op. cit.*, p. 220.

migration of forms from 1930s Europe and 1940s US to late 1960s Argentina, based on the precise reception of formal signifiers. Another route would be to examine the conditions of possibility within the Argentinean artistic milieu of the sixties to know of these previous practices, but this line of research has not yet been fully developed. Several authors have looked at the way in which El Lissitzky's legacy may have affected the context in which *Tucumán Arde* was produced, after one of his texts was published and commented by Óscar Masotta and the artists in Buenos Aires.¹⁰⁴ Lissitzky's article highlighted the idea of dematerialisation, and this prescience has caused other helpful concepts in his text to be overlooked, such as the relationship between the image and the text, or the use of posters in relation to propaganda (a word clearly present in his text) that I will discuss below.

To read *Tucumán Arde* with formalist art historical tools is not enough, in my view, to inscribe it within the wider cultural context in which it was produced. Rather, *Tucumán Arde* needs to be placed at the crossroads of art, mass media, social communication and politics. The relationship between *Tucumán Arde* and propaganda exhibitions is not based on a direct formal influence, but in the role that photograph, moving image and mass media play in the configuration of a specific kind of (political) public sphere. With this lens we can look for different threads that weave a shared sensibility throughout the twentieth century. The apparent gap between propaganda exhibitions and *Tucumán Arde* can be filled with an underlying 'factographic sensibility', a category coming from the Soviet avant-garde and a reference already pointed out by some authors in relation to *Tucumán Arde*.¹⁰⁵ Key to factography is the way in which art and politics are bound not only through, but *in* mass media. Soviet factography was sustained in the belief that photography and film were a necessary objective in the registering of facts. Consequently, art and life could be reintegrated in documentary media. Key to factography as well was the idea that this reintegration, made possible *within* the new media, could be put at the service of the revolution, or in words of the Soviet era, could be made 'operative'. The factographic operation inaugurates a contradiction in the usage of new technological media for political art. Since it presents and constructs a reality that is *intact* and at the same time interpreted, it

¹⁰⁴ Historians have focused on Masotta's usage of dematerialisation ahead of Lucy Lippard. See Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, "After Pop, we dematerialize: Oscar Masotta, Happenings, and Media Art at the Beginnings of Conceptualism", in Inés Katzenstein, *op. cit.*, pp 156-172.

¹⁰⁵ On factography, Benjamin Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography", *October*, n° 30, fall 1984. On factography in relation to *Tucumán Arde*, Víctor del Río, *Factografía. Vanguardia y Comunicación de masas*, Madrid, Abada Editores, 2010 and Jaime Vindel, "Tretiakov en Argentina", in *eipcp*, 08/2010, available at: www.eipcp.net/transversal/0910/vindel/es (last accessed 26/08/2011). More on factography, Devin Fore (ed.), *October* n 118, fall 2006.

bears an unsolvable tension between a presupposed objectivity and a revolutionary aim, which is precisely found and embodied in its mechanical origin.

El Lissitzky has long been established as one of the best representatives of the use of factographic tools and as the first to develop them through the exhibition medium. However, though codified in the Soviet era, the factographic sensibility, and its inherent belief in the intact but operative properties of mechanical media, was dispersed throughout the twentieth century.¹⁰⁶ Along with the theoretical elaborations of Walter Benjamin, it can be traced in documentary films, photographic projects, factual literature, semi-literary/journalistic pieces, and a variety of artistic pieces that have worked with the ‘writing of facts’ (*literatura fakta*).¹⁰⁷ In the case of *Tucumán Arde*, the problem of how mass media and their images construct reality was clearly addressed with factographic tools. Central to *Tucumán Arde* was the provision of different information with objective charts – data, sociological studies and factual photographs and films - all of them interpreted with the help of textual supplements (as Benjamin had suggested). The use of banners, posters, slogans and political rhetoric was a direct influence from the strategies of concurrent political groups and unions. With this new objective documentation, information circuits could be overturned. However, the question about the distribution of such images has obscured questions about their production. The belief in the possibility of a ‘counter-information’, via technological media has left untouched the question of how that information was obtained. The myth of photographic ‘indexicality’ has been blindly protected by political beliefs.

¹⁰⁶ Through the writings of Walter Benjamin, especially “The Author as Producer”, in *Understanding Brecht*, London, Verso, 1983. See also Víctor del Río, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁷ John Roberts, *The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography, and the Everyday*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998.

From media art to media activism

A questioning of mass media is formative for the formal materialization of *Tucumán Arde*, since the whole project was oriented to counter the official version disseminated by the government and the press. An interrogation of communication and mass media was in fact already a widespread tendency in the Argentinean intellectual milieu, particularly in the fields of Sociology and Art. Although theories of communication focused on the understanding of the role of mass media in the social construction of reality were popular in many countries in the 1960s, the Latin American reception of structuralism and semiotics was also critical of European and North American paradigms. This distinct development from 1963 onwards became, by the 1970s, a recognisable Latin American School of Communication.¹⁰⁸ A specific feature of this school was that it placed considerable importance on alternative popular communication in opposition to hegemonic mass media communication. This aspect was developed in close relation to the importance of popular education, for which Paulo Freire was a significant reference, and contributed to the knowledge of innovative communication practices that later gave rise to so-called participatory action research. But even before such theorisation, the alliance of education, research and social communication in seeking positive social change was already present in some projects, such as the *Escuela Documental de Santa Fe* [Santa Fe Documentary School] (Santa Fe, 1956- 1962), discussed below.

In Argentina, Communication Theory was developed in the departments of Sociology of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) and in the Centre of Social Investigations of the Instituto Torcuato di Tella, two institutions where the research and teaching of Eliseo Verón was of great significance.¹⁰⁹ In the mid-sixties, the main topics in Argentinean sociology were the national situation, class struggle, poverty, union movements and underdevelopment. Around 1966, in the Instituto Torcuato di Tella, and under Verón's influence, sociology underwent a transition from functionalist structuralism, an empiric-scientific discourse about the social, towards a sociology that included a more philosophical and theoretical background, and which combined an analysis of social processes with an

¹⁰⁸ Significant authors of this School are Paulo Freire, Néstor García Canclini, José Marques de Melo, Armand Mattelart, Antonio Pasquali or Eliseo Verón, among others.

¹⁰⁹ Key books in this process were *Comunicación y Cultura de masas* by Antonio Pasquali and *Conducta, estructura y comunicación* by Eliseo Verón, both from 1963. Verón directed the Centre in 1967 and 1968. The report handed in *Tucumán Arde* was produced in this Centre.

idea of social transformation.¹¹⁰ This dialectic between scientific and Marxist discourses ('scienticism' vs. 'essayism') and the relation between the systematisation of facts and the interpretation of them is significant for *Tucumán Arde's* approach to reportage, because this intellectual milieu supported some of the participants of the project. Roberto Jacoby, for example, had studied sociology at the UBA. Beba Balvé, another sociologist, had worked in the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas of the Instituto di Tella and was one of the authors of the Report "*Tucumán Arde... ¿Por qué?*" [Tucumán is Burning... Why?], that was handed out during the exhibition.¹¹¹

Communication Theory in 1960s Argentina was related to the influence of French semiotics and to the Frankfurt School. Their critical approach soon changed from linguistics to the analysis of ideology, power and communication from an economic and political perspective. The common ground of sociology and communication theory was developed in the Instituto Torcuato di Tella, through Verón's investigations, but also through the figure of Óscar Masotta, a key thinker in connecting communication theory with artistic practices. Longoni and Mestman, among others, have examined in depth the figure of Masotta and the intellectual and theoretical background which, in relation to mass media theory and art, surrounded the di Tella and determined *Tucumán Arde's* profile.¹¹² Masotta elaborated a theoretical proposal that encompassed an interpretation of specific concepts in relation to artistic practices: Roland Barthes' ideas of myth, discontinuity and redundancy, Marshall MacLuhan's concept of environment, and El Lissitzky's dematerialisation. These were connected by Masotta to Pop art, happenings and media art, and permeated Argentinean art of the 1960s via the Instituto Torcuato di Tella, where he lectured and even performed.

Masotta supported certain strategies ('redundancy' and 'discontinuity') to facilitate a process of 'apperception' by which the code of the communicative act, and not the message, became the subject of attention.¹¹³ Works, such as the ones produced around

¹¹⁰ See Horacio González (ed.), *Historia crítica de la sociología en Argentina*, Buenos Aires, Ed. Colihue, 2000.

¹¹¹ The report was elaborated by Miguel Murmis, Silvia Sigal and Carlos Waisman. Beba Balvé's sister Silvia also contributed to *Tucumán Arde* as an artist

¹¹² A deep analysis of the relation between art and mass media in Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, "After Pop, We dematerialise: Oscar Masotta, Happenings, and Media Art at the Beginnings of Conceptualism", in Inés Katzenstein (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 156-172. Also the monographic issue of *Ramona*, n° 45, Buenos Aires, septiembre, 2004.

¹¹³ In relation to the concept of 'apperception', Daniel R. Quiles, "Publicity as an Art Form: David Lamelas's Publication", unpublished paper presented at the *I Transnational Latin American Art International Research Forum*, University of Texas, Austin, 6-8th November 2009.

1966 by Marta Minujín, David Lamelas, Eduardo, Margarita Paksa and the Grupo de Arte de los Medios [Media Art Group], explored discontinuity as the breaking up of the unity of time and space, so a single artwork was produced with different timings and in different spaces.¹¹⁴ Masotta also challenged the happenings' aspiration for an immediate experience and the mediated experience emphasised in environments and media art, in pieces created through the use of new technological media, such as T.V. or radio broadcasting.¹¹⁵ A piece by the Grupo de Arte de los Medios, *First Hearing of Works Created with Oral Language* (1966), can be examined in this direction.¹¹⁶ The new technological media not only preserved the facts, but amplified its literary potential. This piece can be considered a paradigmatic example of the 'writing of facts' as thought about by Tretiakov and Benjamin, but has been overlooked when dealing with *Tucumán Arde* antecedents.¹¹⁷

From all these experiences, Masotta inferred an evolution in which firstly artworks used new media within an artistic context, (either Pop Art use of images of media, or happenings involving C.C.T.V., TV monitors, slide projectors or cinema projections). At the same time, art was inserted *in* mass media, as in the works of the Grupo de Arte de los

¹¹⁴ Redundancy involved repetition or patterning in order to highlight the code. Discontinuity, a tactic that Barthes had put forward in his examination of Michel Butor, required the breaking into pieces of the artwork or the interruption of the message, so a continued reception was made impossible and the viewer could analyze the system. Influenced by Masotta, artists close to the Instituto di Tella started to use these strategies. Around 1966 there were a number of artists using a combination of these techniques, especially in the Grupo de Arte de los Medios, but not only in them. *Three Countries Happening* by Marta Minujín, David Lamelas' *Conexión de tres espacios* [Connection of Three Spaces, 1966], Eduardo Costa's untitled piece for *Art in the mind* show or Margarita Paksa, all use these strategies. In relation to media, *El mensaje fantasma* [The ghost message] is also a very illustrative piece, in which posters were put up in the centre of Buenos Aires, announcing a television broadcast four days later. In that date, the TV announcer noted that four days before a poster had appeared in the street. The street poster and television were fed into one another, redundantly pointing to one another. In so doing, they produced a tautology with no other message.

¹¹⁵ The idea of environment came from a combination of Allan Kaprow's idea of environment (the creation of an ambience) and Marshall MacLuhan's concept of a mediated atmosphere. Mac Luhan's renowned statement that the media is the message was literally staged in some pieces such as Marta Minujín's *Simultaneidad envolvente* [Environmental Simultaneity], considered 'señal de ambientación' (a sign of environment) and not a happening. In this piece Minujín chose sixty relevant persons from the cultural and journalist milieu and placed each of them in front of a TV and a radio set. They were then filmed, photographed and recorded. Ten days later, the same persons, dressed up and placed in the same way could see themselves in the projection while they heard their broadcasted voices.

¹¹⁶ The artists described their piece in the flyer announcing the event that took place in the *Centro de Experimentación Audiovisual* of the Instituto di Tella: 'We propose a new genre that applies the same principles of literary creation to works created in oral language. Based on fragments of spoken language collected on a tape recorder, along with Juan Risuleo, we have created "literary" works to be heard directly on tape. The tape recorder, storing the language that would later be combined into the work, would operate like an objective memory, outside of the artist. Thus all the richness of oral language would be recovered for literature (tones of voice, the age and gender of the person speaking, perhaps his social class). All this is lost when we work in written language'. Flyer reproduced in Inés Katzenstein, *op. cit.*, p 253.

¹¹⁷ Other pieces involving live recording in this moment were *Entre en discontinuidad* [Between in discontinuity] by Raúl Escari in 1966 and *El helicóptero* [The Helicopter] by Óscar Masotta in 1967.

Medios.¹¹⁸ Also significant was the notion of ‘circuit’, which came from a combination of redundancy and media. Considering artwork as a circuit, it shifted from a produced object to a distribution channel, becoming pure mediation. Part of *Tucumán Arde*’s strategies, such as the media campaign, was thought about as a circuit. Another key point in relation to Masotta’s concept of happening and environment is that he considered them as being of a hybrid nature, something that was also pointed out by Jacoby. Both authors associated hybridity with the idea of avant-garde.¹¹⁹

In conclusion, around 1967 in Buenos Aires there was an established art constituency that had read Pop art, happenings and environment in relation to sociology, mass media, semiology and communication theory. Artists were producing a series of works characterised by an acute consciousness of the media structures and codes, and by the combination of genres into a hybrid technological environment or by the insertion of artworks in the media. Redundancy and discontinuity were key strategies in the building of ‘circuits’ that put into question mass media as producers of contemporary myths. One of the most accomplished works of this period, which encompassed the majority of strategies, was the *Anti-happening* organised by the Grupo de Arte de los Medios.¹²⁰ The piece was contemporaneously analysed by Eliseo Verón.¹²¹ Within this context, it is easy to understand how the first phase of *Tucumán Arde* was conceived as a fake media campaign.

¹¹⁸ The Grupo de Arte de los Medios [Media Art Group] was formed by Roberto Jacoby, Eduardo Costa and Raúl Escari in 1966. Besides the article by Longoni and Mestman, the relation of the Grupo de Arte de los Medios with the international context can be examined in Alexander Alberro, "Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1977", in Alexander Alberro y Blake Stimson (eds.) *Conceptual Art: A critical anthology*, Cambridge, Mass., M.I.T. Press, 1999, pp. xxv-xxvi.

¹¹⁹ Masotta saw hybridity as follows: ‘The very idea of “genre” as a limit seems precarious or perishable (theater mixes its techniques with those of film, dance blends with painting, film shows the strong influence of the comic strip), it becomes increasingly impossible to remain indifferent to this small proposition of all avant-garde work or exhibitions’, Oscar Masotta, “After Pop, We Dematerialised”, a text from 1967 in Inés Katzenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 211. Jacoby asserted ‘Reflecting on the origins of Happenings, it is easy to see how artists coming from different artistic fields converged to form a hybrid genre. Painters, dancers, musicians, filmmakers, theater people, etc., crossed the boundaries between traditional genres, looking for the outlet they could not find in their own medium. For them, the broadening of the notion of art needed to include not only temporal and spatial fragmentation (so the artwork became open and discontinuous), but required the uperseding of the traditional media and the “hybridization” of “theater, plastic arts, music, film”, and mass media’, Roberto Jacoby, “Against the happening”, also from 1967 in Inés Katzenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

¹²⁰ In this tautological work the Group handed to the press a written and photographic report of a happening that hadn’t taken place. However, it was taken by the media as real and reproduced in some newspapers. The piece was called *Total participation Happening*, or *Happening for a deceased wild boar*, though it is usually known as *Anti-happening*. In this piece Robert Jacoby took Barthes’ concept of myth and counter-myth to establish an opposition between a possible real happening and its narration in the press: ‘But the myth of the Happening was not in itself the work’s “message”. What was communicated was the paradox between the characteristics of the Happening (the lack of mediation, direct communication with objects and personas, short distance between the viewer and the viewed) and a great deal of mediation between objects and events, the non participation of the receptor; in short, the conditions imposed by the mass media as a means of communication’, Roberto Jacoby, “Against the happening”, in Inés Katzenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

¹²¹ Eliseo Verón, “La obra” (1967), *Ramona*, n° 9-10, Buenos Aires, 2000-2001, p. 46.

From today's perspective, however, we need to point out that the usage of mass media against itself couldn't work, paradoxically, without a primary belief in their objective properties as technological devices.

This drive towards a transcription of reality was not exclusive to the Soviet avant-garde, but has to do with a wider sensibility and set of political interests. I am aware that this kind of mediatory practice in which reality is apprehended indexically, while activated politically, is difficult to map as if it were a genre, a style or a movement. However, it can be revealed in its traces as an inclination or predisposition throughout the twentieth century. In 1960s Argentina, we can find affinities in the way that different cultural practitioners approached socio-political reality. For instance, we can identify a factographic methodology in the politically-oriented texts of Rodolfo Walsh, a journalist and writer who superseded the genre distinction between novel and journalism in his use of documents and testimonies and the search for a collective voice.¹²² Walsh was one of the supporters of *Tucumán Arde* and the editor of the CGTA bulletin. We can also situate film projects, such as the Escuela Documental de Santa Fe or Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, *La hora de los hornos* (1968), under a factographic sensibility that reunited 'direct cinema' and political commitment.¹²³ We can also recall that *La hora de los hornos* was screened during the *Tucumán Arde* show in Buenos Aires. To clarify, here I am not talking about formal influences, but am trying to identify a shared sensibility that corresponds to a historically determined and mediated apprehension of reality with emancipatory intentions.

Due to the increased political radicalisation after the 1966 *coup d'état*, the tautological critique of mass media needed to go a step further and media art underwent an evolution. In Masotta's words, this evolution would 'lead to a transformation of the aesthetic material, which would become increasingly sociological and then political'.¹²⁴ In fact, there was a

¹²² See Ana María Amar Sánchez, *El relato de los hechos. Rodolfo Walsh: testimonio y escritura*, Rosario, Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 1992; Mauro Bertone Crippa, "Proximidades y distancias entre las narrativas de Walsh y Borges" *La Trama de la Comunicación*, vol. 12, Rosario, Argentina. UNR Editora, 2007; and Fabiana Grasselli "Concepto de vanguardia y escritura testimonial en los programas estético-políticos de Rodolfo Walsh y Francisco Urondo", in *Espéculo. Revista de estudios literarios*. Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2010, <http://www.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero45/walsuron.html>, last accessed 26/08/2011.

¹²³ Mariano E. Mestman, "Testimonios obreros, imágenes de protesta: el directo en la encrucijada del cine militante argentino", en María Luisa Ortega Gálvez y Noemí García (ed.), *Cine directo. Reflexiones en torno a un concepto*, T&B Editores, 2008.

¹²⁴ Masotta on this aspect: "The sociological material of the Happening surely calls for a sociological language. Yet if we claimed to give a complete account of the aesthetic characteristics of the Happening in terms of sociological facts, it is likely that along the way, we would lose what is most specific to the genre. Therefore it soon becomes necessary to go searching for this language at a higher level of generality, at a sufficiently

realization that media could contain political content and become revolutionary.¹²⁵ This is the moment when artistic strategies converged with this already existing factographic sensibility. The possibility of becoming more politically committed was in fact present in Jacoby's texts from 1967. Jacoby goes even further and talks explicitly about a shift from art to propaganda: 'The predominance of the connotative function will move art closer to propaganda and to the study of the structures of persuasion'.¹²⁶ It must be emphasized here, the extent to which *Tucumán Arde* is indebted to Jacoby. The artists that contributed to *Tucumán Arde* were consciously part of the union's political strategy and were fully aware of the propagandistic value of the combination of art and media. The spirit that lay behind the project was a revolutionary one, and as such must be examined under this lens. The emphasis put on its failure benefits the myth and the melancholia, but negates the possibility of a demystified version, with all its *chiaroscuro*.

general level of language to encompass both the facts of sociology and the objects of aesthetics', Oscar Masotta, "Prologue to Happenings", in Inés Katzenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

¹²⁵ 'Mass media artworks are receptive to contain political include political content, and this is due to their own concept and their own structure. I mean, left wing content, really convulsive, able to blend revolutionary practice with aesthetic praxis', Oscar Masotta, *Conciencia y estructura*, Buenos Aires, Jorge Álvarez, 1969, pp.14-16. Quoted from Ana Longoni, "Vanguardia" y "revolución", ideas-fuerza en el arte argentino de los 60/70", published on line in *Arte Nuevo*, 08/07/2007, <http://arte-nuevo.blogspot.com/2007/07/vanguardia-y-revolucin-ideas-fuerza-en.html>. Last accessed 26/08/2011 (my translation).

¹²⁶ And he continues: 'What is more, perhaps, the old conflict between art and politics, which people have tried to transcend by introducing a political "content" into art, will be settled by the artistic use of a medium as political mass communication', Roberto Jacoby, "Against the happening", in Inés Katzenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

2.3 Marxist aesthetics: activism, documentary media and allegory

The itinerary that led to *Tucumán Arde* interweaved a course of action, in which the politicisation of art mirrored the radicalisation of the politics in the country, with another route in which artistic practices were led to a kind of political art that came out from a sociological version of media art. The transition from a tautological version of media art towards a ‘factographic’ and propagandistic one can be fully assessed in the two phases of *Tucumán Arde*: the media campaign, which has been extensively examined by the already mentioned Argentineans historians, and the show itself, which has been less considered. Longoni and Mestman have thought of the show as an ‘environment’, in which the usual media art strategies were present: discontinuity, redundancy, mediation and participation.¹²⁷ Certainly all these features were part of the immediate legacy and were used in *Tucumán Arde*. However, I would say that the tautological aspect of the Argentinean environments was overtly surpassed by the project’s ideological requirements. The final result was closer to a productivist exhibition.

Several authors have made a distinction between factographic and propaganda exhibitions. Benjamin Buchloh differentiates between exhibitions set up by El Lissitzky, which he views as genuinely factographic, and subsequent exhibitions by Soviets, Fascists, Nazis, and the U.S., which are to his eyes propagandistic. Buchloh opposes factographic exhibitions – characterised by the use of photomontage, simultaneous differing perspectives, changes from the part to whole that connote the relation between individual and collectivity as a process in continuous redefinition - to propaganda exhibitions, in which photomontage is abandoned in favour of a unified spatial perspective, and where collective conflict is pacified and substituted by monumentalization and heroic pathos. For him, political dialectics and class struggle are precisely conveyed by photomontage, where junctions and margins reveal the constructed nature of reality and therefore the possibilities of transformation.¹²⁸ Other authors, such as Ulrich Pohlman, admit that propaganda exhibitions used photomontage and panoramic photo-frescoes, and underline the use of photography as a universal language.¹²⁹ However, both authors agree that the two types of exhibitions represent the masses in different ways. In the factographic exhibition, the

¹²⁷ Longoni and Mestman, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

¹²⁸ Benjamin Buchloh, “From Faktura to Factography”, *October*, n° 30, fall 1984.

¹²⁹ Ulrich Pohlmann, “El Lissitzky’s Exhibitions Designs: The Influence of His Work in Germany, Italy, and the United States, 1923-1943”, in Margarita Tupitsyn (ed.), *El Lissitzky: Beyond the Abstract Cabinet: Photography, Design, Collaboration*, New Haven and London, Yale Univ. Press, 1999.

masses are shown as participating individually in the construction of a new collectivity, whereas in the propagandistic exhibition, the masses are anonymous and subjugated, subordinated to the state apparatus.

Closely related to El Lissitzky's innovations and oriented towards a propagandistic transformation of museums are the so called 'experimental Marxist exhibitions' and Stalin's 'Talking Museums' (*samogovoriashchie muzei*) in Soviet Russia during the first Five-Year Plan (1928-1933). Several authors have examined the complete reorganisation of public museums in the USSR and their transformation into spaces for artistic denunciation and religious defamation during this period.¹³⁰ Under the promotion of a Marxist understanding of history, aiming at the broad education of the masses, museums adopted a completely new approach, involving new display techniques and an elaborate programme of outreach. In this new Soviet museology, exhibitions such as *Art from the Age of Imperialism* (1931) or *The Art of the Great Industrial Bourgeoisie on the Eve of the Proletarian Revolution* (1932) adopted an installation format based on the dynamic graphic and exhibition designs of El Lissitzky.¹³¹ The new display language was also applied to the 'atheist' museums, such as the *Central Anti-Religious Museum* in Moscow and Leningrad's *Saint Isaac's Cathedral* reconversion in 1933, oriented to what one contemporary American observer called 'comparative idolatry'.¹³² Effective communication design was applied to 'every kind of "supplementary" illustrative exhibits, such as maps, designs, plans, drawings, and photos,' according to the Soviet curator Victor Grinevich.¹³³ These discursive supplementary aids, in some cases leading to inflammatory text panels, have been considered antecedents of the Nazi Degenerate Art campaigns and exhibitions. Along with the textual complements, new media, above all photography and photomurals, were also used in these exhibitions. The

¹³⁰ Konstantin Akinsha, "The End of Avant-Garde. Radical Art Forms in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, 1927-1937", Salzberger Art Association. Salzburg, Austria. 2000. Lecture published electronically in a collection of lectures titled *100 Tage: keine Ausstellung (100 Days No Exhibition)*. <http://www.basis.wien.at/avdt/pdf/176/00051632.pdf> (last accessed 27/08/2011); Wendy Salmond, "Notes on the Experimental Marxist Exhibition", *X-Tra*, vol 5 n° 1, fall 2002. Available at: http://www.x-traonline.org/past_articles.php?articleID=155 (last accessed 27/08/2011); Adam Jolles, "Stalin's Talking Museums", *Oxford Art Journal* n° 28, Oxford, October, 2005.

¹³¹ The first one curated by Nikolai Punin at the State Russian Museum in Leningrad in late 1931 and the second curated by Aleksei Federov-Davydov at the Tretyakov Gallery in 1932.

¹³² Crispin Paine, "Militant Atheist Objects: Anti-Religion Museums in the Soviet Union", *Present Pasts*, 1, feb. 2010. Available at: <http://presentpasts.info/index.php/pp/article/view/10/18> (last accessed 27/08/2011).

¹³³ The text reads as follows: 'Recently a new term has come into use in the USSR: [the] "self-explaining [or talking] museum". Its task is to give every worker or peasant, seeking knowledge, the possibility to look over the whole museum on his own, reading only the explanatory labels and posters. Thus, besides the disposition of exhibits great importance is acquired by inscriptions, labels, posters, and every kind of "supplementary" illustrative exhibits, such as maps, designs, plans, drawings, and photos', excerpt from an article entitled "Problems of Museum Exposition" by Grinevich, quoted from Adam Jolles, *op. cit.*, p. 439.

different techniques used in the shows were described in Aleksei Fedorov-Davydov's book *The Soviet Art Museum* (1933). An excerpt of it is eloquent of the overall impression that these exhibitions were trying to achieve:

The Marxist installation was designed to fill that space with a pervasive awareness of the sociological conflicts underlying all art history, combining diverse artefacts--from 'high' to 'low' culture--to reveal relationships otherwise hidden. To function effectively, it had to take the form of an ensemble (*kompleks*), a carefully engineered environment in which painting, decorative art, mass media, text, photography, and architecture came together in a synthetic portrait of a particular class.¹³⁴

As Adam Jolles has pointed out, Grinevich frequently uses the metaphor of the book to describe the talking museum. For him, 'exhibitions must be regarded as a kind of open book for popular educational reading, intelligible for many persons at a time', and he talks of the different sections and installations as 'chapters' and 'paragraphs'.¹³⁵ The relation between books and exhibitions is indebted to El Lissitzky's essay *The Future of the Book* (1926), a key reference for the Argentinean artists, as we have already mentioned.¹³⁶ In this text, El Lissitzky explains the new relationship that words and images have established due to the new printing techniques regarding the education of the masses. This new understanding of the world is brought to the streets in the following way: 'With our work Revolution achieved an immense work of propaganda and clarification. We broke up the traditional book into isolated pages, amplified them a hundred times, printed them in

¹³⁴ Aleksei Federov-Davydov, translated by Wendy Salmond, "The Soviet Art Museum, 1933" in *X-Tra*, vol 5 n° 1, fall 2002, available at http://www.x-traonline.org/past_articles.php?Articleid=156, (last accessed 27/08/2011).

¹³⁵ Adam Jolles, *op. cit.*, p. 439.

¹³⁶The text was published in *New Left Review*, n° 41, January- February 1967, pp. 39-44. Masotta mentioned it in "After Pop: We Dematerialise", in Inés Katzenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 214.



Fig. 16: *Art from the Age of Imperialism* (1931).
State Russian Museum, Leningrad. Installation view.



Fig. 17: *Art from the Age of Imperialism* (1931).
State Russian Museum, Leningrad. Installation view.

colour and put them in the streets in a poster form'.¹³⁷. El Lissitzky also observes that, unlike North American billboards that were made to be read while driving, Soviet posters needed to be seen at a close distance, so their reading could fulfil a didactic function. It is easy to see how this evolution from book to posters informed his exhibitions designs.

Another important reference for the Argentineans artists was Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (1964).¹³⁸. Although his influence on the Grupo de Arte de los Medios has already been noted, two ideas can be drawn from this book in relation to *Tucumán Arde*: the notion of the newspaper as a 'mosaic' and the 'participation in process' attached to it. These conditions were already present in Tretyakov's and Benjamin's concepts of the press. MacLuhan sums up the relationship in this way:

Here I must repeat that the newspaper, from its beginnings, has tended, not to the book form, but to the mosaic or participational form. With the speed-up of printing and news-gathering, this mosaic form has become a dominant aspect of human association; for the mosaic form means, not a detached 'point of view', but participation in process. For that reason, the press is inseparable from the democratic process, but quite expendable from a literary or book point of view.¹³⁹.

For MacLuhan, multiple information items arranged in a 'mosaic on one sheet' and the 'daily communal exposure of multiple items in juxtaposition' is the precise 'medium' of this media.¹⁴⁰. Correlative to this juxtaposition is montage, as the *modus operandi* by which to create associational meanings. The vision of reality as something constructed allowed not only the participation by means of the possible choices, but it implied a transformative possibility that could be reversed into critique.

It is difficult not to relate this blend of information, communication, propaganda, education for the masses and new media with *Tucumán Arde*. Artists were conscious that they wanted to escape from what they called an 'aestheticising' format and they chose to

¹³⁷ The Spanish translation of the text was published by *Ramona*, nº 9-10, Buenos Aires, 2000-2001.

¹³⁸ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1964, p. 210. The Argentinean milieu was especially familiar with MacLuhan. Roberto Jacoby's "Against the Happening" (1966) and Óscar Masotta's "After Pop, we dematerialise" referred to the author. Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, "After Pop, We dematerialise: Oscar Masotta, Happenings, and Media Art at the Beginnings of Conceptualism", in Inés Katzenstein (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 156-172.

¹³⁹ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media, op.cit.* p. 210.

¹⁴⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding mMedia, Ibid.*, p. 204.

use a political aesthetics, based on a mixed array of information pieces, photographs, films, sociological studies, press clippings and data, along with other materials aiming to provoke sensorial responses.¹⁴¹. Regarding the montage aesthetics of *Tucumán Arde*, we can refer to Benjamin Buchloh's association of montage with redemption. For Buchloh, what is being appropriated in montage is what needs to be redeemed: 'The repetition of the original act of erosion and the new attribution of meaning redeem the object'.¹⁴². If we read *Tucumán Arde* in this way, it was the media that needed to be redeemed. The artists' use of the prefix 'counter' is eloquent of this. The counter-information system would provide different information. The use of documentary media was considered key for the reliability and influence on the audience. The fact that the artists were the producers of the referential images gave the show its warranty and it was the cornerstone to defend its neutrality in opposition to the State propaganda.¹⁴³. An interview with Noemí Escandell, one of the artists that went to Tucumán to take photographs, do interviews and help the filming team, is illustrative of this:

I remember that one of the discussions was about taking photographs. Why did we need to paint if there was this other photographic connotation? Would it be useful to paint the circumstances, when the circumstances were alive and real in Tucumán? What we needed to do was to go and document reality, even if we thought it was tough. Because it was going to be a counter-information, a living denunciation, and we needed to embody it. If we painted what we supposed, what it was or what it could become, it would remain in the terrain of allegory. I don't mean to be pejorative with allegory. (...) The artist couldn't be enclosed before his easel and painting, without contacting the other, the one that was suffering. And that was fundamental to *Tucumán Arde*.¹⁴⁴.

It is interesting that Escandell mentions allegory as a way to oppose painting and photograph, presupposing that photographic referentiality was able to avoid the imaginary or narrative factor. Traditionally in painting, an idealist or moralist aspect would be added

¹⁴¹ Graciela Carnevale comments: 'It was our decision the "aesthetics" of the exhibition, as a way to escape an aestheticising format and to go for a greater immediacy, appropriating resources that political groups were using'. Graciela Carnevale, Email to the author, 02/07/2009. As we have seen the used music, recorded interviews, gave away sour coffee and provoked intermittent blackouts.

¹⁴² Benjamin Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures", *Artforum* n° 21, New York, September, 1982, p. 42.

¹⁴³This is the argument that Longoni and Mestman put forward in relation to the use of documentary images. Longoni and Mestman, *op. cit.*, p. 217-220.

¹⁴⁴Longoni and Mestmann, "Interview to Noemí Escandell", *op. cit.*, p. 336.

to the image, to embed it with a specific symbolism. Photography, with its mechanical objectivity, was not 'able' by itself to produce meaning other than what it showed. This is why Walter Benjamin demanded that mechanical-based images should be accompanied with a 'dialectical caption' in order to supplement it with a political surplus. This relationship between text and image brought about a new definition of allegory, which is at the heart of factography.

The Escuela Documental de Santa Fe

Another crucial precursor for *Tucumán Arde*, which merits an extensive digression, concerns the Argentinean filmmaker Fernando Birri and his Escuela Documental de Santa Fe [Santa Fe Documentary School].¹⁴⁵ The School can be considered in relation to a specifically Argentinean factographic sensibility and we can draw an analogy between his proceedings and *Tucumán Arde*. Fernando Birri's work in the School was based on what he called 'photodocumentaries', made prior to the writing of a film script. Birri and his students, working collectively, began with field work, undertaking sociological interviews, photographs and transcribing what the people told them. The School of Santa Fe was dependent on the Institute of Sociology, and interviews were therefore key to both the School and the filmic project. With the gathered sociological material, they created an album that contained photographs and related captions. Birri states that this stage was not the documentary, but a photodocumentary. The booklet displayed a range of social topics they found in the field, from which the whole group collectively chose one.¹⁴⁶

In the case of the collective film *Tire dié*¹⁴⁷ [Throw me a Dime], Birri explains that the 'subject matter' of the film was the deprived children living from the money that people threw to them, as the train slowly passed the bridge. However, the 'issue' were the social

¹⁴⁵ An overview on Fernando Birri in Julianne Burton, "Democratizing Documentary: Modes of Addresses in the New Latin American Cinema, 1958-1972." in Julianne Burton (ed.), *The Social Documentary in Latin America*, Pittsburgh, Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1990, pp. 51-54; Julianne Burton, "Fernando Birri (Argentina): The Roots of Documentary Realism", in Julianne Burton (ed.), *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America: Conversations with Filmmakers*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1986, pp. 1-12.

¹⁴⁶ Birri recounted his methodology in the book *La escuela documental de Santa Fe: Una experiencia-piloto contra el subdesarrollo cinematográfico en Latinoamérica*, which was edited by Manuel Horacio Giménez in 1964. The book has been recently reprinted: Fernando Birri, *La Escuela Documental de Santa Fe*, Rosario, Prohistoria Ediciones, 2008.

¹⁴⁷ Original Title: *Tire dié*; Director: Fernando Birri; Country: Argentina; Original Language: Spanish Duration: 59 min; Year of production: 1958; Producer: Instituto de Cinematografía de la Universidad Nacional del Litoral; Distributor: Laboratorio de Poéticas Cinematográficas de Fernando Birri S.R.L.; Executive Producer: Edgardo Pallero. The script and the photography were made in collaboration with the students of the Instituto de Cinematografía de la Universidad Nacional del Litoral, Santa Fe.

causes that originated the children's activities, which could only be understood in depth through the interviews. The challenge was to make the two planes, subject matter and issue, work together. The film was built with a specific documentary format based on non-fiction, but with no filmed interviews either. The montage and voiceover would produce the allegoric surplus. In order to achieve this, Birri and his students filmed what they called an 'action' and placed the children at the core of it. In this way they could be interpreted as symbols of the causes that should be eradicated. In Birri's words,

From the start the film placed itself as a critical, analytical film that problematised the life of children that begged for coins in the bridge. That is the way to convey the anecdotic thread, the plot, as an after effect of the social causes. What interviews were communicating were those causes.¹⁴⁸

La Escuela de Santa Fe methodology based on a sociological groundwork, collective pedagogy and usage of montage and allegoric strategies can be considered a paradigmatic example of how factography was conceived in Tretiakov and Benjamin's writings. It is also a significant antecedent of the flourishing of film as a medium for social transformation in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, which in Argentina has one of its principal examples in *La hora de los hornos*. In relation to *Tucumán Arde*, it is important to point out the similarities in the way in which these new allegoric procedures were central to a reality that was constructed ideologically. The way Birri explains how particular 'actions' encapsulated the issue and the subject matter and worked as a symbol, is analogous to the way Escandell saw the function of photography in *Tucumán Arde*. This spectacularisation of the information is key in the propagandistic aspect of an exhibition conceived as a visual display with an ideological function.

Montage and dialectics

Georges Didi-Huberman has recently analysed political montage, stating that in order to produce a different meaning, montage first needs to disorganize, or rather, to use his terminology, *dys-pose* things: montage arranges things so to *dispose their differences* and is seen

¹⁴⁸ And he continues: "This is encapsulated in the mother's last sentence, when she says: "No, this kid is still too young to go to the tiredié". What the mother is saying is that when this kid grows, he is also going to the tiredié. So you can see how important it is to concentrate in the theme everything that one wants to express with the documentary'. Birri's lecture transcribed in Adolfo Colombres (ed.), *Cine, antropología y colonialismo*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones del Sol, 2005, pp. 121-138 (my translation).

as a clash of heterogeneities.¹⁴⁹ A non-hierarchical, heterogeneous and chaotic combination of resources was intentionally present in *Tucumán Arde*, *dys-posing* them in an excessive collage. All together, there were enough by themselves to describe a situation, but maybe not to supply the experience with the allegoric impulse that the circumstances required. Since media art, as practiced in the Argentinean milieu, was of a tautological nature, it couldn't provide the impetus that would provoke the viewers' action (and not only their critique). It is important to highlight that *Tucumán Arde* was not only presenting facts and data to the visitors, but wanted to provoke an emotional response in them. Several of the artists highlighted how the show was designed to have an emotional impact on the viewers, an aspect that interferes with its supposed impartiality. This is something that the CGTA journalist, as we have seen, perfectly understood: beyond its content, the temporal and spatial elements of the exhibition, along with the use of shock, were key to organizing the visitor's experience.

In order to make the exhibition operative, that is to say transformative-oriented, images were supplemented with texts that oriented their reading. The allegoric surplus would come from the outsized photographs of the impoverished people of Tucumán, in relation to the words 'hunger', 'unemployment' or 'analphabetism'. However, the texts and

¹⁴⁹ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Cuando las imágenes toman posición*, Madrid, A. Machado Libros, 2008, p. 97.



Fig. 18: *Tucumán Arde* in Buenos Aires. Installation view.



Fig. 19: *Tucumán Arde*. Photographic panel. Peasants working.



Fig. 20: *Tucumán Arde*. Photographic panel. Sugar mills.



Fig. 21: *Tucumán Arde*. Photographic panel. Peasant.



Fig. 21: *Tucumán Arde*. Installation view.

images in *Tucumán Arde* did not conflict, but reinforced each other, avoiding dialectics and polysemy, consubstantial to what Didi-Huberman thinks is characteristic of montage and subscribing to what Buchloh and Pohlman would consider propaganda, not factography. Beyond the image and text relation, the small ensembles worked as sub-montages whose sense would work in the larger show. The configuration of diverse atmospheres, with tactical amalgams looking for different reactions (analysis, rage, anger, solidarity), was made with communicational tools and through a spatial unfolding. This walking in space, in which not only visual, but also sensorial elements were put into action, needed to establish breathing points to produce a rhythm that could lead to an emotional and consciousness-raising climax. The exhibition medium facilitated a narrative structure in which signifiers (the different elements of the collage) could be not only *dys-posed*, but re-arranged in a narration, in a *diegesis*. In this regard, *Tucumán Arde's* montage functioned more like film than journalism. The allegoric re-construction needed to come from a medium able to transform 'facts' into narration. This relationship between factographic and propagandistic exhibitions and films has been also highlighted by Benjamin Buchloh.¹⁵⁰ One of the key moments of the show was its 'moving image cluster', a miniaturized summary of the whole show.

As long as montage is thought to be operative, it is difficult to avoid some aspect of propaganda. The fact that *Tucumán Arde* took place in the union's home also encouraged this approach, as its primary addressee was a viewer used to this type of language. The line between factography and propaganda is thin, and following Buchloh and Didi-Huberman, is dependent on the degree of dialectics and contradiction that the concrete assemblage is able to embody and to generate for an audience. In the Argentinean context of 1968, the terrible political circumstances conditioned *Tucumán Arde's* final outcome, limiting its dialectic side. The Brechtian estrangement, which could have come from the collision of elements, was taken over by the emotional impact coming from the actual arrangement of the show. Images and texts tended to emphasize *pathos* and identification over estrangement. Unconsciously, or in an ingenuous relation to photography, the artists displayed recognisable iconographic references of poverty, buildings as ruins, peasants and deprived people in a picturesque manner, spectacularised by the large size of the photographs. The images represented poverty and spoke on behalf of the community that they had photographed and filmed. From the start, photographs were more rhetorical than

¹⁵⁰ Benjamin Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography", *October*, n° 30, fall 1984.

candid. The allegorical procedures operating in *Tucumán Arde* forced a dramatization and not an analysis of the historical facts, which was accentuated by its narrative/interpretative sequentialisation. All these proceedings speak more of a ‘parti-pris’ than of a ‘position taking’, following Didi-Huberman’s distinction.¹⁵¹ Maybe the dissatisfaction showed later on by some artists regarding the artistic/political balance and the deficiencies of its artistic and aesthetic side is symptomatic of how this dilemma was finally solved.¹⁵²

Considering all these facts, it is highly surprising that art historians have overlooked the propagandistic rationale that underlies *Tucumán Arde*. Part of its myth is precisely sustained on historians avoiding the use of the term and choosing an unproblematic ascription to loaded notions, such as ‘avant-garde’ or ‘utopian-political dimension’ that circumvents the root of the insoluble – but ever-productive – conflict between art, politics and propaganda. In the case of Longoni and Mestmann, it is significant how the myth of its failure is attributed to the collision between artistic and political avant-garde, as if they were irreconcilable. In this melancholic view, these authors follow that of Peter Bürger in his book “Theory of the Avant-garde” (1974).¹⁵³ In their view, *Tucumán Arde* painfully embodies the limit and impossibility of the encounter, whose correlate is the negation of any possible articulation. In spite of being avant-garde, it is either art or it is politics.¹⁵⁴ Jaime Vindel follows this standpoint, updating the argument with Susan Buck Morss’ distinction between ‘avant-garde’ (artistic) and ‘vanguard’ (political). In a single text, he contradictorily states that *Tucumán Arde* exhibitions

were a symptom of the historical logic in which the cultural avant-garde was forced to be absorbed by politics, and that the revolutionary force (...) distanced them [the artists] from the temporary interruption of the institutionally managed avant-garde

¹⁵¹ Georges Didi-Huberman, *op. cit.*, 131-151.

¹⁵² Jacoby asserts that the exhibition was ‘poor and sad’. For him ‘they were not professional photographers, everything was improvised. (...) Everything was a studentish thing. Like when you enter in the Faculty and all around is full of hand made posters....’, in “Interview with Roberto Jacoby”, Longoni and Mestman, *op. cit.* p. 360. A similar vision in “Interview with Pablo Suárez”, *ibid.*, p. 394.

¹⁵³ In his influential book *Theory of the Avant-garde*, Peter Bürger affirms that in the twentieth-century capitalist western framework the relationship between avant-garde art and politics has failed. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984 (ed. 1992). Argentinean historians are indebted to Bürger’s notion of avant-garde and maintained his melancholic position. See Longoni and Mestman, *Del di Tella a Tucumán Arde*, *op. cit.*, p. 306 and Andrea Giunta, *op. cit.*, 14-15.

¹⁵⁴ For Longoni and Mestman: ‘In the culmination of this work, executed in the margins of the art world and with the support of the opposition labor coalition, the limits of the encounter between the artistic avant-garde and the political avant-garde are discernible’, in Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, “After Pop, We dematerialise: Oscar Masotta, Happenings, and Media Art at the Beginnings of Conceptualism”, in Inés Katzenstein (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 169.

and also, in most cases, from the opportunity to adopt the dictates of the emerging armed political vanguard.¹⁵⁵

This statement which situates *Tucumán Arde* in a no-man's land, neither vanguard, nor avant-garde, might explain its liminal position and its failure. Paradoxically, this argument reproduces the mythification of *Tucumán Arde* that Vindel tries to denounce. Following Martha Rosler's observations, he permits himself only a gentle commentary that interrogates the Christian component in Latin American Marxist Peronism and the photographic tradition of the victim that permeated some of the documentary images of the show, but he fails to relate the 'empathetic and compassionate activation of the viewer' with propaganda.¹⁵⁶

The only possible way out for these authors is to transform *Tucumán Arde* into a problem of reception (and interpretation), avoiding the conflicts regarding its production. If *Tucumán Arde* resumed the impossibility of occupying an avant-garde and a vanguard space simultaneously, the contemporary retrieval of the project can only be done via melancholia or via the return of the repressed. (In this regard, *Tucumán Arde* shares a common destiny with many rediscovered 1960s and 1970s radical artistic practices, especially when re-inscribed in the dominant exhibition discourse of the global era.) From this deferred standpoint, it is not surprising that Longoni has been one of the main curators to confront the problems of *Tucumán Arde's* transformation into a contemporary commodity in the globalised art world, by attempting to rescue its currency as an (re-activated) archive in the various exhibitions where the project has been shown. In its archival afterlife, *Tucumán Arde* has become a meta-exhibition, loaded with historicity and personal memories, but also one stripped of its relationship to leftist propaganda.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ He also asserts: "Thus, after the dazzling brilliance of its emergence, the operative factography that the Argentinean avant-garde of the sixties had set in motion came up against the discursive and experiential limit that would drive the re-thinking of the relationships between art and politics in subsequent years", Jaime Vindel, "Tretiakov en Argentina", in *eipcp*, 08/2010, available at: www.eipcp.net/transversal/0910/vindel/es (last accessed 26/08/2011).

¹⁵⁶ Vindel states: "The notion of charity, which is central to this ethic, hovered over some of the initiatives that took place within the Argentinean project, such as the stand set up to collect food to be sent to Tucumán province. As a counterpoint, the stand displayed a text noting that its promoters did not intend it to be a charitable work, but wished to ameliorate social justice", Jaime Vindel, *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ The 'archivalisation' of the experience is significant in all of the exhibitions in which it has been shown. See note 1. Willing to go a step further, the already mentioned show *Inventario 1965-1975. Archivo Graciela Carnevale*, Ana Longoni and Fernando Davis, as curators, tried to activate other exhibition resources, such as timelines, maps or screened interviews to the artists. These supplementary aids transformed the archive into a contemporary, globalised looking exhibition.

Curating and politics

What aspect of *Tucumán Arde*'s myth would be damaged if it was overtly discussed as a propaganda exhibition?¹⁵⁸ Would *Tucumán Arde* be a less interesting case study for art history, for the history of exhibitions? Would it cease to be an origin myth for Argentinean artists?¹⁵⁹ And for the contemporary international 'radical chic' art world? Would it help if we could speak of a good and a bad propaganda, in artistic terms? Can El Lissitzky's exhibitions be read as instigating an unproblematic propagandistic vocabulary, and ignore *Tucumán Arde*'s persuasive and overdidactic side, which the artists actively sought? Since it has already been established that avant-garde, political propaganda and publicity have shared a certain field of action throughout the twentieth century, it is difficult to draw the line at certain projects. In Soviet Russia, the difference between avant-garde and propaganda was at times indiscernible. *Tucumán Arde* is likewise a complex assemblage, one in which propagandistic, communicational and artistic aspects merge in an indistinguishable blend. Any judgment on the extent to which an exhibition is factographic or propagandistic can only be made in hindsight; and is always conditioned by ideological premises of the moment from which this verdict is issued.

Realised in 1968, *Tucumán Arde* preceded by one year a number of exhibitions that are considered landmarks in exhibition history: *When attitudes become form* (curated by Harald Szeemann), the series of shows by Seth Siegelaub (*January 5-31, March 1-31; July, August, September*), and Lucy Lippard's *557,087*. These latter belong to a specific tradition in which the history of exhibitions is based on western art history, its styles, movements and isms (in this case, conceptual and process art). In this history, propaganda exhibitions still do not have a role. With its singular combination of description, analysis and emotional involvement, artistic and archival material, and with its peripheral Latin American location, *Tucumán Arde* remains difficult to assimilate. Yet at the turn of the sixties decade, a shift was taking place whereby exhibitions started to examine specific topics, and be more thematically oriented: for example, *The Machine as seen at the end of the Mechanical Age* (MoMA, 1968), *Information* (MoMA, 1970, dealing with information and the mass media) and *Documenta 5* (Kassel, 1972). Instead of considering *Tucumán Arde* as severed from all

¹⁵⁸ In this regard, it is significant that this exhibition is not present in Ribalta's book, while arguably *Parallel of art and life* (Independent Group, ICA, London, 1953) is one of the shows present in it.

¹⁵⁹ Only recently, Roberto Jacoby's project *1968: el culo te abrocho* has tried to put into question the myth. See Juli Carson, "Roberto Jacoby's 1968: el culo te abrocho", 1/10/2009, available at: <http://studioart.arts.uci.edu/gallery/jacoby/jacoby.html> (last accessed 27/08/2011).

lineages (the experimental Marxist exhibition, the thematic and the art historical), an exceptionalism that serves to reinforce its mythical status, we should consider *Tucumán Arde* at the historical crossroads of all three, initiating a new mode of thinking about exhibitions in a contemporary, postmodernist framework.

Tucumán Arde is also difficult to assess because it is placed in the boundary between 'doing' and 'representing' politics, a key debate that would be widespread in the following decades, but which in 1968, during an extreme political situation, was impossible to anticipate. From a contemporary point of view, the representational side of *Tucumán Arde* can give the impression of a patronising and instrumentalised exhibition of misery in a loaded union setting, in which outsized images and slogans tended to avoid dialectics and polysemy. Images and text overlapped and narrowed the production of poetical/political meaning. The transformation of facts into a narration, its allegorical impetus, was constructed with an excessive dependence on a recognizable iconography, emotional identification and the choice of pathos over estrangement, which even disappointed some of the artists. The relation between visibility and legibility, between what could be seen and what could be heard, lacked the necessary distance to produce the dialectical gap that characterizes montage.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, some parts of the show, such as the Leon Ferrari's newspaper's clippings, tended to be more critical and clearly dialectical. The historical moment conditioned the way in which dissensus was staged.

Yet, the performative, 'doing politics' side of *Tucumán Arde* casts a different and complementary light on the project, in which other possibilities for dissensus can be put forward. Firstly, its collective authorship, heir of a productivist sensibility, prefigures today's interest in collective curating and communal knowledge production.¹⁶¹ This is reinforced by the fact that artists and non-artists participated on equal terms. This challenge to authorship in exhibition making is inseparable from its process. The exhibition was not only the outcome of a research project and a pre-existing debate, which assumed its formal shape along the way, but was also meant to adapt and change throughout the duration of the show, with contributions from the audience. Although the union was a site loaded with interests, the decision to abandon art institutions and step out of the symbolic protection of the artistic realm speaks of a risk in doing, rather than representing. Finally, the hybrid, interdisciplinary nature of its content, comprising artistic, sensorial, communicational,

¹⁶⁰ See also, Rosalind Krauss, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism", *October*, n° 19, winter, 1981.

¹⁶¹ See monographic issue about Collective Curating in *Manifesta Journal*, n° 8, 2009/2010.

documentary and archival material and a D.I.Y. aesthetics, projected a tension and a question about what kind of heterogeneous elements could potentially be included in a show. All these features, in an embryonic state in *Tucumán Arde*, would be expanded in future exhibitions and curatorial projects in subsequent decades. Due to its complexity, *Tucumán Arde* continues to be useful in thinking retrospectively about the debates, contradictions, strategies and potential dissensus that arise from the relationship between curating and politics - questions that most curators will eventually need to ask themselves.

3. EXHIBITION AS SOCIAL SPACE: THE CASE OF *THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE (ARROZ CON MANGO)*

In this chapter I will examine *The People's Choice*, an exhibition set up in 1981 by the artistic collective Group Material. The show was held in the storefront that they had rented in 244 East 13th St in New York, and it was the fourth exhibition that they had organised after their foundation the previous year. At first it was called *The People's Choice* and later a subtitle was added, *Arroz con Mango* [Rice with Mango]. The display consisted of a bizarre collection of objects belonging to Group Material's neighbours, and were gathered and presented after an open call via a door-to-door leaflet. This show belonged to and subverted a concurrent exhibition methodology and style that was later termed 'thematic salons': group shows that responded to a pre-established political, social or cultural issue, usually chosen collectively, and aiming to raise discussion and debate around the selected topic.¹⁶² In opposition to the conventional disposition of artworks in a neutral, eye-level, white cube style presentation, the display of thematic salons tended to be based on the juxtaposition of non homogeneous pieces and interventions in the actual space, a procedure that had been widely used in displays of the historic avant-garde. Thematic shows could be considered the heirs of the early interventions in the Soho raw warehouse spaces of New York's former industrial neighbourhoods since the late sixties, but now with the addition of contemporary thematisation. In relation to this specific kind of exhibition, *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* continued its procedures, but also put into question some of its limitations.

Beyond this specific background connected to the history of alternative spaces and collectives in New York, Group Material's shows need to be contextualised within a wider landscape in which the relationship between art, critique and social change was undergoing a cultural shift. At the beginning of the 1980s, Group Material was placed in a transitional moment in which art and activism were being re-coded. In this changing artistic scenario, the activities and exhibitions they developed during their first year of existence combined the heritage of 1960s and 1970s practices with the new reflective and deconstructivist position that was going to characterise the 1980s decade. At this juncture, an unproblematic reading of their practice runs the risk of overlooking the complexity of the

¹⁶²The term appears in Gregory Sholette, "News from Nowhere: Activist Art and After. A Report from New York City", *Third Text*, 45, winter 1998-99.

period. In addition to this, the subsequent changes that the group underwent, especially after they abandoned the storefront at East 13th Street, left a sense of disappointment vis-à-vis their earlier strategies. However, in their seminal search for new approaches to exhibition making, they paved the way for a distinctive model of exhibitions in which concerns for audience, community and participation were central.

This case study builds upon and complements the previous chapter, since Group Material's position tried to supersede the contradictions that had limited the representation of the Other in *Tucumán Arde. The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* offers a significant case study by which to examine the unstable balance between representation and participation that takes place when an audience is asked to contribute to an exhibition. This issue has been largely discussed in the last decade, either in the framework of the so called 'new genre public art' or in subsequent context of 'relational aesthetics'.¹⁶³ Yet, rather than drawing a lineage between the collaborative nature of this show and the participatory drive of the nineties, my intention here is to explore *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* as a distinct exhibition format. The diversity and incommensurability of items present in the show is a substantive feature that characterises not only this exhibition, but which can be seen as holding a specific potential for contemporary exhibitions in its wake. This quality of heterogeneity can be put into action as a means to represent or produce dissensus, and to re-imagine any given cultural space, including museums and other hegemonic institutions.

3.1. We learned from New York, we learned from each other

Group Material was an artistic collective working in New York from 1979 until 1996, formed by artists and non-artists, united by the idea of showing artworks and setting up socially and politically oriented artistic projects beyond the commercial circuit.¹⁶⁴ From 1981 onwards, the Group underwent several transformations: its members decreased and increased throughout the years, and its projects adapted to the different challenges

¹⁶³ The term 'new genre public art' was defined in Suzanne Lacy (ed.), *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art*, Seattle, Bay Press, 1995; and 'relational aesthetics' in Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Paris, Presses du réel, 2002.

¹⁶⁴ In their first manifesto it could be read: 'Who is Group Material? Group Material is 5 graphic designers, 2 teachers, a waitress, a cartographer, two textile designers, a telephone operator, a dancer, a computer analyst, and a electrician. Group Material is also an independent collective of young artists and writers with a variety of artistic and political theories and practices. Group Material is committed to the creation, organization and promotion of an art dedicated to social communication and political change'. Group Material's First Manifesto, 1980. Julie Ault (ed.), *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material*, London, Four Corners, Books, 2010, p. 22.

presented to the connection between art and social change.¹⁶⁵ The birth of Group Material needs to be understood in relation to two contextual circumstances. On the one hand, the well-settled tradition of activist groups working in New York since the late 1960s. On the other, the new impulse that the concurrent generation of artists were giving to the artistic scenario, especially in the East Village, bringing about a generational takeover in relation to the Soho scene. This crux position informed the available alternatives for action that Group Material had in this specific transitional period. They needed to position themselves not only vis-a-vis museums or institutional frameworks, but also in relation to the previous activist experiences and alternative spaces operating beforehand and concurrently.

The alternative spaces operating in New York in the 1970s positioned themselves as alternatives to both the commercial circuit and institutional museums (especially corporate museums such as MoMA, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum).¹⁶⁶ At this time, there was a boom of artist run spaces and artists groups that promoted a different exhibiting and distribution system enabling less visible, experimental and underrepresented art to be shown (such as The Kitchen, A.I.R. (Artists in Residence) Gallery or Art Workers Coalition).¹⁶⁷ During the early 1980s, these new galleries began to propose an alternative to the alternative spaces. This situation was due to

¹⁶⁵ The original members of Group Material in 1980 were: Hannah Alderfer, Julie Ault, Patrick Brennan, Yolanda Hawkins, Beth Jaker, Marybeth Nelson, Marek Pakulski, Tim Rollins, Peter Szypula and Michael Udvardy, Liliana Dones, George Ault, Anne Drillick, Mundy McLaughlin. In May 1981, the members reduced to Julie Ault, Patrick Brennan, Liliana dones, Mundy McLaughlin, Tim Rollins and Michael Udvardy. In November 1981 the Group was formed by Julie Ault, Dough Ashford, Mundy McLaughlin and Tim Rollins. In 1987, the Group included Doug Ashford, Julie Ault and Félix González-Torres.

¹⁶⁶ Kay Larson, "Rooms with a Point of View", *ArtNews*, 76, no 8, New York, October 1977.

¹⁶⁷ Alternative Spaces and Groups organised by year: 1969: Gain and Ground; Apple; 98 Greene St; Women's Interart Center; Art Workers Coalition (AWC); Guerrilla Art Action Group; 1970: 55 Mercer Street; Bleecker St; Women artists in revolution (WAR); 1971: Institute for art and urban resources; The Kitchen; 112 Workshop/Greene St.; 1972: A.I.R. gallery; 1973: Artists Space; 3 Mercer Store; 1974: Creative Time; Idea Warehouse; 1975: Alternative Museum; 1976: P.S.1; 1978: Fashion Moda; 1979: Collaborative Projects (Colab); Group Material; 1980: ABC No Rio; White Columns; 1981: Art and Knowledge Workshop; Art in General; 1982: Longwood Arts Project; 1985: Guerrilla Girls, 1985 (strategies of the 1980s); Institutional spaces: 1971: Bronx Museum of the Arts; 1977: The Drawing Center; The New Museum; Foundation of Public Art Fund, 1977; Archival spaces: 1976: Franklin Furnace Archive; Printed Matter; 1980: Political Art Documentation/Distribution (PAD/D). This situation was facilitated by a set of factors that Julie Ault, one of Group Material members, has recently summarised: 'The proliferation of alternative spaces and groups was time- and context-based. A convergence of socioeconomic factors fostered cultural production in New York City. These factors included an abundance (some would say an overabundance) of artists; a culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse urban population in flux; the political context of various civil rights and liberation struggles; the availability of affordable residential and commercial rents; a plethora of neglected or underutilized urban sites-spaces and places in transition; an unrestricted public sphere (as compared to the present); the growth of public funding for culture; and the city's status as a powerful art center', Julie Ault, "For the record", in Julie Ault (ed), *Alternative Art New York. 1965-1985*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002, p 6.

the institutionalisation of spaces in Soho.¹⁶⁸ The new groups and spaces shaped themselves in a more specialized way, with a media, social or political orientation.¹⁶⁹ As the National Endowment for the Arts and other public funders facilitated a stable system of financing, each group or space could decide the way in which public funds were going to characterise or determine their projects. This relation to an institutional framework, discussed below, also determined their different critical approaches.

Group Material frequently asserted an acknowledgement of their position in a larger chain of art/activism and alternative spaces. In an interview from 2003, one of its members, Doug Ashford, comments that a 'critical history existed before we came along, and many of us were interested in it [...] The Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, Womanhouse in LA, the Guerilla Art Action Group, and the work of artists like Conrad Atkinson and Hans Haacke were models...'.¹⁷⁰ Tim Rollins also highlights the importance of the previous activist groups as models for a certain way of understanding the relationship between art and cultural and social change; his own genealogy includes Artists Meeting for Cultural Change.¹⁷¹ In their recollection of names and influences, both point out a combination of critical artists, drawn indiscriminately from activism, political art and community art. Their contemporaries in Group Material, by contrast, emphasize the vitality of alternative practices and spaces in that moment. For instance, Julie Ault states: 'When we had our storefront, from 1980 to 81 on East Thirteenth Street, we were also looking at Fashion Moda, Colab, and PAD/D. Fun Gallery began around the same time on East

¹⁶⁸ This process of institutionalisation has been examined in Brian Wallis, He enumerates several possible declinations of the after-effects of National Endowment for the Arts funding: 'social control as compliance (professionalization); social control as institutionalization (models of practice); social control as non-deviance (compliance); social control as utility (product making, market value); and social control as publicity (government patronage strengthening ideological control and providing symbols of legitimacy for government programs and activities', in Brian Wallis, "Public Funding and Alternatives Spaces", Julie Ault (ed), *Alternative Art New York. 1965-1985*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002, pp. 161-181.

¹⁶⁹ Julie Ault (ed), *Alternative Art New York. 1965-1985*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

¹⁷⁰ And he continues: "The 60s and '70s, in which we all grew up, were, as times of both tremendous social upheaval and aesthetic innovation, a major stepping-off point. I remember as a kid every night we would watch on the news the number of American casualties mount in Vietnam. The corrupt global-historical position of the US, the degree to which economic policy had created a new class of disenfranchised people, and the degree to which racism was endemic in the culture all provided an obvious ground on which those of us interested in making art had to situate ourselves. (...) We learned from New York, we learned from each other' in Dan Cameron, "Group Material talks to Dan Cameron", *Artforum*, New York, April, 2003.

¹⁷¹ His own genealogy would be this: 'Group Material was founded in 1980. It came out of Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, a group that included Lucy Lippard, Carl Andre, Jerry Kearns, Rudolph Baranik, May Stevens, Leon Golub, Nancy Spero, Joseph Kosuth, and many others who met during the mid-'70s to protest the Whitney Museum's plan to celebrate the bicentennial with a survey of American art from the collection of John D. Rockefeller III, which included no work by nonwhites and only one work by a woman. We worked on this big project called. The Anti-Catalog--a hefty ad hoc social history of American art. We were the youngest members of that group', in David Deitcher, "Tim Rollins talks to David Deitcher", *Artforum*, April, 2003.

Eleventh. We were vitalized by what was going on'.¹⁷². A critical and activist heritage was present not only in the alternative spaces, but also in the academic realm, especially in the School of Visual Art, where artists such as Hans Haacke, Joseph Kosuth and Martha Rosler were teaching, and which some of the members of Group Material attended. Within this established legacy, a mixture of activism and institutional critique, the newcomers evaluated their possibilities, both in terms of spatial location and critical strategies.

By the end of the seventies a first phase of New York alternative spaces was over and a generational takeover took place around 1980. When the New Museum organised a retrospective of some of the first wave of alternative spaces in 1981, a different scenario was already taking place.¹⁷³. The second wave, to which Group Material belonged, had different coordinates. Firstly, there was a migration from the now-gentrified Soho towards the East Village, a working class neighbourhood with a large Latino population, and where some of the old co-operative galleries were still around.¹⁷⁴. The East Village scene was characterised from the beginning by a juxtaposition of models. The new spaces developed different types of projects; mixing community centres (El Bohio, City Walls), politically engaged groups (PAD/D), commercial galleries (Fun Gallery, Nature Morte, Pat Hearn, 51X, Civilian Warfare, Gracie Mansion) and alternatives cultural spaces (ABC No Rio, Group Material).

Earlier experiences contributed to the transition towards a new scenario, both in terms of city location and exhibition policy. Reflecting the retreat from Soho, one of these initiatives was *Rooms*, the inaugural exhibition of P.S.1 (founded as The Institute for Art and Urban Resources) in 1976, in which a large number of artists intervened in an old and abandoned school in Queens. Another one was The Fashion Moda space in the South Bronx (inaugurated in 1979), which opened itself to vernacular, local and street art forms, including graffiti art, performances of hip-hop music, break dancing and other forms of

¹⁷² Dan Cameron, "Group Material talks to Dan Cameron", *Artforum*, April, 2003.

¹⁷³ The New Museum was founded in 1977 by Marcia Tucker. Its exhibition politics combined contemporary art which was difficult to see in the commercial circuit and a precocious attention to the history of radical practices. This exhibition in 1981 was *Alternatives in Retrospect. An Historical Overview. 1969-1975*, curated by Jackie Apple in The New Museum, New York, may 9 - June 16, 1981. In relation to Marcia Tucker see, Marcia Tucker, *A Short Life of Trouble: Forty Years in the New York Art World*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008.

¹⁷⁴ Deutsche and Gendel Ryan comment: 'There were, in fact, over 150,000 people living in the area, thirty-seven percent Hispanic and eleven percent black. The median income for a family of four living in the neighbourhood in the 1980s is \$10,727, while that of an individual is \$5,139.-39 The fact that more than forty percent of the total population lives in official poverty might account for their high rate of invisibility', Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan "The Fine Art of Gentrification", *October*, vol. 31, winter 1987, p. 103.

overlooked cultural production.¹⁷⁵ A third example was provided by Collaborative Projects (a.k.a. Colab). One of its project guidelines was the setting up of short-term shows for the display of art, usually in abandoned buildings. As some of its members were living on the Lower East Side, they facilitated the transition from Soho to that part of the city, especially after *The Real Estate Show* (1980).

This new generation was not naïve about the conditions of production for art and needed to find its own way in the midst of many different stakes. The risks included the public ‘taming’ of alternative spaces, the market orientation of commercial galleries and the fatigue of certain activist strategies, not to mention the onset of conservatism that followed Ronald Reagan’s election in 1980.¹⁷⁶ Some spaces, such as Colab or ABC No Rio, continued to be publicly funded or drew on a mixed economy. In Colab’s case, they chose to bypass the now institutionalised structures of alternative spaces, but remained public funded. To that end they constituted themselves directly as a non-profit, but with no particular site and with a flexible organisation, free of most of the bureaucratic burdens. Another option was the setting up of a more or less unconventional commercial gallery or returning to self-funded private projects, as in the case of Group Material.¹⁷⁷ The rapid success of some of the artists and the fast gentrification of the area would be questioned by the new critical discourse of postmodernism, but the commercial stigma was actually being subverted, as new galleries experimented with traditional forms of market presentation for

¹⁷⁵ Sally Webster affirms: ‘In the beginning, before Fashion Moda became associated with graffiti, hip-hop and the punk culture of the East Village, its earliest exhibitions of holograms and of materials related to extraterrestrials more nearly reflected Eins’ stated philosophy to fuse science, technology and fantasy. These were not, however, the exhibitions which attracted the Manhattan critics. Instead it was the participation of several young, downtown artists including Jenny Holzer, John Ahearn, Christy Rupp, David Wells, Justen Ladda, Charles Ahearn, Jane Dickson, and Rebecca Howland who brought it to prominence’, in Sally Webster, *Fashion Moda: A Bronx experience*, February 1996, available at: <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/vpadvance/artgallery/gallery/talkback/fmwebster.html> (last accessed 10/11/2008). Other initiatives included: Longwood Art Gallery (directed by Fred Wilson between 1985 and 1989) and Tim Rollins moving from Group Material to the Art and Knowledge Workshop with his *Kids of Survival*.

¹⁷⁶ The role of East Village galleries in the fast gentrification of the area, helped by enthusiastic media coverage, was to remain one of the main topics for its future reviewers. An early critique was developed by Craig Owens in “The Problem with Puerilism,” *Art in America* 72, no. 6, summer 1984, pp. 162-163. See also, Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, *op. cit.*

¹⁷⁷ Tim Rollins, in the interview with David Deitcher, *op. cit.*, recalls: ‘We were a group of about twenty friends who decided to not sit around smoking cigarettes, drinking coffee, and complaining about how awful the commercial art world was. We pooled our money instead: Everyone put in fifty dollars a month, -about all we had-, to rent a space on a block on East Thirteenth Street, between Second and Third Avenues, that many people were afraid to walk down then. (...) We painted the gallery red and called it Group Material Headquarters.’

art, as Alan Moore suggests when he contextualises this period.¹⁷⁸ This background allowed Group Material to articulate a modus operandi that connected their activist nucleus with display issues, a particularly distinctive feature in their case. Moore points out that Group Material was in fact trying to find an original and coherent voice in the East Village, following *The Times Square Show*, produced by Colab in 1980.¹⁷⁹

The influence of Colab on the new scene was significant. From 1979 Colab developed two departments of activity: one concentrated on media, film, and new technology experimentation and distribution, and the other devoted to originating and promoting shows. Unlike the 1960s and 1970s model of warehouse spaces, in which artists' interventions were the agglutinating agent, Colab's shows were organised under the rubric of a flexible title, followed by the word 'Show'.¹⁸⁰ Some of the themes highlighted social

¹⁷⁸ From his point of view most of the very first commercial galleries of the area, such as Fun Gallery, were conceived with 'self-consciousness and humour'. Alan Moore with Jim Cornwell, "Local History: The Art of Battle for Bohemia in New York" in Julie Ault, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-365.

¹⁷⁹ 'As Goldstein perceived it, the central drama then being played out was the commercial assimilation of Colab; some members had been invited to exhibit in commercial galleries, and the group was planning to open an artists' store in SoHo. Group Material, Goldstein wrote, "measures itself" against *The Times Square Show*', in Alan Moore with Jim Cornwell, "Local History: The Art of Battle for Bohemia in New York" in Julie Ault, *op. cit.*, p. 333. They referred to Richard Goldstein, "Enter the Anti-Space", *Village Voice*, 11th November 1980. *The Times Square Show* was set up in an empty building that has housed an erotic massage parlor. It included graffiti artists, feminist artists, political artists, performance artists, and so on. This show was to be criticised on the grounds of its complicity with the gentrification of that area of New York. Julie Ault's critiques can be looked up in the transcription of a lecture at <http://www.undo.net/cgi-bin/openframe.pl?x=/Facts/Eng/fault.htm> (last accessed 9/7/2008).

¹⁸⁰ 'In January 1979, Colab members began to sponsor a series of open-invitation exhibitions in their apartments. These included *Batman Show*, organized by Diego Cortez (January 6th and 13th, 1979); *Income and Wealth*, organized by Colen Fitzgibbon (February 1st-March 5th, 1979); *Doctors and Dentists Show*, organized by Robin Winters (February 3rd, 1979); *Dog Show*, organized by Robin Winters (March 24th, 1979); and *The Manifesto Show*, organized by Colen Fitzgibbon and Jenny Holzer (May 1979), in David E. Little, "Colab Takes a Piece, History Takes It Back: Collectivity and New York Alternative Spaces", *Art Journal*, spring 2007.



Fig. 1: *The Real Estate Show* (1980). Front of 125 Delancey Street.



Fig. 2: *The Real Estate Show* (1980). Installation view.



Fig. 3: *The Real Estate Show* (1980). Installation view.



Fig. 4: Fashion Moda. *The City Maze* (1980). Installation view.



Fig. 5: Fashion Moda. Jody Culkin's *Cardboard constructions* and David Wells' *Cranach Cutouts* (1981). Installation view.



Fig. 6: Fashion Moda. John Fekner's *Danger Live Artists* as part of *Graffiti Art Success For America* (1980). Event view.



Fig. 7: ABC No Rio. *International Workers Day Show* (1980). Installation view.



Fig. 8: ABC No Rio. *Murder, Suicide, Junk Show* (1980). Installation view.



Fig. 9: ABC No Rio. *Murder, Suicide, Junk Show* (1980). Installation view.

issues, originating a certain model of ‘thematic salons’ in Gregory Sholette’s words.¹⁸¹. This model was subsequently followed by ABC No Rio and Group Material in their East Village projects.¹⁸². This new type of thematic show established a turning point in relation to previous curatorial experimentation especially that related to conceptual art and postminimalism.¹⁸³. In the New York scene, the social issues to be addressed were predominantly related to the effects of economy and politics on the social fabric and to the valorisation of urban and popular culture. This was done by challenging the conventional white cube atmosphere, as in a salon-style show. Also there was an intention to have a different understanding of the audience based on the consideration of the function of art in the social space. Since spatial strategy is inherent to collective production, it combines a space for play and creation, but also a territory of social interaction and struggle, as the Croatian curatorial collective WHW has recently pointed out.¹⁸⁴. The site that every group occupies and inhabits is not a given, but it is a produced space, constructed ideologically.¹⁸⁵. The new alternative spaces, no longer centred on an artist peer group, prompted a broader reflection about cultural systems and new audiences in the spaces run by Group Material, The Fashion Moda and ABC No Rio.

How did *The People’s Choice (Arroz con Mango)* look like?

My argument is that three aspects informed Group Material’s practice: the search for an alternative to the alternative that in their case, took a socially oriented dimension; the thematic salon format popularised by Colab; and an emphasis on display concerns.

¹⁸¹ Gregory Sholette, “News from Nowhere: Activist Art and After. A Report from New York City”, *Third Text*, 45, winter 1998-99, pp. 45-62.

¹⁸² ABC No Rio had more general themes: *Crime, Suicide Murder and Junk, Positive Shows, Island Show*. Alan Moore, one of the members of ABC No Rio, is one of the promoters of this genealogy: ‘With The Real Estate Show and ABC No Rio, Colab had touched the turf of the Lower East Side, bringing along their trademark mode of exhibition –themed group shows organized by artists’, in Alan Moore with Jim Cornwell, “Local History: The Art of Battle for Bohemia in New York” in Julie Ault, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

¹⁸³ Instead of organising shows in which the title tried to encapsulate the concept of the exhibition departing from existing artworks (i.e. *Primary Structures*), diverse proposals in the late 1960s and 1970s had begun to place the idea to be worked out before some of the pieces actually existed (*When Attitudes become Form, Spaces, Rooms, Information*, or Seth Siegelaub’s exhibitions, to name but a few). As Lucy Lippard puts it there was a ‘curatorial demand’ from which the artists began to work. Most of these shows had to do with matters of temporal, site-specific or communicational situations, all related to artistic processes. Even though some of them included politically and socially engaged work, their main aim was not to address these issues.

¹⁸⁴ What, How and for Whom, “New Outlines of the Possible”, *Collective Creativity* (exh cat), Cur: What, How & for Whom, Kassel, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, 2005, p. 16.

¹⁸⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, 1991, p. 93.

However, Group Material also overcame their immediate influences, producing a work that was distinctive in its context and whose reception was to receive a significant commentary only two decades later. Their first year was a tentative and seminal moment in which original ideas were tested and which had a long-term effect in their practice. Despite being founded in 1979, the group did not present a public face until 1980. Like many other groups of the time, they rented a storefront to develop their artistic projects. During their first year, Group Material put together more than eight shows, which also included events, such as film screenings, lectures, dance parties, a TV commercial festival and an exhibition of worthless and non-functional products. Interaction with the surrounding community was a key factor, and events, far from being secondary, helped to open the space to a different audience and tried to build a new social space.

Alongside events, Group Material set up object-based exhibits.¹⁸⁶ In shows such as *Consumption* or *Facere/Facis*, they tackled issues related to consumption and fashion. In these exhibitions the display of commodities could be interrogated in relation to a wider cultural framework. Others, such as *The Salon Election '80* or *Alienation*, addressed political, social and economic issues. Both types of shows can be associated with 'thematic salons'. In *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* they left aside the thematically oriented shows and put the sociability they were fostering in the storefront (dancing parties, bingo-nights, communal meals) at the heart of the exhibition. This decision superseded the way in which thematic salons had been approached, because the theme was not represented, but performed.

The best entry point to *The People's Choice* is the leaflet they handed out door to door in the block on which the storefront was located, in which it could be read:

We would like to show things that might not usually find their way into an art gallery. The things that you personally find beautiful, the objects that you keep for your own pleasure, the objects that have meaning for you, your family and your friends. What could these be? They can be photographs, or your favorite posters [sic]. If you collect things, these objects would be good for this exhibition.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ These exhibitions were *The Inaugural Exhibition* (October 4th-27th, 1980); *The Salon of Election '80* (Nov 1st-16th, 1980); *Alienation* (Nov 21st – Dec 21st, 1980); *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* (Jan 9th – Feb 2nd, 1981); *It's a Gender Show* (Feb 7th – Mar 9th, 1981); *Consumption: Metaphor, Pastime, Necessity* (Mar 21st – Apr 20th, 1981); *Facere/Facis* (Apr 25th – May 18th, 1981); *Food and Culture (Eat this show)* (June 27th – July 11th, 1981). See Julie Ault (ed.), *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material*, London, Four Corners, Books, 2010.

¹⁸⁷ Julie Ault (ed.), *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material*, London, Four Corners, Books, 2010, p. 35.

Following this call, Group Material's neighbours contributed objects with artistic or sentimental value; everything that was brought to the space was installed. The result was an accumulation of all sorts of items filling the walls (I will discuss the specific donations below). *The People's Choice* didn't receive much press attention at the time and most of the reviews are descriptive. However, some brief remarks were made about its political efficacy. Elisabeth Hess, although considering some 'touch of liberal guilt', found it important that the neighbours were deciding what was valuable art in opposition to conservative critics.¹⁸⁸ Richard Goldstein praised Group Material's self-analysis and discursive awareness, but found that, in comparison to Colab's *The Times Square Show*, there was a certain lack of emotional stimulus.¹⁸⁹ An understanding of the exhibition appearance relies on these descriptions, and a few installation shots of the exhibition. I will quote at length two excerpts that capture the immediate impression triggered by the show, which provide a firsthand narrative of its contents. The artist and critic Thomas Lawson reviewed the exhibition in *Artforum*, and enumerates many of the presented items.

There was a mural done by the kids on the block as part of a weekly project. There were a few amateurish paintings of family, favorite landscapes and pleasing abstract shapes. There were some small clay pieces by someone's grandmother, now dead. (...) The photographs were of babies, first communions, weddings, pictures taken in the army and, in one case, a billboard of superimposed snapshots documenting the history of an entire family. (...) Another category was that of the collectors, people who had chosen to exercise a quirky, personal taste in furnishing their homes. There was a collection of small toy animals from above a person's kitchen

¹⁸⁸ Hess states: 'Has this exhibit really affected the collective's notion of what is art? Will the folks on the block really dictate the aesthetic at Group Material? I worry that there is a touch of liberal guilt here, of getting down with the community they have just moved in on. I hope this show will breed cross-fertilization among its contributors: What does Norma Fernandez, who created "Rope Man" ("I made this in highschool when I was 15. It has a horsehair head. It looks like my ex-husband"), think about Rollins' beautifully designed dustpan as tool, as a metaphor, as an object of significant art? For the moment, "the people" are deciding what is valuable art –not Hilton Kramer or Armand Hammer- on 13th Street. (Their influence is visible, but, I'm happy to report, not pervasive). The relationship between this gallery and the neighbourhood has just been ignited, and the sparks of contradiction are what makes this space come alive', in Elisabeth Hess, "Home-Style Looking", *Village Voice*, Jan 28th – Feb 3rd, 1981.

¹⁸⁹ Goldstein affirms: 'Group Material measures itself against *The Times Square Show* and concludes that only analysis can save artists from becoming the victims of their own enthusiasm. Yet, in the process of demystifying the image, something is lost. The art is so bluntly subordinate to its intention that it seems sedate. I leave the storefront gratified, but unmoved. Horribly enough for someone as earnest as myself, I much preferred *The Times Square Show*, which left me skeptical but aroused', in Richard Goldstein, "Enter the AntiSpace", *The Village Voice*, Nov 5th-Nov 11th, 1980.

sink, another of PEZ brand candy dispensers, a three-dimensional picture of a covered bridge and a strange-looking valet chair.¹⁹⁰

Lawson gives the readers an overview of a show in which the objects are described through wide categories (paintings, photographs, collections), enhancing the idea of the exhibition being amateurish in its content, but still artistic. A different image is put forward by Elisabeth Hess in the *Village Voice*, through a descriptive list of singular and idiosyncratic items that filled the space in a conceptually chaotic coexistence:

[The objects range] from a roughly 10-foot-long snakeskin to a copy of Mona Lisa. There is a new wave 'schlock' (a 3-D picture of a covered bridge, or a vase filled with plastic flowers), political posters from the landlord/tenant and the Vietnam wars, dolls, a bowling trophy, original paintings, photographs (of Marines and babies) -everything but the kitchen sink. Some of the work is predictable: a Rembrandt reproduction (unstretched) looks uncomfortably fake, while the more personal entries come off as authentic expressions of passion or obsession. A PEZ dispenser collection of over 75 pieces. Mickey Mouse, Zorro, Dumbo, etc will make your mouth water. Peter Cacerez's family bulletin board is an anthropological collage that reveals dozens of important moments, frozen in home snapshots style. The mix of people living on 13th Street is evident from the variety of items. In between the religious icons and fetishes is a cover from Interview magazine, a signed Warhol photograph and a red Duchampian dustpan on the floor, contributed by Tim Rollins, a member of Group Material. Two others, who also live in the neighborhood contribute a cover from the *New York Post*. The headline reads: 'ROCKY DEAD, COLLAPSES WITH HEART ATTACK WHILE WORKING ON A NEW BOOK'.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Thomas Lawson, "'The People's Choice,' Group Material", *Artforum*, n° 8, April, 1981, pp 67-68.

¹⁹¹ Elisabeth Hess, *op. cit.*. Another description by David Deitcher: "The resulting installation included religious imagery, dolls in fancy dresses, family photos, amateur paintings, and clay bowls; it featured a knitted bag from Guatemala, a collection of PEZ candy dispensers, a Rembrandt reproduction, and a poster of Robert Morris, oiled up and posing with chains as a crypto-fascist, S&M dreamboat", David Deitcher, "Social Aesthetics", in Brian Wallis (ed.), *Democracy. A Project by Group Material*, Bay Press, Seattle, 1990, p 22.



Fig. 10: *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)*. Installation view.

This double-sided aspect of the show, highlighted in the reviews, was already present in the title *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)*. Its first part can be read as a claim for making visible under- or unrepresented cultural values and materials, in opposition to a hegemonic system of cultural representation and meaning. In parallel, its second part dismisses any discursive logic, since it connects two types of food that don't usually go together, originating an unexpected and stimulating combination. Not only the two parts of the title used different languages, but also the preposition 'con' (with) was a significant particle. The *con* implied an addition, not an option, as if the choices made by the people were not to be based on the 'or', but on the 'with'. The people's choice could be understood not as what people preferred in opposition to something, but what they added together.

Group Material at a crossroads

Some of the early 1980s spaces and political art initiatives were fully aware of the limitations of their antecedents and wanted to work in a different way. As Lucy Lippard has pointed out, previous conceptual art practices entailed a contradiction: 'Although the forms pointed toward democratic outreach, the content did not. Therefore, community needed to replace communication, and the idea of accessibility, that of distribution'.¹⁹² However, beyond alternative groups working in this direction, the mainstream debate quickly turned towards a different mode of questioning art institutions. Group Material's first year is placed at this crossroads (1980) that coincides with the wider change of paradigm. The impact of postmodern theories tended to replace direct action with deconstruction. The next step was to be enunciated inevitably as how to work critically within the institutions. This discussion subsequently led to the deconstructive or institutional critique paradigms and to a replacement of the 'representation of politics' for the 'politics of representation'.¹⁹³ This change can be observed especially in the critical apparatus that

¹⁹² Lippard affirms: 'Communication (but not community) and distribution (but not accessibility) were inherent in conceptual art. Although the forms pointed toward democratic outreach, the content did not. However rebellions the escape attempts, most of the work remained art-referential, and neither economic nor aesthetic ties to the art world were fully severed. Contact with a broader audience was vague and underdeveloped', Lucy Lippard, "Escape Attempts", in *Six years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2001, p. XVI.

¹⁹³ In Victor Burgin's article the idea is clear although it is inscribed in a framework still dependent on semiotics. He opposes history of art to a history of representations, representations being 'set of operations performed in a field of signifying practices. His defence is pro the legacy of conceptual art. He sees "representation of politics" as the production of work in which political issues of the day are represented – often, and it seems to me increasingly, by means of painting'. The change of to a postmodernist paradigm reaffirms this point of view. Burgin sees the representative drive in the return of painting, whereas

supported the kind of artistic practices that were going to be predominant in the 1980s, such as photography and appropriationism.¹⁹⁴ This shifting discourse tended to dismiss art practices based on direct action involving the actual public and highlighted the battle between, on the one hand, the expansion of 'commercial' painting and on the other, photographic, identity and meta-artistic works. This effort encouraged a re-examination of cultural inclusion in the art historical canon, especially concerning ethnicity and gender. At the same time, the legacy of activism was relocated to a questioning of and intervention in mass media, which is to say, addressing representational politics from within. In the New York scene of the 1980s the increased visibility of A.I.D.S., imperialist intervention in Latin America, the denunciation of consumerism and economic pressures, and gender and racial politics was done primarily through media activism, not through community involvement. Therefore, Group Material occupied a crux position that concerns not only a generational takeover of alternative spaces and their strategies of functioning, but also the question of how to assess community art in a transitional moment in relation to art and social change.

This change of paradigm was also followed by Group Material when they gave up the storefront after a year. From 1981 onwards, they expanded the idea of 'social space' from the micro-politics of communities to a wider notion that included the city and its institutions as ideological spaces in which to be intervened. This strategic shift coincided with the transformation of the group constituency, whose different members pursued diverse goals and tactics. There is very little bibliography about Group Material in the eighties, the decade in which they were most active. The bulk of the literature comprises reviews of their projects in U.S. art journals and magazines, and interviews with the collective. In all of them, the general assessment is that they were successful in terms of questioning art and its context, and in achieving a good balance between art and politics, never falling in the 'easy' traps of political/activist art.¹⁹⁵ Due to the fact that in the 1980s

institutional critique will see it in activist art, where politics is placed as their thematic aim. Victor Burgin, "The Absence of Presence: Conceptualism and Post-modernisms" was written for the exhibition catalogue, *1965 to 1972 – When Attitudes became Form*, Kettle's Yard Gallery, Cambridge University, 1984. It was based on a talk given at the John Hansard Gallery, Southampton University, 1982. Reprinted in Victor Burgin, *The End of Art Theory*, London, Macmillan, 1986.

¹⁹⁴ In the historiographic realm, this new critical was going to be championed by authors such as Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp, Craig Owens, or Hal Foster. See Thomas Crow, "The Practice of Art History in America", *Daedalus*, vol. 135, spring 2006.

¹⁹⁵ William Olander's following words exemplify the tone 'Group Material's agenda should be viewed not merely in relation to the political content of their projects but, more importantly, as counter to the traditional notions of exhibition still focused on issues of quality, individual achievement and reputation. From the start the members of Group Material agreed that the presentation and selection of art was as important to them as production; they wanted to create exhibitions', in William Olander, "Material world", *Art in America*, n° 77, January, 1989.

the activist New York scene was more focused on political action, as we have mentioned, the social aspects of Group Material's practice came to be overlooked. Group Material's decision to move from community work to direct interventions has cast a shadow of fault or failure on the early enterprises they undertook in the storefront.

This assessment has been partially compensated in recent years, due to renewed interest in community-based projects. Throughout the last two decades, social movements that interrogated the validity of the western democracies vis à vis the rest of the world and also vis à vis other forms of communal action, have helped to re-situate such types of early experiences. Actually, community oriented art and activism was not absent from the practices, only from the canonical versions of art history. Another type of art was being produced, which has suffered a historiographic eclipse until very recently.¹⁹⁶ The continuation of participative practices can be tracked down in the 1970s and 1980s in artists working with communities, in Beuys's social sculpture, and in the gradual shift from site-specificity to community-specificity that took place in public art.¹⁹⁷ Recently, this new cartography has been significant for legitimating 1990s practices, but has not been read retrospectively.¹⁹⁸ In hindsight, we can make distinctions between the apparent continuities between the 1960s and the 1990s. The main obstacle is that these social and activist practices do not pretend to question the canon in an attempt to be included in it. Some of these artists were not even represented in alternative spaces; they worked at the boundaries of art and the social, and questioned what could be considered art and who was its primary audience. This fact complicates their inclusion in art historical textbooks oriented to an affirmation of the canon.

Group Material's practice, due to their specific historical moment, was informed by a wide range of past and present influences, traditions and intentions, which overlapped and even contradicted themselves discursively. Because of this density, it has been difficult to inscribe Group Material in a single genealogy. They have been read simultaneously as activism, community-based projects, installation art, and lately as an antecedent of

¹⁹⁶ See Claire Bishop, 'The *Social Turn*: Collaboration and Its Discontents', *Artforum*, February 2006, pp. 179-185.

¹⁹⁷ See James Meyer, "The Functional Site; or the Transformation of Site-Specificity", (orig. 1995), in Erika Suderburg (ed.), *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000; and Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2002.

¹⁹⁸ Stephanie Smith, "Mapping the Terrain, Again". *Afterall*, n° 27, summer 2011.

participative practices of the 1990s.¹⁹⁹ At the same time, in the two last decades, Group Material's exhibitions have gained the interest of curators and theoreticians working in the curatorial studies and exhibition history fields. For a new generation of curators and art writers the self-reflective practice of Group Material and their use of exhibitions as their medium can be considered a significant antecedent of their own practice. All these tensions are present in *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)*.

From storefront to exhibition as social space

Is it possible for a gallery to be a social space? In hindsight, different authors have questioned Group Material's real engagement or the transformative effects that they brought to its closest environment, in spite of their relationship with the immediate community being one of the most successful parts of their experience. Grant Kester, for instance, has stated that frequently 'an imaginary spectator' is thought of by groups working with communities, instead of rooting their practice in an actual audience.²⁰⁰ Jan Avgikos addresses Group Material's relation to their audience as a learning process, which allowed them to understand its problematic nature. Avgikos talks about two separate and distinct models of social space: the gallery and the neighbourhood. From her point of view, Group Material tried to synthesise both and their storefront could be read as the interface between art and the community.²⁰¹ Instead of speaking of an 'imaginary spectator', she refers to a 'metonymic' one. By that she means local residents representing a larger and demographically varied public audience. From her point of view, these two models, the community and the gallery, cannot succeed in their combination. The gallery can't be transformed into a social space, as it remains dependent on its main goal, the distribution of art, even if its artistic content is socially or politically driven.

¹⁹⁹ Group Material is present in the following books, to name but a few, Brian Wallis (ed.), *Democracy. A Project by Group Material*, Bay Press, Seattle, 1990; Suzanne Lacy (ed.), *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art*, Seattle, Bay Press, 1995; Nina Felshin (ed.), *But is it Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*. Bay Press, Seattle, 1995; Grant H. Kester (ed.), *Art, Activism and Oppositionality. Essays from Afterimage*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1998; *Collective Creativity* (exh cat), Kassel, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, 2005; Claire Bishop, *Installation Art. A Critical History*, London, Tate Publishing, 2005; Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (ed.), *Collectivism after Modernism. The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

²⁰⁰ Grant H. Kester, "Rhetorical Questions: The Alternative Arts Sector and the Imaginary Public", in Grant H. Kester, *Art, Activism and Oppositionality. Essays from Afterimage, op. cit.*, pp. 103-135.

²⁰¹ For Jan Avgikos, "Whereas the gallery connotes a highly specialized, elite, and closed society, the neighbourhood symbolizes a diverse, heterogeneous, and open society –particularly if the neighbourhood is signified by Manhattan's Lower East Side, a melting pot of ethnic groups and subcultures that live side by side, each with a different language, belief system, and political persuasion", Jan Avgikos, "Group Material Timeline: Activism as a work of art", in Felshin, N. (ed.), *But is it Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*, Bay Press, Seattle, 1995, p. 92.

These assertions have been made in the late 1990s in the context of a substantially developed historiography dealing with community-specific projects, able to recount retrospectively a sustained genealogy of artistic practices working at the border of art and social change. However, even if we agree with the difficulties inherent to every social art project, such as an eventual instrumentalisation of the audience, the doubts about the inefficacy of art's intervention in social life or the dissolution of the specific artistic features, we need to look into the complexities of individual cases. We are trying to describe a transitional moment in which experimentation with new models can be considered a value in its own right, and retrospective readings usually tend to privilege the actual outcomes, and forget the potential that inhabited certain 'apparent failures'. The idea of the first year's failure has been supported by the fact of Group Material's own self-critique. The impossibility of going forward in certain conditions of possibility is something that Group Material shares with *Tucumán Arde*, and may be a symptom of the limits of a situation, more than the failure of the project.

In September 1981, the Group published a manifesto called "Caution: Alternative Space!" in which they explained the reasons for closing the storefront. Two groups of arguments were put forward. These were, on the one hand, managerial: they couldn't follow the requirements needed in terms of finances, bureaucracy, time-consumption and maintenance. On the other hand, these were ideological: to name but a few, the conformism of promoting a static situation derived from being a gallery, the difficulties in breaking the limitations of the existing audience, and the personal disputes between the different members' viewpoints.²⁰² The extension of an audience beyond the art world had been a key point of their first manifesto, where it was asserted that they wanted to involve working people, non-art professionals, artists, students, organizations and their immediate community.²⁰³ However, the actual results were disappointing for them. The 1981 flyer

²⁰² About this last point, Jan Avgikos points out several factors that induced the transformation of the group, analysing their comments in an interview by Peter Hall in *Real Life Magazine* n 11/12, winter 1983-84. He talks about the consolidation of an 'artistic emphasis' in opposition to the first experimental months, that included the leave of non-artists, the pursuit of individual artists career, the choice of another way of community working or the interest of some of its members to address more feminist oriented issues, in Jan Avgikos, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

²⁰³ In their first manifesto, it could be read. 'Who are their audiences: Group Material seeks a number of audiences: Working people: People who realize that the Fine Art they see in most galleries and museums bears little relevance to the everyday interests and struggles that characterize their lives. / Non-Art Professionals: Historians, anthropologists, businesspeople, teachers, sociologists, journalists, etc.; people who would like to learn how difficult social issues can be clearly investigated and presented through artistic means. / Artists, Students, Organizations: People whose work is, due to its sexual, ethnic, political or colloquial

acknowledged their naiveté and their disappointment about the small actual numbers of people they attracted to their space. In their diagnosis, they blamed, among others, the type of space ('it is impossible to create a radical and innovative art if this work is anchored in one special gallery location').²⁰⁴ For them, the gallery was loaded with a neutralising effect (a white cube syndrome) that made situations static.

However, this didn't mean that the small projects hadn't had an impact on their immediate audience. Group Material wanted to work on a larger scale, but this doesn't invalidate their initial experimental approach to making art for a new audience. In their words: 'Because of our location we had in effect limited our audience to East Village passersby and those curious enough to venture out of their own neighbourhoods to see art off-Soho. But our most rewarding and warm and fun audience was the people on the block'.²⁰⁵ In this respect, *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* can be regarded as the most successful project of their first year. In opposition to other shows that were shaped closer to the thematic salon format, the collaborative structure of *The People's Choice* couldn't be separated from the exhibition format itself. The most important breaking point they achieved was to look at exhibitions (and not alternative spaces) as the site in which the social and political issues could be questioned. This meant that the social change should be addressed not only thematically, but also by interrogating what was 'social'. We can talk of a shift from the gallery as a social space to exhibition as a social space, a notion that relational aesthetics would expand a decade later.

Beyond the storefront, the subsequent phase of Group Material's work had continuity with the former, since they kept exploring different exhibition and information display systems understood as social spaces. This wouldn't have been achieved without the failures and successes of the previous experimentation. The closing of the space at East 13th Street allowed a renewed Group Material (complete with new members) to explore other spatial initiatives to make variations on the exhibition medium, to address new issues and to try and open to wider audiences. These later projects used distribution channels that could equally be considered democratic: they organised interventions in public areas such as

nature, usually excluded or under-represented in the official worlds of art and academia. / Our immediate community: The people of Manhattan's Lower East Side, the people on the block, the people who will pass by our storefront on their way to some everyday activity', in Group Material, "First Manifesto", 1980. Julie Ault (ed.), *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material*, London, Four Corners, Books, 2010, p. 22.

²⁰⁴ Group Material, "Caution: Alternative Space!", in Julie Ault (ed.), *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material*, London, Four Corners, Books, 2010, p. 56.

²⁰⁵ Group Material, "Caution: Alternative Space!", *Ibid.*

‘streets, city squares, newspapers, mass transit, even churches’.²⁰⁶ They intervened in city walls, subway and buses advertisement areas and used informational and publicity formats (billboards, ads, inserts in newspapers). Their exhibitions took place in different spatial locations and shapes, such as town meetings, community services, galleries and institutions. They used the whole city rather than a single venue. These intervention techniques were most effective in media activism and in tune with the new paradigm of 1980s media activism. But it is precisely the emphasis that Group Material placed on exhibitions and display as their principal medium and its relation to sociability that has facilitated their passage to the spotlight of the debate about curating.²⁰⁷

3.2. Display concerns: exhibition as means of production

Thus far I have examined the extent to which Group Material’s early projects were similar and different from their contemporaries. I have especially focused on the shift from a previous model of alternative space towards a socially aware one (an evolution that ended in the rejection of any fixed space) and on Group Material’s questioning of thematic exhibitions. Both lines converge at a point where exhibitions seemed to provide an answer to the dilemmas that troubled other collectives and alternative spaces at that time. Firstly, Group Material changed the site in which their enquiries could be enacted, from an exhibition taking place in a space to an exhibition that was itself the place. Secondly, they expanded the political and social commentary from a theme to addressing the medium through which the question was posed. These two features need to be read in relation to the third contextual aspect mentioned above: their emphasis on display matters, involving what to show, how to show it and for whom. This step will serve to reintroduce the case study after our critical assessment of the context. In terms of content, most of Group Material’s first year projects looked at the production, circulation and consumption of cultural products, questioning at the same time what is a cultural product and what is culture. Cultural products were explored in a broad sense. In their shows, Group Material made equivalences between textiles, fashion, food, decorative objects and art, in order to think dialectically about the social/cultural theme they were addressing in each of them. In relation to their exhibition rationale, it was logically consistent to devote one of these shows to domestic objects at the intersection of art, decoration and collective biography.

²⁰⁶ Group Material, “Caution: Alternative Space?”, *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁰⁷ See Lars Bang Larsen, “People’s Choice”, *Frieze*, n° 132, June-August, 2010; Alison Green, “Citizen Artists: Group Material”, *Afterall*, n° 26, spring 2011.

However, the way they chose to do it in *The People's Choice* made it a distinctive exhibition even within their own history.

From descriptions and existing photographs, we can infer that *The People's Choice* (*Arroꝝ con Mango*) featured two different systems of objects. Firstly, there were singular items that people found valuable, in an arc between the aesthetic and the sentimental. These objects were used to decorate the neighbours' houses. Beyond their decorative function, they also helped to create meaning in the home (in the leaflet they asked for 'objects that have meaning for you'). They ranged from crafts to amateur paintings and art reproductions – which introduced an aesthetic aspect – to personal statements related to identity, such as posters and national-cultural objects. Finally, there were objects or images that represented and symbolised emotional relationships, such as family snapshots, gifts, or items with emotive value. All houses can be read as curiosity cabinets where heterogeneous materials are placed close to each other to compose a personal cosmology. Sometimes, within this assemblage, people might introduce an extra element of significance, legible self-portraits, based on the collection of specific objects that represent something for those persons and at the same time are representations of them. These types of objects constituted the second part of the show, in dialectic relation with the apparent diversity. These personal collections were made of items of the same kind, such as toy animals or PEZ dispensers, organised in a systematic arrangement. Both kinds of objects functioned as a self-portrait of the people living in the block, self-representations that located them within a wider net of personal and social relations.

In private houses, collections, decorative objects and functional items alike are mixed together in a common space, unlike museum taxonomies. Instead of competing, they reinforce each other and challenge all discursive logic. In *The People's Choice* the inhabitants of the block could decide which object or set of objects were to represent them personally and in the community. In turn, the community was given a portrait of itself. This point of view was emphasised by the captions in which the owners explained the story/history of the piece or the reason for the choice, exposing the importance of the item and creating an intelligible narrative with the objects performing as actors. Thomas Lawson highlighted this approach in his article: 'Each picture had its own story, and together they added up to a moving, detailed record of a small community within the city'.²⁰⁸ The display at 244 East

²⁰⁸ Thomas Lawson, "'The People's Choice', Group Material", *Artforum*, n° 8, April, 1981, pp 67-68.

13th was read by Lawson as an attempt to represent a small element of New York, a city that is already an amalgamation of persons and cultures.

We can follow Lawson and the rest of the reviewers and focus on the final outcome, but we can also consider the process of making the show and its consequences. In *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* content, medium and form were intimately interconnected. In order to point out the process of cultural selection, an exhibition was the perfect tool to address what kind of objects, activities and actions can represent persons, communities or groups in the artistic and cultural realm. The value ascribed or withdrawn in that representational process could also be examined. Both selection and display policies were to be problematised. *The People Choice's (Arroz con Mango)* also posed a question about what is culture and for whom is it culture, and how are the means by which this is established. At the core of their project, therefore, there was an exhibition interrogating itself.

In relation to the actual appearance of the show, several authors have pointed out the usage of montage techniques that Group Material brought into play in most of their projects. David Deitcher talked about a 'visual poetics of montage' and he explicitly recalled the works of Berlin Dada artists²⁰⁹. Jan Avgikos spoke of a 'salon-style assemblage of persons, politics, texts, themes, varied media, and visual displays'.²¹⁰ Alan Moore gave importance to a new display culture that could be played with and he associated montage techniques directly with the materialist and dialectical approach that Group Material was trying to achieve by artistic means.²¹¹ In their comments it is interesting to note that both

²⁰⁹ Deitcher affirms 'Of paramount importance to the process was finding ways to translate the collective's ideas and insights into bold visual terms. Group Material evolved a visual poetics of montage in installations that generated public discussion about their ideas, and their work was informed and shaped by public issues, in David Deitcher, "Looking at Whitney Annuals and Biennials, 1968-2000" in Julie Ault (ed), *Alternative Art New York. 1965-1985*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2002, pp. 220-221. And also: 'If their art evokes the spirit of Berlin Dada, however it is not so much individual works by John Heartfield, Hannah Hoch, and Raoul Haussmann that it summons, as the kaleidoscopic installation of the 1920 International Dada Fair in Berlin. In the manner of montage, Group Material's installations create a friction between elements –a productive, discursive friction that sparks improbable insights into a given theme', in David Deitcher, "Social aesthetics", Brian Wallis (ed.), *Democracy. A project by Group Material*, Bay Press, Seattle, 1990, p 21.

²¹⁰ For Avgikos 'Exhibitions were characterised by managed eclecticism, the salon-style assemblage of persons, politics, texts, themes, varied media, and visual displays implementing an atmosphere of "complexity and contradiction", considered Group Material as analogue to the social issues it addressed, in Jan Avgikos, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

²¹¹ Commenting Tim Rollins' statement in which Moore states 'If anything has to do with Group Material, it's reinventing the dialectic through art, Alan Moore says: 'The People's Choice was the direct result of Group Material's search for "discourse". (...) The exhibition was also the first to employ a radical mixture of objects in a manner that would distinguish Group Material's work in the 1980s. In this "dialectical" method, the group had found a position from which to be subtly rather than overtly didactic, to open a space in the

Deitcher and Avgikos speak of ‘installations’, whereas Moore considers Group Material’s outcome as ‘exhibitions’. Installation is also the way that Grant Kester categorises Group Material’s works, although his perception is negative and designates them under the rubric Moral Didactic Installation.²¹² Opposite to this view, Alan Moore characterises them as ‘subtly rather than overtly didactic’, and contrary to the soviet Marxist style, in *The People Choice* the content of the show was completely up to the audience, so no ‘moral’ or ‘ideological’ imposition was determining the premise or the outcome.

One of the ways to approach *The People’s Choice (Arroz con Mango)* is to the light of Walter Benjamin’s “The author as producer”. This may seem nowadays an abused and worn out notion, but we need to underline that Benjamin’s proposal was one of the most radical critiques to the way art and social change was practiced in the Stalin era and that his ideas have had a delayed influence.²¹³ In any case, we need to consider the materialism of Group Material’s approach, since it is at the core of their practice. One of Benjamin’s aims in this text was to argue that the political content of an artwork is insufficient to achieve a transformation in the audience. He stated that a political tendency is a necessary but never sufficient condition for the organization of a political work.²¹⁴ As the bourgeoisie has the ability to assimilate and de-activate revolutionary themes, at least two things were required. On the one hand, the work had to eliminate the differences between producers and audience, and turn readers or viewers into co-producers; in other words, it was necessary to socialise the means of productions. On the other hand, the work had to eliminate the antithesis between technique and content. This meant that the author should no longer prioritise the outcome (work) but rather the means of production (process), since the use

viewer’s mind for thought and argument instead of simply asserting a stance’, Alan Moore with Jim Cornwell, “Local History: The Art of Battle for Bohemia in New York”, in Julie Ault (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 334.

²¹² Kester affirms that “The MDI [Moral Didactic Installation] -exemplified in the work of artists such as Group Material, Richard Bolton, and Martha Rosler- bombards the viewer with information about a particular issue or set of issues, such as homelessness, anti-Communism, corporate capitalism, censorship, U.S. foreign policy, and so on, usually in a highly dense and layered installation format combining video, audio, written material, and published articles. In these installations the artist functions as the coordinator of an idealized mini public sphere in which controversial issues –normally suppressed by the mass media- can be openly engaged. The MDI attempts to encourage and contribute to a critical consciousness or attitude on the part of the audience. (...) Thus what is “on display” in a Group Material installation is not simply information about a particular issue but also Group Material itself as an exemplary body of committed cultural activists’, in Grant H. Kester, “Rhetorical Questions: The Alternative Arts Sector and the Imaginary Public”, in Grant H. Kester, *Art, Activism and Oppositionality. Essays from Afterimage*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1998, pp. 121-122.

²¹³ To understand the context in which the essay was produced, see Maria Gough, “Paris, Capital of the Soviet Avant-Garde,” *October*, n° 101, summer, 2002, pp. 53-83. An analysis of the superseding of Benjamin’s notions in Hal Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer,” in *The Return of the Real*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1996.

²¹⁴ For a whole analysis on the notion of ‘tendenz’, Maria Gough, *Ibid.*

of technique (and technology) is never neutral. The technique should be used and interrogated in relation to its functional/political value.

Two consequences, at least, can be derived from this position. One refers to the authors, as they are obliged to reflect on their position in the process of production. The other implies an explicit break with both the specialisation of work tasks and the separation of techniques (or artistic ways of doing). In his own context, Benjamin proposed two techniques, or we might say counter-techniques, by which this break could be enacted. The first one is montage, where the superimposed elements disrupted homogeneous discourse (*dyspose*, as discussed in the previous chapter).²¹⁵ The second one is the introduction of narrative elements. Taking Brecht's theatre as an example, Benjamin suggested that a way to perform this was by transcending the border between writing and image, or between music and word. This could also be parsed as a hybridization of genres or disciplines (something that was in the mind of artists of *Tucumán Arde*). Following this line of thinking, *The People's Choice* can be considered as a Benjaminian work in which the productive apparatus (the exhibition) was transformed into an operative medium. As Benjamin said of Brecht: 'epic theatre does not reproduce situations; rather, it discovers them.' *The People's Choice* was not undertaken in a given format where the result was predetermined by a set of rules (i.e. an exhibition of artworks or objects wanting to become artworks, or of artists wanting to be included in the canon), but a situation in which unexpected associations could be arranged and re-arranged and knowledge could be transformed and exchanged. As Benjamin suggested, the apparatus was improved and could become exemplary.

Group Material, with its explicitly materialist orientation, was completely aware of the value of considering the medium as an object of analysis, along with the social issues they were addressing. Tim Rollins in particular emphasized this side of their work in interviews:

What is rarely discussed is the crucial question of method in the production of radical art. The most interesting new work is that which embraces social means of production and distribution. A political art can't really be made at working people

²¹⁵ George Didi-Huberman, *Cuando las imágenes toman posición*, Madrid, A. Machado Libros, 2008.

or for the oppressed [sic]. A radical art is one that helps organize people who can speak for themselves, but lack the vehicles to do so.²¹⁶

Doug Ashford also made frequent observations about the fact of interrogating curatorial practice: ‘We see ourselves as artists redefining the role of curating’.²¹⁷ Montage techniques could be easily charged with political connotations, as we have seen in *Tucumán Arde*, and therefore inscribed in a particular avant-garde lineage that automatically affirmed its political affiliation. But just repeating the gesture does not activate its original significance.

The People’s Choice, while conscious of this montage legacy, updated the potential of juxtaposition, narration and hybridization in its own way. Juxtaposing a kitschy image of Christ, a drawing of a Superhero, and snapshots, evoked the connection between domestic realm and everyday beliefs. A ‘Family Bulletin Board’, by a neighbour called Peter Cáceres, doubled the show with an anthropological collage of family pictures. The PEZ candy dispenser put together astronauts, Indian chiefs, Santa Claus and El Zorro. The exhibition produced a horizontal levelling of the aesthetic, the sentimental and the social; it promoted poetic associations between different types of objects and images, facilitating contradiction and opposition; questioning the traditional high, low or popular, art and artefact, original and reproduced divisions, blurring the boundaries between the private and the public realm, between an exhibition setting and a home or between a collection and an exhibition. The introduction of the word, as Benjamin advocated, through captions explaining the reasons for selection, introduced a plurality of non-specialised voices in the scenario. Its participatory nature encouraged plurivocality in the narration of the block’s history. In *The People’s Choice* the ‘technique’ and the ‘content’ were not antithetical, since one was produced by the other and vice versa. The exhibition conditions and the content were commensurate: the process of choosing was *what* was being exhibited, along with the temporary portrait of a geographically specific, but non-identitarian, community.

²¹⁶ Tim Rollins, “Particles, 1980-83”, *Real Life Magazine* n 11/12, winter 1983-84. And also ‘A radical art is one that helps organize people who can speak for themselves, but lack the vehicles to do so’, Tim Rollins in William Olander, “Material World”, *Art in America*, January, 1989, p. 124.

²¹⁷ “Dialectical Group Materialism”. An interview by Jim Drobnick, *Parachute* 56, October-November, 1989. And also Doug Ashford, ‘But desires to rearrange the way art was presented rarely transformed the way art was understood. At the time, the inclination toward other contexts was called revolutionary. In many ways it was (and still is): putting artists in direct alignment with a different audience than the artworld could (or would) address; organizing artists under similar social issues and subjects; placing artwork next to work from other producers of images to show a more accurate picture of where culture comes from. The revolution pointed itself in a way that went full circle’, Doug Ashford, “Kiss of Death”, *Real Life Magazine* n 11/12, winter 1983-84.

In this regard, and to return to the installation vs. exhibition debate, I believe that Group Material did not consider their own projects as installations, but as exhibitions. *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* was not an accumulative installation, since the various leaflets that they distributed state clearly that it was 'an exhibit'. On one of them, there is a drawing depicting a museum display. While installations are usually discussed as artworks, exhibitions are a means of production. Artist's exhibitions can be seen as artworks, but they never lose the possibility of activating its productive (or operative) nucleus.

Self reflective exhibitions

The Benjaminian approach in which the means of production pass from the author to the community has been a recurrent element in the ‘new genre public art’ developed in the U.S. since the 1970s, but not named and formulated until the early 1990s. This type of socially driven artistic production has a strong performative component, since it is during this process that the group is supposedly ‘emancipated’ or ‘empowered’. In the case of *The People’s Choice*, this long-term materialist legacy was complemented by its own historical and artistic background. We may say that they were heirs of two different traditions. The first one relates to activist art and thematic shows addressing social issues. The second, though it might seem contradictory, relates to conceptual art. In Group Material’s case, the influence came via Joseph Kosuth’s teaching at the School of Visual Arts (SVA). Kosuth was an important figure for some of the original members of the group. He had been working on art as a construction of meaning that could be revealed through a specific self-reflexive position. This second tradition stated the importance of art’s self-awareness within certain institutional parameters and a critical analysis of them (a position closer to the deconstruction of the politics of representation). The dismantling of power structures determining artistic values in a social and economic context was thus already present in conceptual art debates.²¹⁸

The debate placed in the formula ‘representation of politics’ vs. ‘politics of representation’ marked the transition from an orthodox Marxist position towards a post-modern intellectual horizon informed by Fredric Jameson’s theorisations of late capitalist culture. However, these two strands didn’t seem so incompatible during the 1970s, perhaps because of their common foundation in the Frankfurt School. Artistically speaking, the works of Hans Haacke and Martha Rosler were perfect examples of this compatibility and both of them were also lecturing at the SVA where some members Group Material studied. With time, however, the two paths tended to diverge. Conceptualist art’s legacy, with its focus on the artistic field, forgot about the social element of this critique. This category of institutional critique came to focus on artistic practices that revealed the political and economic conditions in which art is placed and became self-referential and melancholic. On the other hand, exhibitions by Colab or ABC No Rio seemed to forget the possibility of reflection on the medium by which the denunciations of institutional critique were being

²¹⁸ Benjamin Buchloh, ‘From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique (Some aspects of Conceptual Art 1962-1969)’, *October*, 55, winter 1990, pp. 105–143.

conveyed, through a *modus operandi* of an anti-institutional nature. In the New York context of the early 1980s, at the beginning of this bifurcation, Group Material didn't need to choose between them. On the contrary, they explored the confluence of community-oriented projects and institutional critique or, as Jan Avgikos puts it, 'cultural theory and grassroots realities', that would later be seen as incompatible.²¹⁹ The specificity of this transitional moment, as I discussed above, prevents a straightforward reading of Group Material's work as either activism or institutional critique.

Group Material didn't have many references for exhibition history at the time, either practical, or theoretical. However, a few examples from both the above-mentioned artistic traditions can be useful in order to assemble a discontinuous genealogy. Firstly, conceptual art exhibitions organised by Seth Siegelaub and Lucy Lippard, but also by other curators from 1969 onwards. Dematerialised artworks prompted a correlative questioning of exhibition and distribution. Shows could take the form of a Xeroxed book, a magazine, a newspaper, a vinyl record or a TV program.²²⁰ The use of mass distribution channels was also associated with a democratization of art, an idea that also stretches back to Benjamin and the 1920s. Closer in time and spirit to *The People's Choice*, however, was show *Thirty-Six Hours*, organised by Walter Hopps in 1978. In this curatorial project, Hopps proposed to the Museum of Temporary Art, an alternative space in Washington, 'a show where anyone who brought anything could be shown'.²²¹ Artists and non-artists alike were free to contribute works, although Hopps points out that most of the participants were artists.

²¹⁹ For Avgikos, 'In theory, synthesis of the two social orders would serve the best of both worlds: cultural theory and institutional critique meet grassroots realities and fund a form for the advancement of social welfare and all benefit from the exchange', in Jan Avgikos, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

²²⁰ For instance, Seth Siegelaub, *Xerox Book* (1968), or *One month: March 1-31* (1969); Lucy Lippard, *557,087*, Seattle (1969); Jan van der Marck, *Art by Telephone*, Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art (1969) or Gerry Schum: *The television gallery* (1968-1970).

²²¹ In an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, Walter Hopps recalls, 'We worked at letting people know for a couple of weeks. We put some posters up and got certain people to mention it on the radio. We had some musicians performing the opening night; (...) We made no distinction. But it's interesting how few people who were not really artists showed up. One drunk guy came in who had ripped out a lurid *Hustler* photo with this nude woman exposing herself. He crumpled up the paper and then flattened it out. He'd signed it, and he came in insisting it was his work. My role in this was to be there all 36 hours, meeting and greeting every single person who brought in a work. We'd walk to a space and they would help install it, right then and there. So here was this crisis. But I found a place that was reasonably dark - it wasn't spotlight - and I walked him over there and said: "This is the perfect place for it." (...) So we stapled this thing up, in a sort of shadowy corner. This guy was so out of it, and so surprise - this was just a dirty joke on his part, but I didn't treat it that way. We put it up there, and he went away, and that was fine. (...) My only requirement was that it had to fit through the door', Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Interview with Walter Hopps", *A Brief History of Curating*, Zurich and Dijon, JRP/Ringier and Les Preses du Réel, 2008, pp. 10-31.

Also closer in time, but further away geographically, was *The Museum of Neighborhood Phenomena*, set up in 1977 in Seattle by the architect Jack Baker. Although there is very little information about this project, Lucy Lippard provides an account of the project as:

an exhibition/artwork in his storefront based on ‘local stories and sights – everything from traffic patterns to found objects- sparked by the artist hanging out and noticing the “little fragments you see on the street and wonder about”’. (...) Seeking to make unpretentious and accessible art, Baker was also interested in mapping his neighbourhood so as to understand where its various systems overlapped.²²².

Lippard also reports that Baker recorded the stories people told and photographed the places where they had happened. Mapping the neighbourhood through objects, oral histories and photographs bears a strong similarity to *The People’s Choice*. Both projects are locally based and both try to amplify the resonance and significance of everyday ‘phenomena’. The main difference is that Baker held the decision as to what was shown, while in Group Material’s show, the individuals in the community decided what to exhibit. The important point, however, is that in the New York context of 1981, artists and collectives were not yet experimenting with exhibitions and collecting. Even if this has become commonplace today, in 1981 this was a completely unusual *modus operandi*. With very few exceptions, it is not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that a wave of artists and exhibitions began to reconsider again issues regarding inclusion and exclusion, displaying and collecting and for whom including a re-evaluation of the high-class, white and western artistic canon, and these will be discussed in chapter 4.

²²² Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local*, New York, The New Press, 1997, p. 51. Also an autobiographical profile of Baker, available at: <http://marian-classof1959.blogspot.com/2008/03/class-of-1959john.html> (last accessed 27/08/2011).

3.3. Beyond representation: participation and equality

This final section on *The People's Choice* will look at the possibilities of the exhibition medium as an operative and dissenting apparatus. In their first manifesto Group Material stated that, 'Our project is clear: we invite everyone to question the entire culture we have taken for granted'.²²³ The guiding line of Group Material's first year was consistent in this respect. Their exhibitions examined cultural production in a broad sense, combining different means in which culture was articulated. The same manifesto stated that, 'Group Material researches work form artists, non-artists, the media, the streets, from anyone interested in presenting socially critical information in a communicative and informational context'.²²⁴ As we have seen, they focused on food, gender, politics, consumption, music, fashion or leisure, and combined the exhibit of works with film screenings, lectures, panels, literature, performances, parties and children's art classes. In *The People's Choice*, culture was addressed posing a question in relation to the artistic system, one of the most powerful legitimising apparatuses in the cultural realm. The art gallery was their primary point of reference, as the first leaflet announcing the show makes clear: 'we would like to show things that might not usually find their way into an art gallery'.²²⁵

A second leaflet that Group Material distributed to promote the show was a very simple sheet of paper in which we can see three drawings and some texts. On the top there is a title: *The People's Choice Art Exhibit*. Below, three drawings represent paintings hung in a museum. The one in the left is half of Grant Wood's *American Gothic* (1930); on the right is a cartoon-style caricature of David's *The Death of Marat* (1793); and in the middle is an empty frame around the text 'Your favorite art work here' and just below it, the caption '... but what is it supposed to mean?'. Below there is another typewritten text in which we can read:

'The answer to this and other similar, often posed questions will be answered by the very people who ask them'. The visual content of the show will be almost entirely up to the community, who will be invited to submit the artwork that they have in their homes. It will

²²³ Group Material, "First Manifesto", 1980. Julie Ault (ed.), *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material*, London, Four Corners, Books, 2010, p. 22.

²²⁴ Group Material, "First Manifesto", *Ibid*.

²²⁵ Julie Ault (ed.), *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material*, London, Four Corners, Books, 2010, p. 35.

be for and about their opinions, their ideas and feelings towards art, artwork and the people who make art'.²²⁶.

In asking their neighbours to decide what art was for themselves, Group Material confronted museums and the way their power and expertise position allowed them to determine what could be included in a museum and what could not. In *The People's Choice* the tactic was not to subsume under-represented artists (women, ethnic minorities) or cultural manifestations (e.g. graffiti and street art) into a framework where everything would be homogenised as art.²²⁷ In a similar spirit to the show set up by Walter Hopps, they wanted to question not the content, but the structures that, prior to any choice, already determine the range and type of objects from which the curators choose. The art gallery was a primary point of reference.²²⁸ The openness of Group Material's proposal is not about inclusivity in the sense of adding new objects into a closed field. Their inclusion of everyday objects was not an attempt to question the border between artworks and artefacts, or to address yet again the art/non-art debate. They were not interested in taking a urinal or a Brillo Box and presenting it as a challenge to the framework in which they were inserted. Rather, they aimed to take a deeper look at the systems that framed any cultural object, which included its viewers, consumers and producers. In both of their leaflets, art was a blank space to be filled.

²²⁶ Julie Ault (ed.), *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material*, London, Four Corners, Books, 2010, p. 31. There was even a third leaflet only had a blank space with a caption reading: "ATTENTION!!" and then: "Opening January 10th, 1981, at GROUP MATERIAL: PEOPLES' CHOICE – an exhibition of favorite art possessions on loan from the people and households of 13th street (between 2nd and 3rd avenues), and the members of GROUP MATERIAL. A display of the private gone public, of the-not-normally-found-in-art-gallery, of personal choice and cultural value on one block in New York City. Through February 1, 1981. Watch for special events – Domino night, home movies, etc.". Accessed at Group Material Archive, MoMa Archive, February, 2009.

²²⁷ The representational battle of the late 1960s and 1970s vis à vis museums in the US context was oriented to gain a larger representation of work done by women, Black, Puerto Rican and other cultural communities. This concentration on gaining representation in the art system made them forget the framework in which the representational game was played, a subject that was broadly tackled in the following decades.

²²⁸ Walter Hopps also wanted to challenge the power of curators in museums, him being one of them. Ken Allen states: 'According to Hopps himself, he attempted to carve out a unique position within the tradition of curators and "museum men" from the beginning of his career at the Pasadena Art Museum (now the Norton Simon) in the early 1960s. As he told an interviewer in 1987, "even in the Pasadena days, as I got to know Michael Fried, he would curse me, saying, "You just aren't part of the profession at all. You're a damned anthropologist". And I would say, "You're damned right I am"', in Ken Allen, Reflections on Walter Hopps in Los Angeles, *X-Tru*, vol. 8, n° 1, fall 2005, available at: http://www.x-traonline.org/past_articles.php?articleID=145 (last accessed 6/04/08).



Fig. 11: *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)*. Detail. PEZ dispenser collection



Fig. 12: *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)*. Leaflet.



Fig. 13: *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)*. Leaflet.

I believe that the blank space proposed in *The People's Choice* leaflet is expressive of an imaginary realm. The empty space stands for a moment of suspension, a space that can be filled with anything: 'a 10-foot-long snakeskin, a copy of Mona Lisa, a new wave "schlock", political posters, dolls, a bowling trophy, original paintings, photographs, a Rembrandt reproduction, a PEZ dispenser collection, snapshots style, a cover from Interview magazine, a signed Warhol photograph, a red Duchampian dustpan, a cover from the New York Post', and so on, and so forth.²²⁹ There is some kind of poetic power in exhibition's capacity to stage heterogeneous materials, which challenge our established logic and defy any sense of measure. In this line of reasoning, Paolo Virno has talked of the similarities between poetry and a new public sphere. In his view, art emphasises disproportion and crisis of units of measure 'to find new standards of measure and proportion; specifically, (...) new standards for the appraisal of our cognitive and affective experience. For him, art and radical movements have in common a quest for an index of new forms denoting new ways of living and feeling, which results in new standards'. From this perspective, Virno relates the form of a poem and the form a new public sphere, like the structure of a new idea. In the case of *The People's Choice*, heterogeneity and incommensurability worked together to open up imaginary spaces. Even the conflation of miscellaneous materials and ordered collections is eloquent of this 'disproportion'. The existence of imaginary spaces does not originate automatically new public spheres, but they contribute to challenge and expand the domain of the possible.

Far from being a representational apparatus, *The People's Choice* was an exhibition about the potential to add, to dissent and to imagine. It was more than a portrait of a neighbourhood or a claim for the unrepresented taste and meaning systems of everyday people's aesthetics. It was a political gesture that enacted a dissenting distribution of the sensible with an unexpected outcome. It is precisely its aggregative and eclectic condition (not its choice requirement), its 'arroz con mango' nature that makes it significant. *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* questioned unproblematic assumptions about what is to be represented in the cultural realm and for whom. They even interrogated the need for any representation, unless it is based on horizontal conditions of possibility allowing people to speak for themselves. This horizontal, inclusive, disorganised drive always menaces the given structures, since it makes them unstable. Conservative critiques often dismiss the

²²⁹ Elisabeth Hess, "Home-Style Looking", *Village Voice*, Jan 28th – Feb 3rd, 1981.

possibilities of openness in the name of quality, as if the combination of rice and mango would destroy an idealised purity.

The *People's Choice* experience contributed to revealing the conditions that characterised a state of curatorial knowledge at that particular moment. At a turning point, between thematic salons addressing political issues and institutional critique working within museums, they envisioned a distinct mode of considering what could be an exhibition and how this could also be a relationship between art and social change. Despite the apparent failure of Group Material's first year, I think that, in the case of *The People's Choice*, the collective broke not only their own limitations, but also pushed the boundaries of what could be imagined and done in the artistic and curatorial field. The self-reflexive use of the exhibition as medium, with its eventual transformation into an operative apparatus, and their radical questioning of exhibitions as a representative system, created a space for an equal and heterogeneous participation where a poetical/political distribution of the sensible could occur. This renders it a singular and captivating case, not only in its own time, but also for the present day, as this type of participative curatorial practice has undergone significant growth since the late 1990s.

4. EXHIBITION AS ENCOUNTER: THE CASES OF ROOMS WITH A VIEW, WE THE PEOPLE AND ART/ARTIFACT

In this third chapter I will focus on Fred Wilson's project *Rooms with a View: The struggle between culture, content and the context of art*, an exhibition that took place at Longwood Arts Projects (New York) in 1987, along with two other exhibitions: *We The People* (Artists Space, 1987) and *Art/Artifact* (The Center for African Art, 1988).²³⁰. In *Rooms with a View*, artworks created by contemporary Black, Latino, Asian, and Native American artists were presented in different rooms, staged as distinct historical exhibition spaces. Placed in these divergent settings, the artworks revealed how display systems were essential for the construction of different artistic discourses. Instead of expanding the exhibition format, this chapter is focused on the way in which art and exhibitions can problematise museum conventions and how they have regulated art and culture to organise a historically specific apparatus of power and knowledge.

The three shows that form the core of this chapter operate within very concrete coordinates: the New York art scene of the 1980s, its museum structure and the discourse about so-called primitive art. In the case of *Rooms with a View*, a reference to the major museums in New York was central to this project, as they were considered the producers of a specific discourse about the relationship between modernity and primitive cultural construction. First, *Rooms with a View*, *We the People* and *Art/Artifact* will be examined synchronically, associating them with the contemporaneous exhibitions *Damaged Goods* and *The Desire of the Museum*. Therefore, they will be related to other self-reflexive shows that were taking place at the same time in New York. The 1980s were marked by a deconstructivist determination to reveal the importance of display techniques as producers of discourse for contemporary art. This prevailing state of critique was spread in the form of exhibitions and through debates prompted by particular shows. I will subsequently situate them in diachronic relationship with historical exhibitions, such as *Indian Art in the U.S.* or *Art of the South Seas*. This link would give the study cases a lineage of predecessors, with which they can be compared. This chapter will position the case studies within this dual history of exhibition lineage, in order to interrogate the conditions under which non-white artists were able to work in the New York art scene.

²³⁰ *We The People*: November 12th to December 23rd 1987; *Rooms with a View*: December 12th 1987 to February 6th 1988 and *Art/Artifact*: January 29th to April 17th 1988.

This chapter builds on the previous one in reflecting how disparate objects have been classified and displayed, especially those under the categories of visual art and material artefact. It also continues the debate about representations and participation of the Other, focusing on the dialectics that modernism and primitivism established at the beginning of the twentieth century and the aftermath it brought to the New York artistic scene. The case studies aim to look at how exhibitions can address the artistic field as a discursive formation. Instead of addressing a politics or sociability, like *Group Material*, they focus on aesthetics: highlighting the historicity of display systems, and even conflating them, to interrogate how exhibitions affect artworks in both positive and negative ways. Self-reflexivity in exhibition making can therefore be used as a tool that sheds light on the inevitable blind spots produced by all formations of power and knowledge. Looking at a historical moment in which legitimacy was not yet achieved – neither for contemporary nor for ‘primitive’ art –, these three exhibitions can be seen not as the site of authority, but as an unstable frame of reference in which objects are still in a state of uncertainty.

4.1. Coincidental shows

Fred Wilson is a North American artist whose practice is based on the rearrangement of museum’s collections in order to critically examine and question how western museum displays reinforce beliefs and behaviours in relation to the representation of minorities.²³¹ After graduating in 1976 from the State University of New York, he engaged in jobs that would be fundamental in his later evolution as an artist: he worked in the education departments of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the American Museum of Natural History, as an exhibition installer in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and in other commercial galleries and non-profit spaces. His experience in these three different types of museums – ethnographic, fine arts, and contemporary art – and his profile as educator, curator and installer provided him with an acute institutional sensibility, an awareness of how conventions and procedures constituted and determined the artistic field. In 1981 Fred Wilson participated in a group show at A.I.R. Gallery and accepted a curatorial post at Longwood Arts Projects in South Bronx.²³² Between 1981 and 1992 Fred Wilson made his

²³¹ John Alan Farmer and Antonia Gardner (ed.), *Fred Wilson, Objects and Installations 1979-2000. Issues in Cultural Theory*, No. 4, Center for Art and Visual Culture, UMBC, 2004.

²³² Wilson was curator at Longwood Arts Projects from 1981 to 1992. Longwood was a South Bronx neighbourhood in economic decline when Bronx Council on the Arts opened Longwood Arts Project in the abandoned P.S. 39 in 1981. The Project provided low-rent artist studios and other art services, including

job as curator compatible with his early career as an artist.²³³ These split tasks began to unify in 1987 when he curated *Rooms with a View: The struggle between culture, content and the context of art* at Longwood Arts Projects. The exhibitions *Rooms with a View* (1987), together with *The Other Museum* (White Columns, 1990), are two signposts at the beginning of Fred Wilson's artistic career and ones that determined his future orientation. *Rooms with a View* has usually been read in relation to Wilson's subsequent works, specifically as an antecedent to *Mining the Museum* (Maryland Historical Society 1992), which is considered one of Wilson's best projects. In this chapter, I will not read *Rooms with a View* as an antecedent of this exhibition and the artist's mature career (an approach which is only necessary when trying to establish a consistent interpretation of the artist's practice). Rather, I will examine it as a link in a different chain and with significance of its own.

Wilson narrates the origin of the idea as follows: 'When I was at Just Above Midtown I wanted to organise a show [of contemporary artists] that was at three different museums. (...) I wanted to do a show at the Frick, the Metropolitan, and the American Museum of Natural History'.²³⁴ These venues stood for a salon space, a contemporary art space and an ethnographic museum space, characterised by him respectively as 'authoritative and valuable', 'cold and calculated', and 'exotic and foreign'.²³⁵ Artists and designers Curt Belshe and Lise Prown helped Wilson in the design and building of the three different 'period' rooms (white cube, salon-style room and ethnographic museum).²³⁶ Jennifer A. Gonzalez has described them as follows:

One room took the form of a modernist white cube, with the attendant minimalist aesthetic of bare floors and walls, open space, and sparsely hung works of art, primarily paintings; the décor of the second gallery suggested a late-nineteenth-century salon or

Longwood Art Gallery, which opened in 1986. In 2002, it was relocated to Hostos Community College in Mott Haven.

²³³ After his participation in the A.I.R. Gallery group show, he showed at the Sculpture Center (1982). In 1985 he participated in *Art on the Beach* (Creative Time) and in 1988 he created a temporary outdoor sculpture for the Public Art Fund. His first solo show, *The Other Museum* took place in 1990 in White Columns (travelling to the Washington Project for the Arts in Washington, DC). After this, in 1990, he received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. In 1991 Wilson had two more solo shows at Gracie Mansion and Metro Pictures.

²³⁴ Leslie King-Hammond, "A conversation with Fred Wilson", in Fred Wilson and Lisa Corrin (ed.), *Mining the Museum: An installation*, New York, The New Press, 1994, p. 31. Just Above Midtown (1974-1988) was a gallery directed by Linda Goode-Bryant, devoted originally to exhibiting abstract work by Black artists. See Julie Ault, "For the Record", *Alternative Art New York 1965-1985*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002, p. 39.

²³⁵ Leslie King-Hammond, *Ibid.*

²³⁶ In 2009 they are still working as designers of public spaces. See <http://www.liseprown.com> and <http://www.curtbelshe.com> (last accessed 28/08/2011). Lise Prown also participated in the show as an artist.

richly furnished domestic interior that included a sculpted mantelpiece, potted plants, and hung tapestries; the third gallery took the form of an ethnographic museum display with walls painted in warm sepia tones, glass vitrines, and cordoned off display spaces showing what looked like functional objects of natural materials.²³⁷

Wilson invited thirty artists and each of them had two pieces in the show.²³⁸ One of the two works was always installed in the white cube, so everyone had one work there, while the other was placed in one of the two paired spaces (salon or ethnographic museum). The visitors to the show followed the same visiting sequence: ‘There was a central hallway; you would go to one room, which was the ethnographic space; you would go to the next room, which was the contemporary art gallery; and the third room was the salon space. You could have come from another stairway, but that is mostly how people saw it’.²³⁹

The centrality of the white space, which the visitors had to enter after going through each of the other spaces, had a symbolic significance. Wilson was very conscious of the importance of activating the viewer’s response: ‘it would not be nice just to have their work in the ethnographic unusual spaces. (...) But it also made it very clear that all the spaces affected the viewers’ way of thinking about the artists’.²⁴⁰ The white cube was not only a source of legitimacy for contemporary art practices, but it made clear that its configuration was also historical and it could only work in relation to the other spaces. The homologation

²³⁷ Jennifer A. González, “Fred Wilson. Material Museology” in *Subject to display. Reframing Race in contemporary installation art*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2008, p. 65.

²³⁸ The show included the following artists: Barton Benes, Willi Birch, Serena Bocchino, Marina Cappeletto, Paul Capelli, Sunjoon Choh, Albert Chong, Pawel Cortes-Wodtasik, Jimmie Durham, Robert Hawkins, Noah Jemison, Alexander Kosolapov, Nina Kuo, Paul Laster, Larry List, Manuel Macarrulla, James McCoy, Tyrone Mitchell, Sana Musasama, Gloria Nixon, Lorenzo Pace, Linda Peer, Lise Prown, Jewel Ross, Robin Ryder, Elena Sisto, Eva Stettner, Ken Tisa, Alvin Toda, and Peggie Yunque.

²³⁹ Fred Wilson, Interview with the author, New York, 10/02/2009.

²⁴⁰ Fred Wilson, Interview with the author, New York, 10/02/2009.



Fig. 1: Longwood Arts Project. *Rooms with a view*.
Installation view. 'Ethnographic museum' room.



Fig. 2: Longwood Arts Project. *Rooms with a view*.
Installation view. 'Salon-style' room.

of the white cube to the other two spaces through its historicisation also projected a shadow of uncertainty into it. The white cube acted not as a canonical space, but as one among several Other spaces, questioning its apparent neutral supremacy.²⁴¹ It is not by chance that this historical assessment of the white cube was present in Wilson's show, since it was not until the late 1980s that its questioning as an ideological figure began to be widespread. The popularisation of the term white cube only happened after the re-edition of Brian O'Doherty's book in 1986 (only a year before *Rooms with a View*), despite the fact that O'Doherty's articles were originally published between 1976 and 1981.²⁴²

Rooms with a View has often been associated with *Art/Artifact*, an exhibition that took place at the Center for African Art in New York just a month and a half later, in January 1988. *Art/Artifact*, curated by Susan Vogel, questioned the way African art had been installed in Western museums, and similarly exposed display and installation as non-neutral mediums.²⁴³ In the introduction to the show's catalogue, the curator Susan Vogel traces a genealogy. African objects began to be presented in curiosity cabinets, along with biological or geological objects. Later, in Natural History or ethnographic museums, African artefacts were used to illustrate different aspects of culture under an ethnographic gaze. At the beginning of the twentieth century, some of these artefacts began to be seen under an aesthetic gaze, and started to be incorporated into art museums. These different considerations of similar objects implied different selection processes (i.e., in ethnographic museums original and copies coexist), diverse displays systems (crowded vs. isolated presentations); and distinct information policies (with or without contextual data). In

²⁴¹ It also prefigured the current ascendancy of a new 'global white cube', in which all contemporary art was soon to be indistinctively subsumed. Elena Filipovic, "The Global White cube" in *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art exhibitions and Biennials in post-Wall Europe*, Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic (ed), Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2005, pp. 63-84.

²⁴² The book published in 1986 was a compilation of four different articles. The three first ones, published in 1976 in three different issues of *Artforum*, came from a lecture that O'Doherty gave in the LACMA (invited by Maurice Tuchman) under title "Inside the White Cube, 1855-1974". The last article "The Gallery as Gesture", in which the idea of white cube is definitely developed as an ideological site, a gallery space with historical and contextual consciousness, came from a Franklin Murphy Lecture given at the University of Kansas at Lawrence in spring 1980 and was first published in *Artforum* in december 1981, pp 26-34. The compilation was entitled Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986.

²⁴³ Vogel stated in the catalogue: 'Most visitors are unaware of the degree to which their experience of any art in a museum is conditioned by the way it is installed. (...) Installations color the viewer's estimation of what he sees. This conditioning begins with the selection of what is to be displayed. (...) The museum exhibition is not a transparent lens through which to view art, however neutral the presentation may seem', in Susan Vogel, "Introduction", *Art/Artifact* (exh. cat.), New York, The Center for African Art and Prestel-Verlag, 1988, pp. 11-17. Reprinted in Howard Morphy and Morgan Perkins (ed.) *The Anthropology of Art: a Reader*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p. 209.

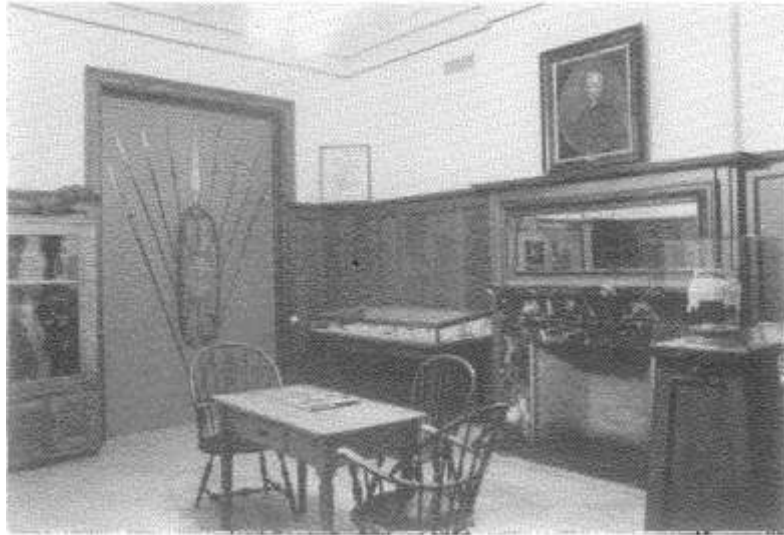


Fig. 3: Center for African Art. *Art/Artifact*. Recreation of the curiosity room from the Hampton Institute, ca. 1905.

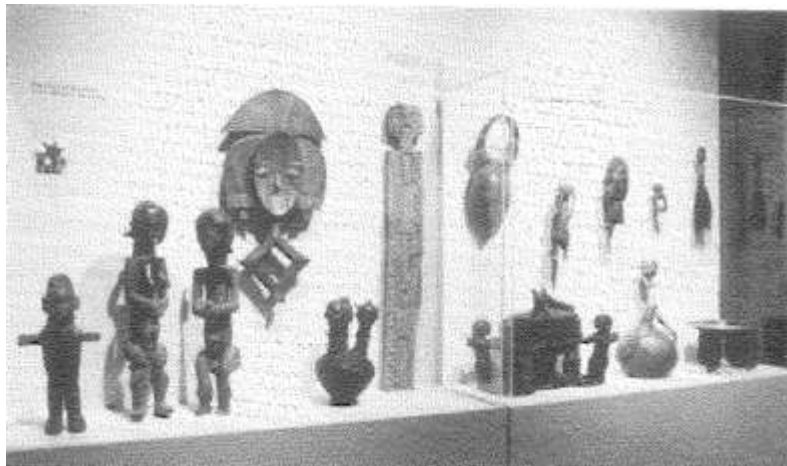


Fig. 4: Center for African Art. *Art/Artifact*. Display in the style of a natural history museum.



Fig. 5: Center for African Art. *Art/Artifact*. Diorama in the style of a natural history museum.

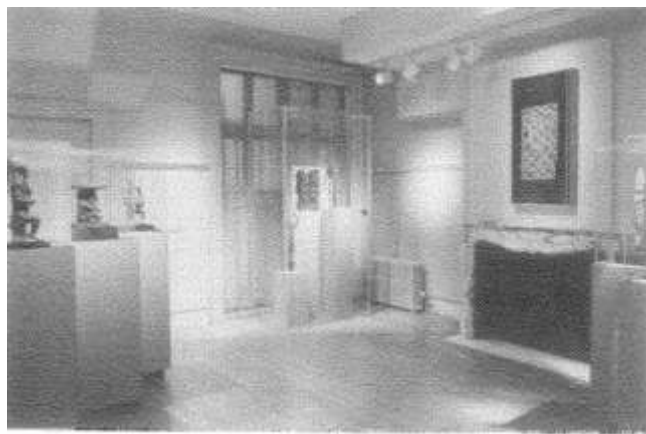


Fig. 6: Center for African Art. *Art/Artifact*. African figures and utilitarian objects exhibited as in an art museum.

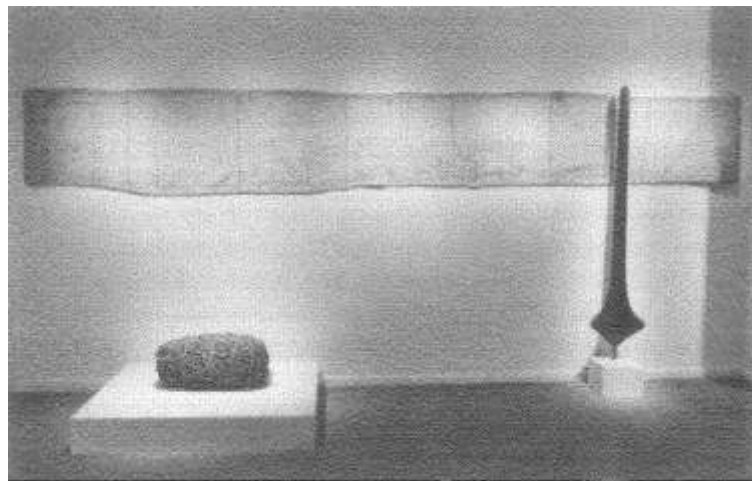


Fig. 7: Center for African Art . *Art/Artifact*. African objects presented as pure form.

Art/Artifact, four different presentational approaches were put together.²⁴⁴ In one section, objects were grouped together in display cases following anthropological models, with explanations about their technical, social and religious functions. In a second section, the ‘Contemporary Art Gallery’, objects were arranged as if placed in a modernist sculpture gallery, without explanations or identifications (only small numbers referring to the catalogue). The third section was set up as a diorama, with three life-size mannequins surrounded by artefacts. In this section, material culture and environment as a whole was highlighted. Finally, there was a recreation of the Hampton Institute’s first display of its ethnographic collection in the 1870s, as an example of a curiosity cabinet. In this area, artefacts were placed in dark wooden cases and frames. Similar kinds of artefacts were displayed in each of the four sections.

Alongside *Rooms with a View* and *Art/Artifact*, the exhibition *We The People* was simultaneously held at Artists Space, and also drew attention to the conventions of display, in this case that of Native American artists’ works. The exhibition was curated by Jean Fisher – an artist, art writer and scholar, who has looked extensively at artists emerging from cultures historically disenfranchised by colonialism – and Jimmie Durham, a visual artist, poet, essayist and political activist, whose work deconstructs national narratives and the stereotypes of western culture.²⁴⁵ The curators wanted to question two shows that had taken place in New York a few years previously – “*Primitivism*” in *Twentieth-Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and Modern* (MoMA, 1984) and *Lost and Found Traditions: Native American Art, 1965-1985* (American Museum of Natural History, 1986) – to reveal the ‘colonial nature of the exhibition contexts offered to Native American artists, despite curatorial good intentions’.²⁴⁶ For Fisher and Durham, these museum shows proved that a modernist and imperialist view was enduring in relation to cultural difference, in spite of the contemporaneous postmodernist aesthetic discourse, with its emphasis on pluralism and polyvocality. *We The People* tried to disclose the persistence of the ‘ethnographic gaze’ in

²⁴⁴ A description and evaluation of the show in James C. Faris, “Art/Artifact: On the Museum and Anthropology”, *Current Anthropology*, vol. 29, n° 5, December, 1988, pp. 775-779.

²⁴⁵ Contributing artists: Pena Bonita, Jimmie Durham, Harry Fonseca, Marsha Gomez, Tom Huff, G. Peter Jemison, Jean LaMarr, Alan Michelson, Joe Nevaquaya, Jolene Rickard, Susan Santos, Kay Walkingstick, Richard Ray (Whitman). Catalogue essays by Emelia Seubert Jimmie Durham, Jean Fisher, Paul Smith.

²⁴⁶ *Lost and Found Traditions: Native American Art, 1965-1985* took place at the American Museum of Natural History in 1986. See Jean Fisher, “In Search of the ‘Inauthentic’: Disturbing Signs in Contemporary Native American Art”, *Art Journal*, vol. 51, n° 3, autumn 1992, pp. 44-50. Reprinted in *Vampire in the Text, Narratives of Contemporary Art*, London, inIVA, 2003, pp. 240-249. Also in relation to Native Americans, in January 1988 the exhibition *Re-visions* (Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff, Canada) responded to the show *The Spirit Sings / Le Souffle de l’Esprit: Artistic Traditions of Canada’s First Peoples*, organised for the 1988 Olympic Arts Festival. A review of the show in Jane Fisher, “The Health of the People is the Highest Law”, in *Vampire in the Text. Narratives of Contemporary Art*, London, inIVA, 2003, pp. 218-227.

aesthetics, scholarship, but primarily in relation to artistic institutions, which were seen as unable to interrogate the ideological assumptions of their own practices. The whole project interrogated the notion of ‘authenticity’, a western category that conceals an ethnographic gaze and disallows others the status of full speaking subjects, which in addition displaces the otherness that structures the centre of our own being. In the show authenticity was displayed as a masquerade. Citing Durham, Jean Fisher highlights the main strategy for the exhibition as ‘us looking at them looking at us’, an approach already present in Durham’s work. Key to the artworks and to the exhibition alike was an emphasis on how museological discourse constructs an exploratory ethnographic gaze. As a consequence, museum display conventions were brought to light. In Fisher’s words:

We faced economic limitations, but the design of the first room was intended to evoke an ‘ethnographic’ display, while the second space attempted to override the modernist white space through the curved placement of sculpture pedestals and Jean LaMarr’s mural, which helped to flooding the space with colour, and sound provided by John Rainer Jr.’s flute music.²⁴⁷

In the three shows the display forced a contradictory feeling of belonging and discrepancy in each of the settings through the placement and displacement of art works. ‘The struggle between culture, content and the context of art,’ as Wilson stated in the subtitle of his show, could be made visible through the ‘effects of the environment’ in which the pieces were placed. The simultaneity and coincidence of the modus operandi of *We The People*, *Art/Artifact* and *Rooms with a View* speaks eloquently of the importance, in the mid-eighties, of questioning the representation of non western cultures, particularly after the fiasco of “*Primitivism*” in *Twentieth-Century Art*.²⁴⁸ If Vogel’s contribution concerned representations of African art in history, the other two shows reminded New Yorkers that

²⁴⁷ Jean Fisher, *Ibid.*, note 3, p. 249.

²⁴⁸ All reviewers of the exhibition stressed that the formalist, aestheticised and decontextualised reading of primitive art, advanced through the idea of ‘affinities’ by the curators William Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe, was obsolete and colonialist, to say the least. See Thomas McEvelley, “Doctor Lawyer Indian Chief?”, *Artforum*, n° 23, November 1984; Hal Foster, “The primitive “Unconscious” of Modern Art”, *October*, vol. 34, autumn, 1985, pp. 45-70. James Clifford, “Histories of the Tribal and the Modern”, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1988, pp. 189-214.



Fig. 8: Artists Space. *We the People*. Installation view: Jimmie Durham's *On Loan from the Museum of the American Indian*.

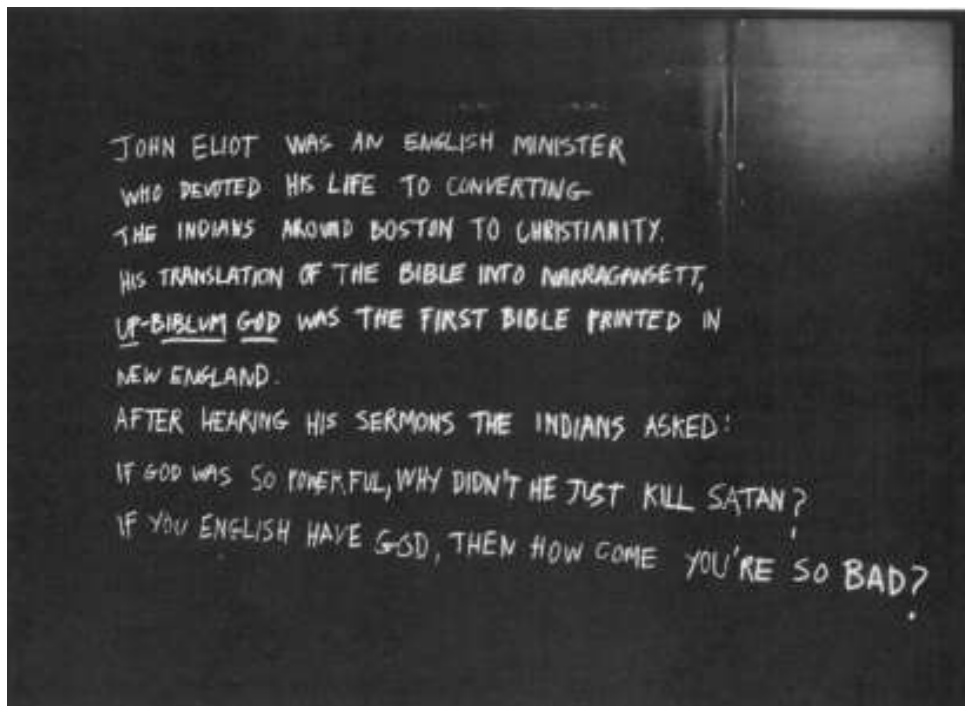


Fig. 9: Artists Space. *We the People*.
Detail: Alan Michelson, *Up-Biblum God*.

the issue persisted for contemporary artists and could be observed everyday in the very same territory. Vogel opened her catalogue with the statement that ‘This is not an exhibition about African art or Africa. It is not even entirely about art. *Art/Artifact* is an exhibition about the ways Western outsiders have regarded African art and material culture over the past century’. I will dare to rephrase her statement in relation to the shows of Wilson, Fisher and Durham: *We The People* and *Rooms with a View* were not exhibitions about Black, Latino and Native American artists. They were not even entirely about art. *We The People* and *Rooms with a View* were exhibitions about the ways (white) American curators have regarded Black, Latino, Native American artists over the past century. The curators of all three exhibitions were acutely aware of the divide between what Wilson calls ‘mainstream American culture’ and the ‘peripheral’ art scene.²⁴⁹ Therefore, the show was not only a reflection on how display systems framed artists and artworks, but a full investigation into the present conditions by which artists were still being classified.²⁵⁰

Museums in context

The coincidence of these shows should be looked at in a wider context. Between 1968 and 1972, there was a significant confluence of artists and theories challenging the white cube, but ten years later, around 1987-1993, the goal of the critiques shifted to collecting practices and museum discourses. In the 1980s, anthropology, museology and cultural studies had started to look at the way in which the gathering of artefacts had played a role in the formation of non-Western identities and their system of meaning and values. In the artistic sphere, this interrogation took place both in artists’ works and in the significant increase in discursive exhibitions and artists’ interventions into museum practice.²⁵¹ The proposals were quite varied: they could be historical museum collections disturbed by a contemporary gaze; they could be canonical Fine Art museums disrupted by the juxtaposition of works from different times and cultures or by the reconsideration of display techniques loaded with ideological routines; they could also historicise and deconstruct museums as sites of knowledge, power and representation. Not all of these

²⁴⁹ Fred Wilson states: ‘At that time artists of colour –Black, Latino and Asian and Native American artists– were not in the mainstream at all, we were very outside the mainstream, just in our galleries, in our communities, or in the galleries that we had created just for us. So we were in dialogue with each other, but not with the mainstream American culture’. Fred Wilson, Interview with the author, New York, 10/02/2009.

²⁵⁰ Howardena Pindell, “Art(world) and Racism. Statistics, Testimony and Supporting Documentation”, *Third Text*, vol. 2, n° 2-3, 1988, pp. 157-190.

²⁵¹ Works made by artists, to name but a few, Barbara Bloom, *The Reign of Narcissism* (1989); Christian Boltanski, *Inventory of Objects belonging to a Young Woman of Charleston* (1991); Lawrence Gipes, *Century of Progress Museum* (1992); Ann Fessler, *Art History Lesson* (1993); Ilya Kabakov, *Incident at the Museum* (1992).

shows were informed by an explicit critical perspective, but all of them, in a very condensed period of time, explored the discursive nature of museums and art history in practical ways.²⁵²

The intensity of this dismantling of museums as ideological structures was unprecedented, although it was already present in the work of artists of previous generations, especially Marcel Broodthaers and Hans Haacke. This critical mass, deriving both from theory and practice, questioned museums as sites where hegemonic discourses are produced and reproduced. But the questioning of museums was only one example of the wider analysis undertaken systematically since the late 1970s, aimed at examining the discursive forms engendered by Modernity. This type of critique was significantly different from previous modes of critical action against the museum. For instance, in the early 1970s New York scene, confrontation with museums involved activist engagement (i.e. Art Workers Coalition), who usually tried to provoke real changes in the institution, from a position external to it. However, at the turn of the decade a new intellectual landscape prompted a major shift, and placed a stress on the analysis of the conditions of possibility that had permitted a certain type of ideological practice and policy to take place. As we have commented in the previous chapter, this new approach was characterised as a move from the ‘representation of politics’ to the ‘politics of representation’. In this new scenario, the goal was to understand how the museum had been configured as an apparatus, to concentrate on an exercise of self-reflection regarding its origins as a discursive site; and the various and conflicting effects that this configuration had brought about, more than trying to change the museum from an imaginary outside. In this regard, Douglas Crimp’s

²⁵² Examples of artist curated shows, artists and curators intervening in museums or exhibitions about museums were the series belonging to *The Artist’s Eye* (National Gallery, London since 1977) or *The Artist’s Choice* (MoMA since 1989); *Histoires de Musée*, (Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989); *Connections* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1991), *Rendez-Vous* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Ghent, 1993) or artists re-hanging the MAK collection (Vienna, 1993). Curators re-hanging collections include Rudi Fuchs’ 1983 re-hanging of the Van Abbemuseum collection or Harald Szeemann’s *A-Historische Klanken* (Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam, 1988). Artist curated shows: Group Material, *Americana* (Whitney Biennial, 1985); Louise Lawler, *A Forest of Signs* (L.A. Museum of Contemporary Art, 1989); Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum* (Maryland historical Society, Baltimore, 1992); Joseph Kosuth, *The Play of the Unmentionable* (Brooklyn Museum, 1992); Mike Kelly, *The uncanny* (Sonsbeek ’93, 1993); Mark Dion, *Collection of the Bronbeek Royal Veterans* (Sonsbeek ’93, 1993). Exhibitions dealing with collecting and displaying artworks and artefacts: *Damaged Goods: Desire and the Economy of the Object* (New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1986); *Art/Artifact* (Center for African Art, New York, 1988); Jean-Hubert Martin’s *Les Magiciens de la Terre* (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1989); *The Desire and the Museum* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1989); *A Museum Looks at Itself: Mapping Past and Present* (Parrish Art Museum, New York, 1992). *Worlds in miniature, Worlds Apart* (Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1991-94); *The museum as muse* (MoMA; New York, 1999).

article “On the Museum’s Ruins” (1980) can be considered a turning point in the discussion.²⁵³

The transition from a late modernist intellectual environment towards an emergent post-structuralism had a great impact in the New York artistic scene of the 1980s. This sprung from the academia and the dissemination that French Theory underwent through journals, such as *Semiotext(e)* and *October*, educational training programs, such as the Whitney Independent Study Program, or institutions, such as New Museum, whose catalogues and exhibitions contributed to spread new theories and artistic practices.²⁵⁴ Critical theory in a Frankfurt School tradition became allied with psychoanalysis, feminism, semiotics, Marxism, critical ethnography, gender and postcolonial theories. With these theoretical tools, writers, curators and artists tried to examine art as a form of cultural production bound to economic, social and political interests.²⁵⁵ In order to delineate how new discursive scenario influenced artistic practices, I will describe two shows that took place in New York during this period: *Damaged Goods: Desire and the Economy of the Object*, which was held a year before the three shows forming the core of this chapter; and the other, *The Desire of the Museum*, two years later.

²⁵³ Douglas Crimp, “On the Museum’s Ruins”, *October*, 1980, n°. 13, summer, 1980, pp. 41-57. In this article Crimp applies the ideas of Foucault to an analysis of museums and describes them as ‘institutions of confinement’, comparable to Foucault’s investigations on asylums and prisons.

²⁵⁴ For the dissemination of French Theory see Sylvère Lotringer, “Doing Theory” in Sylvère Lotringer and Sander Cohen (ed.), *French theory in America*, New York, Routledge, 2000 and François Cusset, *French Theory, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Cie et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux États-Unis*, Paris, La Découverte, 2003. On the ISP see Miwon Kwon, “Reflections on the Intellectual History of the ISP”, *Independent Study Program: 25 years, 1968-1993*, New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993; Thomas Crow, “Marx to Sharks: The Art-Historical ‘80s,” *Artforum*, New York, April 2003, pp. 47-48; Howard Singerman, “A History of the Whitney Independent Study Program - In Theory & Practice”, *Artforum*, New York, February, 2004.

²⁵⁵ For a overview of New York artistic scene in 1980s, see the monographic issue of *Artforum*, October 1999; Alison Pearlman *Unpackaging art of the 1980s*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2003; and the exhibitions *Around 1984: A Look at Art in the Eighties*, curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, P.S.1, 2000 and *East Village USA* (exh. cat.), curated by Dan Cameron, New York, New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005.

Intellectual arrangements

Marcia Tucker's permanent challenge in all her projects at the New Museum was to dismantle museological authority and, throughout the 1980s, a number of exhibitions and catalogues helped to define the critical profile of her institution.²⁵⁶ *Damaged Goods: Desire and Economy of the Object*, curated by Brian Wallis in 1986, is a significant example of the new scenario.²⁵⁷ The exhibition addressed the crossing of art and political economy, taking its lead from Baudrillard's writing, through an emphasis on the production of the desire for commodities.²⁵⁸ On a discursive level it stressed how the representation of desire was constitutive to visibility, playing with the double meaning of the word fetish, in Freudian and Marxist terms. It claimed to reveal how museum installations and displays in department stores and shop windows were part of the same rationale. As Brian Wallis states in the catalogue: 'The abstraction of the consumer object has been achieved through the spectacular effects of advertising, display, and presentation strategies which are directed more at motivating the viewer's desire for consumption than at demonstrating the utilitarian properties of the object'.²⁵⁹ Reflection on media and mediation was an essential part of the show and they were addressed with contemporaneous deconstructive tools.

The relation between art and capitalist economy was not a new exhibition theme in New York of the 1980s. In the early 1980s, shows such as Group Material's *Consumption: Metaphor, Pastime, Necessity* and *Facere/Facis* (1981), and the shows curated by Collins and

²⁵⁶ Some of the exhibitions that took place at the New Museum: *Art and Ideology* (1984), curated by Benjamin Buchloh, Donald Kuspit, Lucy Lippard, Nilda Peraza and Lowery Sims; *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* (1984-1985) curated by Kate Linker and Jane Weinstock; *Damaged Goods: Desire and the Economy of the Object* (1986), curated by Brian Wallis; *The Art of Memory: The Loss of History* (1985-1986), curated by William Olander.

²⁵⁷ It took place in The New Museum from June 21st to August 10th 1986, curated by Brian Wallis. Contributing artists were Judith Barry, Gretchen Bender, Barbara Bloom, Andrea Fraser, Jeff Koons, Junsten Ladda, Louise Lawler, Ken Lum, Allan McCollum and Haim Steinbach. The catalogue included texts by Hal Foster, Deborah Bershad, Marcia Tucker and artists' statements. A description of the pieces in Brian Wallis' Introduction in the catalogue and of the show in Vivien Raynor, "Objects are subject of 'damaged goods'", *New York Times*, July 18th, 1986.

²⁵⁸ Commenting on the intellectual framework of the moment, Juli Carson states that "*Difference, Damaged Goods*, and *Interim* accorded with an art practice in which feminist theories incorporated a psychoanalytic approach in order to question the politics of visual practice, rather than promoting a separate sociological or ideological imperative for gendered production. From this position [Jacqueline] Rose and others advocated a deconstructive approach (akin to that of Barthes) in place of a feminist corrective, such as gender parity, in Juli Carson, "On Discourse as Monument: Institutional Spaces and Feminist Problematics", in Julie Ault (ed.), *Alternative Art New York 1965-1985*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002, p. 147.

²⁵⁹ Brian Wallis, "A Product you could kill for", in *Damaged Goods: Desire and the Economy of the Object* (exh. cat), New York, The New Museum, 1986.

Milazzo dealt with the topic in different ways.²⁶⁰ The exhibition *For Presentation and Display: Ideal Settings* (Artists Space, 1984) reflected on a similar thematic.²⁶¹ Also, so-called appropriationist and neoconceptual artists, championed by Douglas Crimp, Craig Owens and Hal Foster, were close to this type of critical discourse.²⁶² Through their different takes on art, media and economy, *Damaged Goods* highlighted the display of commodities (Jeff Koons, Allan McCollum), the staging of objects or collections (Barbara Bloom) and the necessary mediation that any exhibition implied, such as in Andrea Fraser's contribution (*Damaged Goods Gallery Talk Starts Here*, 1986), one of her first docent tours.

Judith Barry, with the help of Ken Saylor, produced a self-reflexive installation design that stressed the importance of mediation. In the installation of the show she specifically emphasised the similarities between museums and department stores displays. Judith Barry also contributed a text to the catalogue surveying a brief history of exhibition design.²⁶³ Barry begins her essay with a reference to El Lissitzky as the first designer that explicitly encouraged the role of the active viewer in the exhibition space (present in his two projects for a *Demonstration Room* in Dresden and Hannover, 1926-1927). Throughout the text she distinguishes two different models of exhibition design: on the one hand, the theatrical, as in Natural History Museum dioramas and glass cabinets for fetishised domestic objects; and on the other, the ideological, as in displays of the spoils of war or the meta-designed installations of functionalist objects. Between these two poles, and as a synthesis of both, stands the retail store, in which consumption and possession are organised around the

²⁶⁰ Some of Collins and Milazzo most known exhibitions: *Still Life with Transaction: Former Objects, New Moral Arrangements and the History of Surfaces* (International with Monument, 1986), *The New Capital* (White Columns, 1984), *Paravision* (Postmaster's Gallery, 1985) and *The New Poverty* (John Gibson Gallery, 1987). Also from 1982 to 1984 they edited *Effects: Magazine for New Art Theory*. A compilation of lectures at Yale University: Collins and Milazzo, *Hyperframes: A Post-Appropriation Discourse, Vol. 1*, Paris, Éditions Antoine Candau, 1989. A profile of this duo of curators and critics in "Peter Halley, Jeff Koons and the Art of Marketing and Consumption-Analysis" in Alison Pearlman *op. cit.*, p. 116-120, and in John C. Welchman (ed.), *Art after appropriation: essays on art in the 1990s*, G+B Arts International, 2001, p. 31.

²⁶¹ See Hal Foster, "Subversive Signs" *Art in America*, n° 70/10, March 1982, pp. 88-92; Andrea Fraser, "In and Out of place", *Art in America*, 76/3, June 1985, pp. 122-129; and Johanna Burton, "For Presentation and Display: Some Art of the '80s'", 2005, available at: web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/amcarticles/Burton-80s.pdf (last accessed 28/08/2011).

²⁶² In Hal Foster's words: 'The most provocative American art of the present is situated at such a crossing—of institutions of art and political economy, of representations of sexual identity and social life. This shift in practice entails a shift in position: the artist becomes a manipulator of signs more than a producer of art objects, and the viewer an active reader of messages rather than a passive contemplator of the aesthetic or consumer of the spectacular. (...) These later artists stress the economic manipulation of the art object—its circulation and consumption as a commodity-sign—more than its physical determination by its frame', Hal Foster, "Subversive Signs" *Art in America*, n° 70/10, March 1982, pp. 88-92.

²⁶³ Later on, in 1992, in *Mining the Museum's* catalogue, Lisa Corrin recounts a brief history of practical interventions in museums, in order to build a genealogy for her curatorial invitation to Wilson. Fred Wilson and Lisa Corrin (ed.), *Mining the Museum: An Installation*, New York, New Press, 1994.

spectacular and the symbolic alike. It is noteworthy that in this early survey of exhibition display, Barry overlooks the important role of Frederick Kiesler regarding the connection between exhibitions and department stores, which he had formulated in New York, such as the *Space House* (1933).²⁶⁴

Judith Barry's text is significant because she emphasises the way in which El Lissitzky's exhibition encouraged the participative viewer to go from mere perception to subject positioning and action.²⁶⁵ For Barry, 'presentational forms', such as architecture, refer to ways in which we experience social relations. In her view, we should confront the assumed neutrality of the exhibition space and elaborate exhibition designs (that represent social relations) able to describe various subject positions. The title of her essay is significant for our purposes: "Dissenting Spaces". Before Rancière's popularisation of this term, it was already understood that the exhibition space could be used as a mechanism of dissensus. In the display design for *Damaged Goods*, Barry and Saylor put into motion three major features: the contextual historicisation of the spaces (in this case the department store), the emphasis of mediation and display, and the distancing (estrangement) of the spectator. As Jean Fisher has pointed out, the combination of unorthodox lighting effects and display devices helped to break down the conventional 'order of the space', inviting the viewers to recast their relation to the objects.²⁶⁶ Among these devices were disproportionately high plinths and narrow corridors, which made the viewer uncomfortable and uneasy. A confidence in the spectator's awareness, through experiential and intellectual means, was vital to understanding the exhibition's possibilities as a critical tool. In the overtheorised atmosphere of the mid-eighties, the significance given to working with spaces and

²⁶⁴ See Frederick Kiesler, *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display*, New York, Brentano, 1930. For a study of the *Space House*, see Beatriz Colomina, "La psique del edificio: La *Space House* de Frederick Kiesler", in *Doble Exposición. Arquitectura a través del arte*, Madrid, Akal, 2006. This article was first published in French in *Frederick Kiesler: Artiste-architecte* (exh. cat.), Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1996.

²⁶⁵ Barry's article quoted Benjamin Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography", *October* n° 30 autumn 1984. Buchloh had previously written an article about El Lissitzky and Broodthaers, "The Museum Fictions of Marcel Broodthaers", in the pioneering book by AA Bronson and Peggy Gale (ed.), *Museums by Artists*, Toronto, Art Metropole, 1983.

²⁶⁶ Jean Fisher, "Through the Mirror of Seduction... Judith's Barry Film and Video Installations", in *Vampire in the Text. Narratives of Contemporary Art*, London, inIVA, 2003, p. 27.



Fig. 10: New Museum. *Damaged Goods*. Installation view.



Fig. 11: New Museum. *Damaged Goods*. Installation view.



Fig. 12: New Museum. *Damaged Goods*. Installation view.

installations practically, as a way of being critical through practice, is especially notable in Judith Barry's subversion of display conventions.

In his article "The Exhibition Catalog as a Distancing Apparatus", Robert C. Morgan draws attention to the increasing importance of catalogues in an exhibition's discursive justification, to the detriment of the artworks.²⁶⁷ He claims that:

as a catalog, *Damaged Goods* is a brilliant commentary on consumer culture. As an exhibition *Damaged Goods* is a bland illustration of everything stated in the catalog. In one sense the exhibition was superfluous to the tightness of the curatorial intention, which exuded self-righteousness and puritanical guilt.²⁶⁸

It is important to note that Morgan is not against a theoretical background for shows; in the article he also criticises the 1987 Whitney Biennial catalogue, which he uses as a term of comparison, for its lack of any critical interpretation. But for him, an overdetermination of the exhibition by way of the catalogue cancels any possibility of an internalized discourse emanating through the spectator's direct contact and reflection on the works. He even states that *Damaged Goods* would have functioned better as an exhibition in the context of a department store. In any case his assertion indicates a new era in which discursive battles were increasingly played out in the theoretical realm. This discursive hegemony has eclipsed the significance of practical approaches in the form of exhibitions, such as *Damaged Goods* or *Rooms with a view*, on art history.

Libidinal arrangements

Two years after *Rooms with a View* (and three after *Damaged Goods*), *The Desire of the Museum* (1989) opened in Federal Reserve Plaza.²⁶⁹ This show can be regarded as a visual conclusion to theoretical reflections on museums as discursive sites in the 1980s and one of the first examples of the proliferation of exhibitions addressing museum collections and displays, which we have discussed above.²⁷⁰ *The Desire of the Museum* can be placed in other

²⁶⁷ Robert C. Morgan "The Exhibition Catalog as a Distancing Apparatus: Current Tendencies in the Promotion of Exhibition Documents", *Leonardo*, vol. 24, n° 3, 1991, The M.I.T. Press, pp. 341-344.

²⁶⁸ Robert C. Morgan, *Ibid*, p. 343.

²⁶⁹ The exhibition took place in the Whitney Museum of American Art (July 12th to September 12th), downtown at Federal Reserve Plaza.

²⁷⁰ See note 23 of this chapter.

significant coordinates. The show was put up by five of the nine students of the Curatorial and Critical Studies Program of the Whitney Independent Study Program.²⁷¹ Under the supervision of Hal Foster, it was undoubtedly informed by his theoretical approach – in particular his use of psychoanalysis as a methodological tool.²⁷² The Whitney Independent Study Program’s (ISP) director, Ron Clark, later observed that ‘Hal thought that exhibitions should embody theoretical and critical arguments. He saw the ISP as a chance to experiment and see if it was possible to develop alternative curatorial forms, to challenge the established conventions.’²⁷³ The exhibition’s premise was that museums have an unconscious and, by implication, a series of conflicting goals and sublimated desires. The exhibition started with a wall text asking, ‘What does the museum want?’. This question was answered by the exhibition as if it were a ‘talking cure’, able to speak and reveal the museum’s desires and repressions. Museums were considered as sites in which aesthetic and social control, market demands and corporate advertising simultaneously took place.²⁷⁴ The show presented, among others, pieces by Marcel Duchamp, Hans Haacke, Andrea Fraser, Joseph Kosuth, Sherrie Levine and Allan McCollum. The exhibition also included a work by Mark Dion, a recent graduate of the ISP, (*The (Un)Making of Nature*, 1989), that looked at painting fragments discarded by restorers, and cropped because they didn’t fit the frame, a reflection on the aesthetic control exercised by these agents.²⁷⁵

²⁷¹ Students in the Curatorial Program of that year: Sarah Bayliss, Amy Homes, Christopher Hoover, Miwon Kwon, Timothy Landers, Jackie McAllister, Catsou Roberts, Benjamin Weil, Marek Wieczorek. The last five organised *The Desire of the Museum*.

²⁷² For Hal Foster it was his second show as tutor of the Curatorial Program.

²⁷³ The hiring of Hal Foster in 1987 as supervisor of the Curatorial Program produced a shift in the way exhibitions were considered. The former name of the Program, Art History/Museum Studies Program, was divided in two separate programs, Critical Studies Program and Curatorial Program, although Foster was in charge of both, as Senior Instructor and Supervisor. The ISP gained in critical and theoretical methodologies in comparison with the previous moment, oriented more to an aesthetic approach. Informing exhibitions with criticality and experimentation was definitely in Foster’s mind. See *Independent Study Program: 40 years*, New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 2008, p. 15.

²⁷⁴ Contributing artists: Richard Artschwager, Ashley Bickerton, Mark Dion and Jason Simon, Marcel Duchamp, Andrea Fraser, Guerilla Girls, Hans Haacke, Silvia Kolbowski, Joseph Kosuth, Barbara Kruger, Liz Larner, Louise Lawler, Sherrie Levine, Peter Nagy, Allan McCollum, Aimee Rankin, Ad Reinhardt, Julia Scher and Laurie Simmons.

²⁷⁵ Other works to be mentioned: Allan McCollum (plaster surrogates); Julia Scher (closed-circuit surveillance video set-up); Aimee Rankin (peep-box pieces); Guerilla Girls (poster); Liz Larner (machine scratching museum wall), Mark Dion and Jason Simon (vandalized painting fragment, secret sins of restorers), Andrea Fraser (docent tour) and Louise Lawler (*Interesting*); Hans Haacke (*Seurat's 'Les Poseuses'*, small version), Marcel Duchamp (*Boîte en Valise*), Ad Reinhardt (charts), Kruger (*Buy me: I'll change your life*), Ashley Bickerton, Richard Artschwager, Silvia Kolbowski, Joseph Kosuth, Peter Nagy, Laurie Simmons, and Sherrie Levine.



Fig. 13: Whitney Museum at Federal Reserve Plaza.
The Desire of the Museum. Installation view.

The concept of the museum conveyed by *The Desire of the Museum* implied a wide range of desiring agents (curators, restorers, trustees, artists, educators, collectors), but also the public. Some of the works tried to reflect on audience behaviour, such as Louise Lawler's simple wall text piece saying 'Interesting' (*Interesting*, 1984), a banal comment on shows from the part of the public. The show suggested the idea that the exhibition also had an 'unconscious' desire to do with audience, and how it constructed the public as an Other whose desire it tries to fulfil. In this regard, it is useful to compare two exhibition reviews, one by Roberta Smith (herself an ISP alumni), and one by Peter Schjeldahl, focusing on their response to the way the exhibition made use of some devices to make the museum's unconscious visible.²⁷⁶ There were parallel silver bands on the wall denoting the eye-level area; on separate columns, the words 'Quantity' and 'Quality' were written, and the wall texts were titled 'Institutional unconscious', 'Institutional taste analysis' and 'Museum fatigue'; the sewage pipe was painted bright red; and the hallway leading to the toilets was transformed (Smith uses the word 'exoticized') using red lights. The two critics described these interventions differently, and are worth quoting directly. Smith affirmed that 'the curators have perpetrated a series of alternately stylish and witty curatorial interventions throughout the exhibition, in an attempt to articulate the museum exhibition as creative product, physical environment, mental exercise and sender of subliminal messages.'²⁷⁷ Schjeldahl, by contrast, argued that 'The installation calls insistent attention to mechanisms of museum display, in case you never noticed them before', and then insists on the idea by

²⁷⁶ Roberta Smith, "The Whitney Interprets Museums' Dreams", *The New York Times*, July 23rd, 1989 and Peter Schjeldahl, "The Desire of the Museum", review from August 23rd, 1989, in *The 7 days art columns, 1988-1990*, New York, Figures Press, 1990, pp. 142-144.

²⁷⁷ Roberta Smith, "The Whitney Interprets Museums' Dreams", *Ibid*.

saying that ‘the Incredibly Stupid Viewer is never ceasing to learn for the first time that, for instance, museums reflect the interests of the people who fund them. That hot tip pretty much exhausts this show’s sociological vision’.²⁷⁸

This discrepancy of opinions may be due to the fact that the two critics had different types of visitor in mind. Smith presupposed an accomplice to the curators’ intentions, ready to appreciate the wittiness of their proposal and its counter-ideological basis. Whereas Schjeldahl presupposed a ‘canny art lover’, well-informed, moderately skeptical and fully able to appreciate works for him or herself.²⁷⁹ Schjeldahl’s connoisseurship (and influential position) allowed him to further his criticism by targeting Hal Foster directly.²⁸⁰ Despite their diverging views, however, it is important to underline the confidence that both Smith and Schjeldahl had in relation to the capacities of the show to provoke an experience in the viewer, whether critical or aesthetic. Another point of debate between the two critics was the role played by the institution, from which the legitimacy of the critical project could be derived. Schjeldahl presupposed a total complicity from the institution, while Smith pointed out several dissenting points, concerning control and censorship.²⁸¹ Once again, it is important to underline the importance ascribed to exhibitions as sites of dissensus, at least in this New York moment. Contemporaneous with Group Material’s second phase shows, such as *Americana* (1985) or *Democracy* (1988-89), the New Museum and the ISP’s exhibitions provided practical discursive examples, which were not illustrations of previous theories, but constituted different way to produce knowledge.

²⁷⁸ Peter Schjeldahl, “The Desire of the Museum”, *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ Peter Schjeldahl described Fraser’s piece as ‘good old American social satire’, *Ibid.*, p.143.

²⁸⁰ Foster was described as ‘essentially art-hating intellectual of a fuzzy leftist stripe’ and his type of artistic discourse as a ‘critique Zeitgeist that is a “hypocritical mandarin”’, using critique to gain power in the artistic field’, *Ibid.*, p.143. Besides this symbolic battle, what was at stake here was the “unconscious” of the critics, which spoke not only of the visitor attending the exhibition, but also mainly of their (desired) readers. Schjeldahl’s agenda was affirmed via Hans Haacke’s piece: ‘Haacke’s 14-year-old investigative reporting stands out as prophetic, though not of current trends in “critique”, whose main concern is to dissemble their own power-seeking agendas. Rather, it anticipates a present healthy frankness in art journalism’, *Ibid.*, p.144 .

²⁸¹ Schjeldahl asserted: ‘It is an exercise in flat-out hypocrisy: the alleged subversion of museums by museum trainees. Proof of its falseness is the complacency of the Whitney in this use of the museum’s corporate-hosted Wall Street-area branch. Smith affirmed: Ironically, the exhibition itself precipitated conflicting desires between the Whitney administration and the show’s curators. According to Timothy Landers and Marek Wieczorek, the museum was at first reluctant to let them use the word "desire" in the show's title because of its sexual connotations. Nor were the show's organizers allowed to print, parallel to their catalogue texts, a chronology of the Whitney's founding, growth and corporate sponsorships that is routinely available for press purposes. Nor were they allowed to incorporate more suggestive excerpts from dreams among the words and phrases on the gallery's walls’. It was not the first or the last time that the ISP curators needed to negotiate with the Whitney information that doesn’t necessarily confirm an unconscious or a ‘hidden agenda’, but definitely corroborates the fact that, as any other institutional formation, museums are criss-crossed by different and latent interests. Miwon Kwon also talks about Whitney’s limits in Miwon Kwon, “Reflections on the Intellectual History of the ISP” in *Independent Study Program: 25 years*, New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993.

4.2. Exhibitions at the perimeter

It is clear by now that at the turn of the 1980s, exhibitions began to be increasingly significant as discursive sites.²⁸² *Rooms with a View*, like *Art/Artefact* and *We the People*, were concerned with exhibition display conventions and the ideological agendas behind museums, issues that were being discussed in various forms in the New York intellectual and artistic realm. *Rooms with a View* was regarded by Wilson as an ‘investigation’ or a ‘scientific experiment’ in which he could activate a dialogue among mainstream and peripheral artists, and between the artists and how they were framed in different artistic and cultural traditions (*culture, content, context* as stated in the subtitle).²⁸³ To a certain extent, this institutional questioning was a product of the impact of post-structural theories and the expansion of a new kind of criticality. However, the work of Fred Wilson and Jimmie Durham belonged to a different context. Wilson wanted to exhibit artists outside the North American mainstream: ‘at that time artists of colour – Black, Latino and Asian artists, and Native American artists –were very outside the mainstream. We were just in our communities or in our galleries, that we had created just for us. We were in dialogue with each other, but not with the mainstream American culture’.²⁸⁴

Over the last twenty years, Wilson’s work has been referred to as ‘institutional critique’, a characterisation that is indebted to his projects after *Mining the Museum* (1992). For instance, Jennifer A. Gonzalez, though dealing specifically with historical colonialism, race dominance and visual culture through installation art and the questioning the display of culture(s), forgets to inscribe Wilson in his own background as an African-Caribbean-American.²⁸⁵ The artistic genealogy she builds for him links his work to Hans Haacke and Louise Lawler, and places him at the heart of debates led by Hal Foster, Miwon Kwon and

²⁸² This is also constable in the impact that exhibitions, such as “*Primitivism*” in *Twentieth-Century Art* (MoMA, 1984) and *Magiciens de la Terre* (Pompidou, 1989), had in the critics and art historians.

²⁸³ Wilson states: ‘It was really an investigation, it wasn’t an art work, it was an investigation about what is the display doing’. (...) This was like my scientific experiment’, Fred Wilson, Interview with the author, New York, 10/02/2009.

²⁸⁴ Fred Wilson, Interview with the author, New York, 10/02/2009.

²⁸⁵ Jennifer A. González, “Fred Wilson: Material Museology” in *Subject to Display. Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art*, The MIT Press, 2008, pp. 64-119.

Frazer Ward, all of whom deal with the value of 'institutional critique', and all of them, included González, related to the ISP.²⁸⁶

I would like to argue that institutional critique can be a useful way to frame Wilson's practice, but does not give an adequate account of *Rooms with a View's* singular configuration and position in the New York context. Wilson's personal background and education are far more important to his early works than antecedents that only function in the discursive field of art history. In an interview with Leslie King-Hammond in 1992, Wilson talks about his artistic education and how he started working in a social service agency running art programs in East Harlem.²⁸⁷ He comments that he didn't know anybody from the art world and it was through this job and working in the Metropolitan Museum that he began to be introduced to the African-American artist community.²⁸⁸ As Leslie King-Hammond euphemistically remarks, Wilson was 'at the perimeter of the burgeoning conceptual movement in the New York scene'.²⁸⁹ Wilson's background was complemented with travels in Africa, Egypt, Europe and Peru in those years. Despite this cosmopolitan background, Wilson speaks extensively about his position being an African-American in school:

In some other publications I'm characterized as having a very cosmopolitan background, which to a degree I have. (...) My parents gave me a broader worldview. But to say I have a cosmopolitan background, it seems to me, flattens out my childhood experiences. I mean, the Bronx and Westchester –that's not exactly cosmopolitan. This kind of language sometimes has a tendency to homogenize one's race and class identity [...] I would say that part of the problem was that I was not aware of what being the only African-American child [in the class] was doing to me at

²⁸⁶ González affirms: 'Hans Haacke and Louise Lawler, two of Wilson's immediate predecessors, share his critical approach to the social, economic, and ideological function of the museum of art', in Jennifer A. Gonzalez, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

²⁸⁷ He studied in the High School of Music and Art in Bronx and then went to SUNY Purchase. He comments about three important professors for him: '[Abe] Ajay (older and a formalist); Tal Treeter (I really liked his use of ideas as the basis for what he did); and Antonio Frasconi (from Uruguay), (...) he was good for me because we had a certain understanding about otherness and he was also committed to social issues in his work'. He didn't go to grad school, but attended lessons with Robert Morris in Hunter. Leslie King-Hammond, "A conversation with Fred Wilson", in Fred Wilson and Lisa Corrin (ed.), *Mining the Museum: An Installation*, New York, New Press, 1994.

²⁸⁸ Wilson recalls: 'I met Lowery Sims and later, Randy Williams, when she was into community service. She was my one connection to the art world. (...) I met David Hammons through Florence Hardy when David first came to New York. Florence worked with Lowery Sims in the community affairs department at the Metropolitan', in Leslie King-Hammond, *Ibid.*, p. 28

²⁸⁹ Leslie King-Hammond, *Ibid.*, p. 23.

that time. (...) I remember feeling at the end of elementary school that I represented 'the Race' (...) I was under extreme pressure... being misunderstood... and not really understanding (...) I didn't totally understand that it was a racial thing.²⁹⁰

This conflict with the narratives of institutional critique approach has also been stated by semiotician and professor Walter Mignolo, who prefers to inscribe him in what he calls 'de-colonial aesthetics', a notion whose full relation to art history is still being developed.²⁹¹ During the 1980s Wilson worked in several administrative positions in the art world. First he was employed as administrative assistant in Just Above Midtown Gallery, a job that inserted him in the emerging African-American artistic circle.²⁹² Later on, he took the above-mentioned position in Longwood Arts Gallery where he could fully develop his ideas as a curator. Also during the 1980s he participated as an artist in several group shows and public art projects. *Rooms with a View* therefore comes from a conjunction of various facts in Wilson's background. On the one hand, his deep institutional knowledge of three of the more important museums in New York (Metropolitan, MoMA and Natural History); on the other, the extensive familiarity of the non-white artistic community, due to his jobs in East Harlem, Just Above Midtown Gallery and Longwood Projects.²⁹³ Wilson was prepared to build a 'museum of his own', and this encouraged him to change his administrative job for a curating position.²⁹⁴

I would contend that Wilson's projects need to be understood, not in the institutional critique legacy, even if he uses a self-reflexive exhibition strategy, but in relation to a different lineage, which connects him with his own background, both as an African

²⁹⁰ Fred Wilson, in Leslie King-Hammond, "A conversation with Fred Wilson", in Fred Wilson and Lisa Corrin (ed.), *Mining the Museum: An Installation*, New York, New Press, 1994, p. 25.

²⁹¹ Walter Mignolo, *Museums in the Colonial Horizon of Modernity*, in Annual CIMAM Conference (International Association of Museums of Modern Art), edited by Board of CIMAM, 2005. Available at: http://www.cimam.org/arxius/recursos/CIMAM_2005_Annual_Conference_-_Museums_Intersections_in_a_Global_Scene.pdf (last accessed 28/08/2011).

²⁹² She adds 'In 1981, Wilson was hired by Linda Goode-Bryant to work at her Just Above Midtown Gallery. Goode-Bryant was one of the few aggressive, innovative visionaries who provided a space for emerging African-American artists to exhibit their work. As an administrative assistant in her gallery, Fred Wilson witnessed the first blossoming of the careers of David Hammons, Senga Nengudi, Maren Hassenger, Randy Williams, and Houston Conwill', in Leslie King-Hammond, *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁹³ Wilson recalls: 'After college I was also hiring artists to work in museums in East Harlem for the program I administered (...). Just Above Midtown Gallery enabled me to get a broad overview of the art community'. In the Gallery he ran the program *The business of being an artist*, a series of workshops providing artists with access and information on the art market. Leslie King-Hammond, *Ibid.*, pp. 27 and 31.

²⁹⁴ Wilson affirms: 'I realized that curating could be more fun than the administration I was doing, so I organized one show. Then I got a job in the Bronx running a gallery', in Leslie King-Hammond, *Ibid.*, p. 31.

American and with his experiences in the different museums.²⁹⁵ *Rooms with a View*, *Art/Artifact* and *We The People* raise two different, but complementary questions. Vogel was interested in how the power and knowledge formation about ‘primitive art’ came about historically.²⁹⁶ Wilson, Fisher and Durham asked if that ideological scheme was persistent, and, if so, how it affected contemporary artists. To fully understand how primitive, contemporary and modern art were articulated in the New York context, and how these categories were still operative conditioning non-white artists, I will devote the following section to examine this crossroads²⁹⁷.

Rooms with a past: Modernism and Primitivism in the New York context

Although the relationship between modern art and non-Western cultures has a long history, my argument will begin at a specific moment, when modern and primitive art started to be disseminated simultaneously in New York at the end of the 1910s. This was a time when the distinction between aesthetic and ethnographic began to be eroded with the emergence of twentieth-century modernism and anthropology. A large amount of non-Western objects underwent a reallocation from material culture to sculpture, in their reclassification as art. This shift speaks of a redefinition of art at the core of western theory of art that takes place alongside the appropriation of tribal productions from modernist artists, in what James Clifford calls a shifting historical ‘taxonomic moment’.²⁹⁸

This ‘taxonomic moment’ did not affect primitive art alone, but implied modern art as well. As Shelly Errington has argued in the United States, specifically in New York, the

²⁹⁵ Previously Wilson had attended, as a high school student, educational programs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This initial contact with the institutional setting and the possibility to see its internal functioning allowed him a very early perception of the museum’s procedures: ‘In the basement you could see the plaster casts covered just very casually in plastic, because they were just being stored; and then in the galleries there would be these same things with an incredible light. Just to me the idea of seeing things having different kind of lives, different kinds of ways of thinking about them, even within the same institution, was something that I thought about. You usually go to a museum and you don’t see storage, you just see the exhibition space, so you don’t think how else they could be in the world. Just being there off hours, in a much more casual environment, was really interesting’, in Fred Wilson, Interview with the author, New York, 10/02/09.

²⁹⁶ I am using the notion of primitive as a constructed category. I will avoid the use of inverted commas. For a definition of the category, see Shelly Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and other tales of Progress*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998.

²⁹⁷ The relationship between the modern and the primitive has pierced the history of New York institutions, such as the MoMA, the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Primitive Art, the Center for African Art, the Whitney Studio Club, 291 Gallery, the Walter and Louise Arensberg collection and others beyond New York, but equally important, such as the Albert C. Barnes Foundation. This question was also at the core of “Primitivism” in *Twentieth-Century Art* (1985) and *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989).

²⁹⁸ James Clifford, “Histories of the Tribal and the Modern”, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1988, pp. 189-214.

collecting and promotion of modern and primitive art were closely intertwined. Errington examines how between the two world wars the MoMA was the major venue for the first historical and discursive appraisal of modern art and also for primitive art exhibitions, and how its trustees, especially Abby Aldrich and Nelson Rockefeller, were instrumental in the process.²⁹⁹ The MoMA invested great effort in exposing and educating the public to these two new forms of art and the search for legitimacy became a common enterprise for both. Primitive and modern art shared not only the need for validation in the artistic realm, but as Clifford argues there is a certain convergence between anthropology and modern art, especially in the connection of French ethnography and surrealism. This conjunction is particularly embodied in the shared ground of collecting and exhibiting. As he suggests, the interwar artists tried to make familiar objects look strange, just as museums were forcing strange objects to become familiar.³⁰⁰ Estrangement, displacement and de/re-contextualisation were common tools for non-western and modern art objects alike.

The appearance of modern and primitive art was not only a matter of epistemological categorisation, but it required the solution for a practical problem: how were these two forms of art going to be displayed? Along with the undeniable and institutional responsibility of the MoMA and the Rockefellers, Susan Vogel's history of display conventions foregrounds the role played by the installers, such as Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Steichen. Their 291 Gallery exhibition of African art in 1914 already exhibited African art purified of its functional look, while at the same time introducing modern art to the U.S. in an exhibition called *Statuary in Wood by African Savages: (The Roots of Modern Art)*.³⁰¹ Vogel points out that at the end of the nineteenth century, African art was

²⁹⁹ One of the MoMA's founders was Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, a promoter of modern art who was also collecting American folk art, both tastes very advanced for the time. (...) The major collector who made visible and legitimated objects from Africa, Oceania, and the Americas as primitive art was Nelson Rockefeller. For Errington the fifty years between 1935 and 1985 saw the emergence and institutionalization of authentic primitive art, in a period's beginning with MoMA's 1935 exhibit *African Negro Art*, whose catalog was written by James Johnson Sweeney, and its ending with the same institution's 1984 exhibition "*Primitivism*" in *Twentieth Century Art*. For her, parallel to modern's art secure establishment, primitive art's legitimacy crystallized institutionally with the 1957 opening of the Museum of Primitive Art (situated, perhaps significantly, directly behind MoMA on 54th Street). Nelson Rockefeller's collection formed its core. With the opening of the new museum, MoMA ceased exhibiting primitive art (with the exception of *Art of the Asmat* in 1962). Shelly Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and other Tales of Progress*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998.

³⁰⁰ James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* vol. 23, n° 4, October 1981, pp. 539-564. For Clifford, both artists and ethnographers articulate 'foreignness' as a coefficient of context. The notion of ethnographic surrealism is discussed in Michel Beaujour, "Anthropology and Ethnography", in Lawrence D. Krizman (ed.), *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Columbia University Press, 2005, p 136-140, but the author still assumes the connection.

³⁰¹ In the catalogue, Vogel stated that Alfred Stieglitz played an instrumental role in the installation of modern and African art.

mounted both in art and ethnological museums in the same way as Greek, Roman or Chinese antiquities, regarded as historical objects.³⁰² In 291 Gallery's installations, the objects were isolated, removed from their original context and presented to resemble western (modern) art in an aestheticised mode.

As a matter of fact, there was no previous answer as to how to display neither a displaced artefact, nor a decontextualised ready-made, something that affected the incipient legitimacy of both types of objects. If we examine the 1917 Stieglitz's photograph of R. Mutt's *Fountain*, published in *The Blind Man*, the small plinth seems at odds with the urinal, which stands unsteadily on it. The urinal casts a shadow on the pedestal that reinforces the feeling of instability. In the installation of African art at 291 Gallery, the plinths appeared more as columns or a vertical accumulation of different size squares, with a strong similarity to the Brancusi's show that took place in 1914, also at 291.³⁰³

This uncertainty about how to display can be used to undermine museums as sites of authority. In fact, it was one of the conceptual bottom lines of Susan Vogel's exhibition, a proposal that could only be made in practice, as it needed to be tested in the exhibition space. In the catalogue, Vogel presents three different dilemmas regarding how three different 'primitive' pieces would look under an aesthetic gaze, if they were forced to.³⁰⁴ An Abomey repousse brass head could easily pass as modern, if it was to be installed in a manner that quoted Brancusi's sleeping-head position. A Zande hunting net could be decontextualised and placed in a situation where it invaded the spectator's space, resembling contemporary art installations.³⁰⁵ Vogel took the risk of installing some of these pieces and some anthropologists were receptive to Vogel's proposal. One of them, Alfred Gell, even wrote an article imagining how an exhibition made from actual traps, based on

³⁰² The figures were set off by square or rectangular pedestals; the masks and heads were on necklike blocks; and some masks hung on the wall like relief sculptures.

³⁰³ The openness regarding how to display modern art is also present in the different modes of exhibiting designed by El Lissitzky (*Abstract Cabinet*) and Moholy-Nagy (*Room of the Present*) for Alexander Dorner in the Hannover Museum and in Kiesler's galleries for Peggy Guggenheim's *Art of Our Century*.

³⁰⁴ In the case of Lozi needle cases, their 'grouping made a decorative twist', in Susan Vogel, "Introduction" to *Art/Artifact*, in Howard Morphy and Morgan Perkins (ed.) *The Anthropology of Art: a Reader*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

³⁰⁵ Vogel states: 'Twentieth-century sculptors have tended to create works that stand in the viewer's space; earlier works usually carried their own space with them, in their own scale (...) In contrast, African and Modern sculptures were generally not meant to be isolated from the viewer by a frame or base, but to invade, to share his environment. If our reference were the art of our time, and not that of a century ago, we might want to show African sculpture without barriers or mounts', in Susan Vogel, "Introduction" to *Art/Artifact*, in Howard Morphy and Morgan Perkins (ed.) *The Anthropology of Art: a Reader*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p. 215.

ethnographers' drawings of traps, and contemporary art works resembling traps, would look.³⁰⁶ However, the text that Arthur Danto wrote for the catalogue prompted an intense polemic from anthropologists.³⁰⁷ Gell argued that, perhaps inconspicuously, by questioning the ethnographic gaze, Vogel could have contributed to reinforcing Danto's institutional theory of art.³⁰⁸

The mutual reinforcement of modern and primitive is telling of the cultural instability of both. On the one hand, modern art, out of its context, is always in danger of symbolically disappearing, as Alfred Gell feared, commenting on Danto's approach. The museum of modern art is a self-validating sphere trying to pass as a transparent institution. On the other hand, displacement and re-inscription in an occidental syntax are the conditions in which non-western objects have performed various discursive roles in the western context. In spite of the acknowledgment of its historical configuration, there was still a divide in the relation of art and artefact, material culture and sculpture. Regarding our vision, in order to see one, we have to blind ourselves to the other, as in a reversible (duck-rabbit) image. If we look at ethnographic art as aesthetic, we renounce relating it to its context. If we contextualise it in its original culture, we probably lose its aesthetic side. One installation mode should emphasise the visual and the perceptual, and the other, the cultural and the intellectual. In this standstill point, we can examine some previous attempts to think beyond these dual image terms. In the following section I will build a genealogy that connects the early moments of the relationship between modern and primitive to the case studies, through two exhibitions that punctuated this debate in the 1940s.

A room with a *vista*

Two antecedents leading to the critical reflection on exhibitions by Fisher and Durham, Wilson and Vogel can be found in René d'Harnoncourt's exhibitions at MoMA in

³⁰⁶ Alfred Gell, "Vogel's Net. Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps" in *Journal of Material Culture*, vol. 1, n^o. 1, 1996, pp. 15-38.

³⁰⁷ Arthur Danto, "Artifact and Art.", in *Art/Artifact* (exh.cat.), New York, The Center for African Art and Prestel-Verlag, 1988. For the discussions on Danto's article, see James Faris, *op. cit.*, and Denis Dutton, "Tribal Art and Artifact", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, 1993, pp. 13-21.

³⁰⁸ As stated for instance in Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996. Danto's approach would not affect non-western objects, as they could be inscribed in other disciplines, but it didn't help contemporary art, for this would be moved into a dismissing and sterile relativism that evacuated questions of 'quality'. Danto's argument was just an extreme example of the over-idealized distinction between art and artefact, between functional artefacts and meaningful artworks, which Gell suggests was a legacy of post-Enlightenment philosophers, such as Hegel.

the 1940s. As Mary Staniewski has suggested, the MoMA in its early decades was an ‘experimental display laboratory’, with Alfred Barr, Herbert Bayer, Edward Steichen and d’Harnoncourt as key figures. Especially interesting for our purposes are two exhibitions organised by d’Harnoncourt, *Indian Art in the United States* (1941) and *Arts of the South Seas* (1946), both of them a prototype for a different, and somehow oppositional kind of installation. For *Indian Art in the United States* d’Harnoncourt devised three different sections, named Prehistoric Art, Living Traditions, and Indian Art for Modern Living. For each one, d’Harnoncourt explored a diversity of exhibition techniques experimenting with spaces, atmospheres, display props, materials, reproductions and re-enactments of rituals.

The prehistoric section dealt with archaeological items, which were displayed mostly under an aestheticising gaze. René d’Harnoncourt’s words are telling in this section, as he said that he would place these objects ‘as one would install any gallery of small sculpture using simple pedestals and cases standing before plain walls’, but even more significant are his observations that this display system will lend the pieces ‘the type of dignity usually associated with the works of the Classics’.³⁰⁹ Through this remark he reinforces the display system of antiquities, examined by Vogel. This section also involved re-creation of pieces from documentation, reproductions of sixteenth-century Pueblo murals by Hopi artists and architectural interventions to create distinct atmospheres. The second section, Living Traditions, exhibited the different Indian tribal cultures. Each group had its own gallery, with wall colours and exhibition materials consonant with the geographical and cultural context they inhabited. In this section there was a balance between the ethnographic and aesthetic approach through what Staniszewski calls an ‘abstracted technique’, that avoided the re-creation of realistic scenes (nor dioramas, nor habitat groups, neither period rooms). In this section the objects were highlighted in their functional value, and it was achieved through a combination of isolated objects with an evocative formal setting.

Ideologically, the third section, Indian Art for Modern Living, was the most complex part of the show. It was devoted to making visible the commercial potential of Native American art and products.³¹⁰ For that purpose d’Harnoncourt had to stress the compatibility between modern art and Indian art. Jackson Rushing has examined the

³⁰⁹ Jackson Rushing, “Native American Art and the New York avant-garde. A history of cultural primitivism” in Janet Catherine Berlo (ed), *The Early Years of Native American Art History*, Seattle, University of Washington Press and Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1992, p. 208.

³¹⁰ A profile of D’Harnoncourt in Robert Shrader, *The Indian Arts and Crafts Board*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1983.

exhibition reviews, focusing on their defence of American nationalism and the works' resemblances with modern art, especially surrealism and abstraction.³¹¹ This floor was divided in three galleries: Contemporary painting and sculpture, Indian art as an object of study, and Indian contributions to modern decorative arts. The first one was a genuine attempt to incorporate Indian contemporary artists to the canon.³¹² The second gallery entailed a combination of objects, pictorial charts and texts, which tried to illustrate what d'Harnoncourt thought was art's 'abstract contribution' to modern life. This contribution was, in Rushing's view, 'the opportunity to study the role of art in the economic, social and religious life of a community and the unity of technique, material and form in the face of the complicated production methods of the "machine age"'.³¹³ Finally, the Indian contributions' gallery was filled with utilitarian, modern and beautiful objects, such as Navajo rugs and blankets, Pueblo pottery, Eskimo carvings that could 'find a place in our houses and wardrobes simply because of their decorative value, but many combining utility with aesthetic merit'.³¹⁴ This section extended to personal adornment and fashion accessories..

The use of different display methods is one of the most commented upon features of this show. Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights the fact that d'Harnoncourt was very aware that there was no such thing as a neutral installation and used the different display strategies in order to achieve different goals.³¹⁵ A single show could be organised formally to produce a variety of meanings, and doing so the institutional re-inscription was made visible also to the viewers. As we have discussed above, installation played a vital role in formal legitimacy; there was no better place in which modern and non-western art could support each other than in exhibitions, a contiguity that served to originate the tautological concept of 'affinity'. The need of a context seemed to be a key issue. These shifting demands are pointed out by Rushing when he describes the elaborate interplay of contexts that *Indian Art in the United States* put forward. Rushing talks about three different strategies: aestheticization, contextualisation, and recontextualization of the objects that come

³¹¹ Jackson Rushing, *op. cit.*

³¹² He believed that 'some of the down town galleries will swing into line and accompany our exhibit with sales exhibits that should create a new steady market for Indian paintings in the east', Jackson Rushing, *op. cit.*, p. 214. Some of the artists represented: Fred Kabotie, Oscar Howe, Harrison Begay, and Monroe Tsatoke.

³¹³ Jackson Rushing, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

³¹⁴ Jackson Rushing, *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ Mary Anne Staniszewski, "Aestheticized Installations for Modernism, Ethnographic Art, and Objects of Everyday Life", in *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1998.

synthetically together for different purposes.³¹⁶ Aestheticization helped to look at Indian art with modern eyes, but at the same time made it possible to ‘grasp some of the essentials of the abstract pattern which are intrinsically Indian’.³¹⁷ This essentialisation is oriented toward a nationalist impulse, which was also part of its contextualisation in the rationale of a North American legacy. Finally, both were complemented with a recontextualisation driven unambiguously towards commercial purposes. Modernity, nation and market, disengaged from historical processes and addressed to the North American viewer, were perfectly intertwined in a complex system of installations.

³¹⁶ Jackson Rushing, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

³¹⁷ Jackson Rushing, *op. cit.*, p. 208.



Fig. 14: MoMA. *Indian Art of the United States* (1941). Installation view.



Fig. 15: MoMA. *Indian Art of the United States* (1941). Installation view.



Fig. 16: MoMA. *Arts of the South Seas* (1946). Installation view.

For *Arts of the South Seas*, d'Harnoncourt explored an expanded version of this procedure.³¹⁸ This exhibition was less driven by political or commercial goals and d'Harnoncourt tried to re-address the ethnographic/artistic divide. Instead of choosing different display options to reveal the partiality of installations, he did the opposite and combined them in a new encompassing visual synthesis that he called *vistas*. The audience could visually flow from one area to another and make formal/functional connections between the different regions of the South Seas, so the exhibition purportedly became a visual comparison device. In the way the different oceanic territories inter-related geographically and historically (as in an archipelago), contextualisation and aestheticisation could also work together in a conciliatory spirit, as a kind of suture³¹⁹. The dual image could be reconciled, even if only momentarily, by putting them in motion, as in a bird-in-the-cage thaumatrope. What the *vistas* couldn't address, being in a blind spot, was precisely the historicisation of the divide.

4.3. Between post-colonial and de-colonial aesthetics

I would like to argue that *Rooms with a View*, *We The People* and *Art/Artifact* broke the conciliatory *vistas* and the reductive formalist notion of 'affinities'. In terms of exhibition history, we could say that the exhibitions of d'Harnoncourt were not unlike those of Alexander Dorner's 'atmosphere galleries' at Hannover Landesmuseum in the 1920s and 1930s, while the three exhibitions of 1989-90 were closer to a Marxist materialist analysis of such 'period rooms' put together. Similar to d'Harnoncourt, Dorner's museology was based on the integration of works with a suitable environment. Each room was to evoke the feeling and look of a particular period by integrating the exhibit arrangements, lighting, colours, labels, recordings, and supplementary material. Later, in the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design, he even supplied each of the galleries with a headphone and speaker for music, literature, and gallery talks in 1941.³²⁰ Besides, the installation's reliance on a highly sensorial environment, no separation was made between fine and applied arts and there was information on the cultural background of each period available to visitors.

³¹⁸ A description and a plan of the show in Gregory Bateson, "Arts of the South Seas", *Art Bulletin*, 28, n° 2, June, 1946. See also Staniszewski's analysis on the show in relation to the MoMA.

³¹⁹ The notion of 'affinities' is examined in Shelly Errington, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-101.

³²⁰ Alexander Dorner, *The Way beyond Art*, New York, New York University Press, 1958; Joan Ockman, "The Road Not Taken: Alexander Dorner's Way beyond Art" in Robert E. Somol (ed.) *Autonomy and Ideology: Positioning an Avant-Garde in America*, New York, Monacelli Press, 1997; Ines Katenhusen, "Alexander Dorner (1893-1957): A German Art Historian in the United States", Washington, American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, 2002. Available at: www.aicgs.org/documents/katenhusen.pdf (last accessed 29/08/2011)

These means were oriented by a strong didactic impulse. Dorner wanted to convey that art was not an isolated phenomenon, but an integral part of history. To this end, he drew considerable attention to modern life; his view of the museum's mission was related to a logic of progress and dynamism, which has recently been re-appraised.³²¹ At the same time, d'Harnoncourt's *vistas* also played with evocative sceneries, visual dynamism, complementary documentation, contextualisation and a connection to modernity.

In spite of Dorner's refusal of an eternal and universal art history and his didactic emphasis, he was far removed from Soviet museology discussed in chapter 2, driven equally by history and education. Dorner's way of superseding Hegel, was what he called 'the pragmatic liberation of art history' proposed by John Dewey.³²² For the Soviets, Marx's superseding of Hegel required a materialist approach with class struggle in mind. It is worth quoting in length another excerpt of Aleksei Fedorov-Davydov's *The Soviet Art Museum* (1933), which helps to delineate this specific and polemic museological legacy:

Contrasts between class-based styles are created using a small number of objects in the same room. If there is plenty of material and the facilities are large enough, two rooms may be juxtaposed, each devoted to the art of a single class. Thus, for example, the contrast of two galleries showing the art of the 1860s, one devoted to the art of petit bourgeois, democracy and bourgeois liberals, the other to aristocratic art. Standing in the doorway between the two spaces the visitor can at a glance view them both and grasp via the visual aid of the installation the difference and struggle of these styles, underscored moreover by the different colour scheme of each room. This example shows very clearly the role of supplemental material in emphasizing style. In the art of the democrats their utilitarianism and political topicality, and the predominance of minor forms of easel painting are emphasized by the inclusion of drawings and magazine illustrations. In the art of the aristocracy the white furniture and porcelain of palaces underscore its tendency towards decoration and pleasure, its conventionality and affectations.³²³

³²¹ For instance, Hans Ulrich Obrist has highlighted these aspects of Dorner's works. See Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Alexander Dorner etc.... "everything is inbetween"", 1 Apr 1998, in <http://www.thing.net/eyebeam/msg00373.html> (last accessed 29/08/2011).

³²² Alexander Dorner, "Introduction", *The Way beyond Art*, New York, New York University Press, 1958.

³²³ Aleksei Federov-Davydov, translated by Wendy Salmond, "The Soviet Art Museum, 1933" in *X-Tra*, vol. 5 n° 1, fall 2002, available at http://www.x-traonline.org/past_articles.php?Articleid=156 (last accessed 27/08/2011).

The similarities between this example and *Rooms with a view*, *We the People* and *Art/Artifact* are striking, but I am not suggesting a direct influence of Marxist museology on the New York context of the late 1980s. Rather, I would like to point out the extent to which modern critical culture has been understood in terms of a materialist paradigm based on dialectics.³²⁴ In the case of Vogel, Fisher and Durham and Wilson, their dissenting options were less oriented by the Benjaminean author as producer route that I have argued was foundational to *The People's Choice*, leading the exhibition apparatus to be socialised as a means of production. The three case studies in this chapter undermined the exhibition apparatus with a different methodology, a combination of montage and dialectics, coming from a critical theory legacy, and a new theoretical framework between post-colonialism and de-coloniality. From the standpoint of the 1980s, they acknowledged the doctrinaire simplification and partiality of propaganda Soviet shows. But they also explored the juxtaposition of various temporal and epistemological frameworks in which objects were given meaning(s), provoking a fertile uncertainty. This elusiveness not only affected the way in which modern and primitive art was historically installed, as we have mentioned above, but it disturbed the whole exhibition as an ideological gesture. Shocks and instability produced a critical movement, which, at the same time, disrupted the colonial narrative and opened a space (made room) for a new one, suggesting that other forms are always possible.

In the case of *We the People*, this tricksterlike mobility questioned the viewer's desire for authenticity. Uncertainty was also at the core of Susan Vogel's strategy. Beyond the historicisation of the emergence and evolvement of primitive art as a category, she opened the question as to how African objects should be displayed in the here and now. Fisher,

³²⁴ A relationship between Marxist and anti-colonial exhibitions in surrealism in Adam Jolles, "Espèces d'espaces surréalistes: Architecture/Mise-en-scène/Exposition", in Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron (ed.), *Pensée de l'expérience, travail de l'expérimentation au sein des surréalismes et des avant-gardes en Europe*, Paris and Leuven, Peeters, 2005.



Fig. 17: Longwood Arts Project. *Rooms with a view*.
Installation view. 'Ethnographic museum' room.



Fig. 18: Longwood Arts Project. *Rooms with a view*.
Installation view. 'White cube' room.

Durham and Wilson confronted conventional museum displays, opposing disciplinary realms, artistic and anthropological, that were still kept apart, as if the ideological subtext that they were addressing didn't have prevalence in the mid-eighties, or as if all classificatory systems had been already superseded in contemporary art, which was not the case. Both shows ironically played with and subverted the idea of 'contemporary affinities', since they were built on the premise that similarities between historical Native American and African art and contemporary artists could be as artificially forced as primitive art could be to modern art.

Beyond the western modernist tradition, culturally or historically loaded objects, materials, practices and strategies, not always open to disambiguation, not always clear as for what they stood, began to challenge the artistic field.³²⁵ In parallel, cultural studies, anthropology, economy, critical theory and psychoanalysis opened up contemporary art theory to an examination of its assumptions.³²⁶ Within this expanded realm, not all post-modern art claimed the same genealogy. Some western post-modernism of the 1980s, especially in the North American context, was still built on modern genealogies, attempting only to re-vamp the canon by including what was considered modern art's Others.³²⁷ This position remained Eurocentric insofar as it perpetuated the idea of an Other to be incorporated. Several authors, such as Aníbal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo, have questioned the limitations of Eurocentric critical theory and even post-colonial theory to address colonialism, since the post-colonial project is for them so heavily dependent on post-structuralism.³²⁸ For them, 'the analytic of coloniality and the programmatic of de-coloniality' introduce a fracture with both: the Eurocentred project of post-modernity and the project of post-coloniality.³²⁹ This line of reasoning, arguably contends against the

³²⁵ I am talking not only about non western objects, but also, for instance, about community art.

³²⁶ See for instance, A. L. Rees and F. Borzello (eds.), *The New Art History*, London, Camden Press, 1986.

³²⁷ The Other of modern art has been declined as popular culture, primitive art, crafts, mass media, new and post-media and critical art.

³²⁸ Walter D. Mignolo states 'the project of post-coloniality is heavily dependent on post-structuralism as far as Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida have been acknowledged as the grounding of the post-colonial canon: Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Hommi Bhabha', in Walter D. Mignolo, "Delinking", *Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, n° 2, 2007, pp. 449–514. Available at: http://www.waltermignolo.com/txt/publications/WDMignolo_Delinking.pdf (last accessed 29/08/2011).

³²⁹ Mignolo states: 'Quijano's project articulated around the notion of 'coloniality of power' moves in two simultaneous directions. One is the analytic. The concept of coloniality has opened up, the re-construction and the restitution of silenced histories, repressed subjectivities, subalternized knowledges and languages performed by the Totality depicted under the names of modernity and rationality. Quijano acknowledges that postmodern thinkers already criticized the modern concept of Totality; but this critique is limited and internal to European history and the history of European ideas. That is why it is of the essence the critique of Totality from the perspective of coloniality and not only from the critique of post-modernity. Now, and this is important, the critique of the modern notion of Totality doesn't lead necessarily to post-coloniality, but to de-

inscription of Fred Wilson into a post-modern legacy and advocates for his inclusion in a de-colonial one.³³⁰ To examine in depth the difference between post-colonial and de-colonial aesthetics is beyond the scope of this thesis.³³¹ However, my examination of these three exhibitions is a contribution in this direction.

In her double role as curator and art writer, Jean Fisher's position was informed by a rare combination of practice and theory, critical, post-colonial and de-colonial theories, which allowed her to pose this issue as the history of a reciprocal encounter. In her words:

There is a fundamental misunderstanding of the sophistication with which other cultures historically internalised western culture and make modernism over in their own image; moreover, one might legitimately argue that modernism arises with the exchange between the West and the Rest, that the West has no privileged ownership of it, and that there were as many modernism, each with their local inflections, as there are sites of exchange.³³²

All the display spaces present in Durham and Fisher's, Wilson's and Vogel's exhibitions reflected different modernist inflections of this exchange, in which everyone was situated as an Other. Dissensus and resistance to hegemonic epistemes need to face the ethical responsibility of the effects that every artistic or curatorial enterprise produces regarding the relation between the self, the other and the world.³³³ An ethical standpoint regarding curating seems to be a recurrent difficulty, as we have seen in the previous chapters. The following case study will also address the complexities that the artists encountered when they decided to work in an impoverished neighbourhood in Bogotá.

coloniality. Thus, the second direction we can call the programmatic that is manifested in Quijano as a project of 'desprendimiento', of de-linking', in Walter Mignolo, *Ibid*.

³³⁰ Walter Mignolo, *Museums in the Colonial Horizon of Modernity*, in Annual CIMAM Conference (International Association of Museums of Modern Art), edited by Board of CIMAM, 2005. Available at: http://www.cimam.org/arxius/recursos/CIMAM_2005_Annual_Conference_-_Museums_Intersections_in_a_Global_Scene.pdf (last accessed 28/08/2011).

³³¹ We may suggest, but needs to be researched in depth and proved that *Documenta 11* could be the paradigmatic example of a post-colonial aesthetics. In relation to *Art/Artifact*, Okwui Enwezor states the influence of postmodernism in Okwui Enwezor, "Topographies of Critical Practices: Exhibition as Place and Site", *The Exhibitionist*, n° 2, June, 2010, pp. 46-52.

³³² Jean Fisher, "Fictional Histories. Magiciens de la Terre", in *Vampire in the Text*, *op. cit.*, p 212.

³³³ In relation to Levinas, Bakhtin and "ethical agency" see Jean Fisher, "Conversation pieces", in *Vampire in the Text*, *op. cit.*, 276-277.

5. EXHIBITION AS AN EXCHANGE SITUATION: THE CASE OF EL MUSEO DE LA CALLE

This fourth and last chapter will examine *El Museo de la Calle*, an artistic project set up by Colectivo Cambalache that took place between 1998 and 2001, primarily in Bogotá, but also in other cities. Colectivo Cambalache still acts as an ongoing platform under which the artists, individually or collectively, have been carrying out other projects. This chapter will focus on *El Museo de la Calle* in its original form, a pushcart that the artists steered through the streets of a neighbourhood of Bogotá and which served as a site for bartering. The exchange act and the cart constituted the basis for an ever changing museum, which aimed to represent the unstoppable movement of commodities that characterises the streets of Bogotá. The project was originally conceived as an intervention in the public space. However, it was later presented in institutionalised artistic spaces. This change of framework caused some tensions and contradictions that are also the subject of this chapter.

In comparison to the other case studies I have examined in this dissertation, *El Museo de la Calle* is quite a recent project. The historical perspective needed to assess this case study is limited by such a short temporal distance between the project and its analysis. Moreover, the existing bibliography is small and based more on reviews than on scholarly analysis. I have therefore tried to open up possible directions that connect *El Museo de la Calle* with diverse theoretical frameworks that point to recent debates, such as critical assessments of neoliberal and informal economies. This has taken place in parallel with a large number of contemporaneous shows dealing with the service economy, post-Fordism and globalisation. With the new geopolitical scenario of the 1990s, *El Museo de la Calle* can also be seen as a symptom of the westernised homogenisation of so-called peripheral artistic scenes, in this case, that of Latin America.

El Museo de la Calle mimicked and questioned the circulation and exchange of commodities and at the same time, imitated and confronted museum conventions. Each one helped to interrogate the other. In the process, the notion of what can be an exhibition expanded even more in relation to the other case studies. In addition to its expected temporality, not only collectivism, heterogeneity and uncertainty, but also mobility and fluidity can be added to the exhibition's potential to dissent and imagine. *El Museo de la*

Calle plays dialectically with all these features, as if it was a summary made of accumulated layers and it could speak symptomatically of a specific historical moment. The project also complements the previous chapters in relation to the association and classification of different objects, the significance of display, the representation of the Other, and the contradictions that challenging artworks undergo in artistic frameworks. This case study, compared to the previous ones, constitutes an extreme case in relation to the instability that their configuration - at the same time artistic projects and exhibitions – entails. It is an artwork that mimics simultaneously a storefront and a museum, showing an ever changing set of objects. Notably, its most evident feature is that it is a temporary display of objects with an undistinguishable aesthetic and commodity value. This temporary and ‘exhibitionary’ dimension paradoxically threatens its core, always on the verge of becoming a different kind of arrangement. Its contradictory nature provokes unease about the nature of exhibitions, museums and stores in the contemporary artistic and economic scenario. It is precisely in this intersection where *El Museo de La Calle* questions the relation between these two fields.

5.1. Colectivo Cambalache and the street as public space

Colectivo Cambalache is part of the changing artistic scene that took place in Colombia at the beginning of the 1990s. At this time there was a generational takeover in which artists extended their practice to other media, issues and processes, beyond modernist painting and sculpture.³³⁴ Contemporary artistic languages were already present in the Colombian context, but this new generation of artists abandoned an exhausted modern vocabulary, at a moment when the international reception of peripheral artists, produced by globalisation, accelerated this diversification. Several authors have indicated that the changes took place primarily in relation to medium and content. On the one hand, there is an expansion of the mediums used by artists, especially performance and installation. On the other hand, Colombian artists began to look closely at the national political, social and economic situation. There was a specific interest in investigating the conflicted politics of Colombia and the transformation of the urban environment and its social problems. Common themes for artists to reflect on included violence, drugs,

³³⁴ Carlos Arturo Fernández, *Arte en Colombia 1981-2006*, Medellín, Universidad de Antioquia, 2007; Ricardo Arcos Palma, “El performance en Colombia a finales del siglo XX. Apuntes sobre una investigación de una generación olvidada”, *Reflector*, julio 2007, available at: http://www.reflector.unal.edu.co/elperformanceencolombia_palma.html (last accessed 29/08/2011).

migration and displacement.³³⁵ However, participative artistic practices invoking, examining and producing a sense of community were not fully developed until the end of the decade.

Colectivo Cambalache was born in the University of Los Andes (Bogotá) in 1998 under the impulse of Colombian and Spanish artists Raimond Chaves and Federico Guzmán, and a group of student artists, namely Carolina Caycedo, Luisa Clavijo and Adriana García Galán. Raimond Chaves' practice was based on drawings, wall installations, posters, archival material, collective projects and workshops that re-interpreted traditional genres and concepts, such as drawing, cartography, landscape and portraiture. Chaves was lecturing at the University and had already introduced young artists to collaborative practices, developing workshops and organising a show out of the results.³³⁶ Chaves invited Guzmán, whom he knew from a workshop in Barcelona, to give a seminar in Bogotá, because he thought it was important to introduce new practices in the Colombian artistic scene. Federico Guzmán's practice had been based since the late eighties in collective work, public space and pedagogy. Using art as a tool for knowledge, encounter and social transformation, his works construct 'open' monuments and copyright-free zones, questioning intellectual property through appropriation. The title of the seminar that Guzmán proposed was *Promote your everyday life*; its goal was to start a conversation that would take the students beyond the university classrooms.³³⁷ Colectivo Cambalache was one of the seminar's outcomes. For Chaves, 'Colectivo Cambalache started from all the experience that Federico brought, from the previous work I was doing, and from the girls' energy and bright ideas'.³³⁸

The nineties in Colombia was determined by a complex socio-political context with the approval of a new constitution in 1991, the implementation of neoliberal policies and the intensification of armed conflict and the war on drug trafficking. The country was characterised by immense social asymmetries, poverty and exclusion, political corruption, state precariousness, and lack of citizen participation. Guzmán recounts in an interview

³³⁵ Miguel Rojas-Sotelo, "Postales de un territorio excéntrico", in *Calle 14 Revista de investigación en campo del Arte*, vol. 4 n°. 5, julio-diciembre, 2010, pp. 118-133; M^a Clara Bernal, Fernando Escobar, Karen MacKinno (ed.), *Displaced: Contemporary Art from Colombia* (ex. cat.), Swansea, Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, 2007.

³³⁶ José Roca, "Entrevista a Raimond Chaves", *La Columna de Arena*, n° 63, 2003. Available at: <http://www.universes-in-universe.de/columna/col63/entrevista.htm> (last accessed 29/08/2011).

³³⁷ Jaime Iregui, "Modos de operar", *Esfera pública*, 16 noviembre de 2002, available at http://esferapublica.org/portal/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=617&Itemid=79 (last accessed 29/08/2011).

³³⁸ José Roca, "Entrevista a Raimond Chaves", *La Columna de Arena*, n° 63, 2003 (my translation).

that the first project he did with the students of the seminar was to organise Ludo games in the public space to test people's reactions. They discovered the degree to which public space was highly controlled, surveyed and economically stratified.³³⁹ They decided to move to a part of the city that was less controlled, choosing to work in an area called El Cartucho.

At that time, the *barrio* El Cartucho, located quite near the centre and the presidential palace, was one of the most dangerous locations in Bogotá, due to drug trafficking and drug use. In the late nineteenth century, the neighbourhood had been a wealthy residential area, inhabited by the bourgeoisie of Bogotá. In the 1950s, the area started to change, first with the establishment of jewellery shops and the settlement of local immigrants, and in the 1970s with the progressive encroachment of drugs, causing middle class residents to move to the north part of the city.³⁴⁰ The reduction in drug prices attracted a growing number of users, resulting in the degradation of the whole district. Ruined streets and houses were inhabited by petty thieves, sex workers, underage dealers, corrupt police, along with priests of all religions trying to help the impoverished population. Another artist working in the area, Rolf Abderhalden Cortés, characterised El Cartucho through Agamben's concept of 'state of exception': it was a site out of the juridical order, with its own laws and 'under the blind gaze of the State'.³⁴¹ In 1998, just as Colectivo Cambalache started work in El Cartucho, Bogotá's mayor decided to demolish the neighbourhood and replace it with a huge park (*Parque del Tercer Milenio* [Third Millennium Park]). This programme of urban regeneration involved house demolition and the eviction of working class residents. The context of Colectivo Cambalache's work, therefore, took place within the reconfiguration of cities worldwide under the pressures of capitalist and neoliberal interests, a hegemonic discourse on official urbanism that was simultaneously criticised by neo-Marxist authors.³⁴²

³³⁹ Video- interview: "Entrevista con Federico Guzmán", *Esfera pública*, 21 mayo 2007, available at <http://esferapublica.org/nfblog/?p=846> (last accessed 29/08/2011).

³⁴⁰ Andrés Góngora y Carlos José Suárez, "Por una Bogotá sin mugre: violencia, vida y muerte en la cloaca urbana", *Universitas humanística*, n° 66, julio-diciembre de 2008, pp. 107-138.

³⁴¹ Rolf Abderhalden Cortés, *El artista como testigo: testimonio de un artista*, lecture in Academia Superior de Artes de Bogotá, December 2006. Available at artesesencicas.uclm.es/.../El_artista_como_testigo_RolfAbderhalden.pdf (last accessed 29/08/2011). Agamben uses state of exception to designate a 'space devoid of law, a zone of anomie in which all legal determinations are deactivated', a kind of site that increasingly appears to be dominant in contemporary politics. See Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 50.

³⁴² Edward Soja, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 2000; and David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography*. 2001.

The first project that the *Collectivo Cambalache* undertook was to set up a free hairdressing salon *a toda mecha* (quick cut) at the UASI hospital, which they ironically called a ‘beauty salon’. The aim of the project was to introduce themselves to the neighbourhood, hear people’s stories and learn how the *barrio* was organised. The salon was led by Carolina Caycedo, acting as an amateur hair-dresser, throughout period they worked in the area, alongside the establishment of *El Museo de la Calle*.³⁴³ The project began at the suggestion of Luisa Clavijo and Adriana García Galán, to organise a big barter and giveaway in the streets for the exchange of all kinds of artefacts. The idea was in direct relation with the dynamics, social and economic practices of *El Cartucho* everyday life. Due to the different kind of economic transactions that took place in the *barrio*, both legal and illegal, the area was open to a talented and skilful informal economy, especially of the type called ‘economía del rebusque’ [economics of rummaging, or moonlighting]. Within this economic logic, recyclers were particularly numerous and active, collecting different types of materials in order to sell them on again, once upcycled or as scrap metal.

The Collective decided to mimic the neighbourhood’s mode of action and built a push cart, named *El Veloz* [The Fast One] in the manner of the recyclers, and embellished it with red felt.³⁴⁴ They collected all kinds of artefacts from friends and family (clothing, toys, and home appliances) that were then bartered for objects that people wanted to exchange. Since money was not permitted, the barter put into motion a different system of value ascribed to objects, mainly functional, alimentary or sentimental values. With the exchanged objects they organized an ephemeral and portable museum that they called ‘the museum of the street’. It was subject to permanent change and reconstruction and echoed the way in which the city and neighbourhood were experienced daily by its inhabitants. The collection of material culture gave the museum a representative side, while the exchange system provided a participative aspect, albeit one in a permanent but unstable balance.

³⁴³ Carolina Caycedo, “Interview with the author”, 12/07/2010.

³⁴⁴ Federico Guzmán filmed an interview with a recycler asking how to construct a cart, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omNTRxwx-YY> (last accessed 29/08/2011).



Fig. 1: *El Museo de la Calle*. Installation view.



Fig. 2: *El Museo de la Calle*. Detail.

A paradoxical combination of indexical document with a performative core managed to express the human, social and economic relations (its rules, its language, its way of clothing) of a particular public space.³⁴⁵ Once a week, for a year and a half, the collective brought *El Museo de la Calle* to El Cartucho. The time lapse allowed for a regular audience to build up and interact with them. This extended temporality was the condition of possibility for a project characterised by continuous ephemerality and mobility. Since the cart was kept at Carolina Caycedo's home, some blocks away from El Cartucho, they decided to stop in other neighbourhoods too, so the items that they obtained in El Cartucho would get spread around the city. Carolina Caycedo has observed 'cartucho' is the name of a flower that used to grow in the area; so the artists were planting El Cartucho seeds around the city.

El Museo de la Calle can be related to a number of theoretical concepts, particularly the Situationist International (the *dérive*), Michel de Certeau's 'practice of everyday life' and 'walking in the city', and Deleuze and Guattari (nomadism and deterritorialisation); as such they can be situated within the so called 'spatial turn'.³⁴⁶ In this framework, *El Museo de la Calle* has participated in exhibitions dealing with critical interventions in the urban public space through mobility and portability, which associate *El Museo de la Calle* with other artists working in the 1990s with similar orientations.³⁴⁷ This topological move has resulted in foregrounding the underlying structuralism of many disciplines. In the 1990s, the Marxist and Productivist critiques were substituted by what we could call a 'Situationist paradigm', coming from a renovated neo-Marxism.³⁴⁸ However, as we will see, its use within contemporary art projects is not uncontroversial.

5.2 The aesthetisation of economics in the 1990s context

³⁴⁵ Colectivo Cambalache wrote a blog to document the project: <http://museodelacalle.blogspot.com/> (last accessed 29/08/2011).

³⁴⁶ These authors proposed a new approach to the city and urban life, where spatial practice is redefined through the different modes in which individual and social groups behave in the city, in practices such as drifting and walking or the performance of everyday activities. These kinds of spatial practices can be used to provoke playful-constructive behaviour and resistance to the hegemonic discourses that condition city structures and ways of life. See Guy Debord *Theory of the Dérive*. Paris, Les Lèvres Nues #9, 1956; Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984; and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

³⁴⁷ For instance, the exhibition *Ambulantes. Cultura portátil*, curated by Rosa Pera, Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Sevilla, mayo-agosto 2004.

³⁴⁸ This transition has been examined by Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer," in *The Return of the Real*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1996.

Aesthetisation of poverty

A year later, *El Museo de la Calle* travelled to other neighbourhoods and cities, and became inscribed in the art circuit. In 1999, it appeared in the III Bienal de Venecia, organized by Franklin Aguirre in the popular neighbourhood of Venecia in South Bogota.. In 2000, it travelled to the Modern Gallery of Ljubljana in Slovenia for the show *Worthless (Invaluable) The Concept of Value in Contemporary Art*; and in 2001, it participated in the exhibition *Da adversidade vivemos* [We thrive on Adversity] in the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, both organised by the Argentine curator Carlos Basualdo.³⁴⁹ The first show looked at the question of the value of artworks and presented pieces and projects of some forty artists and collectives from various periods of the twentieth century and from different parts of the world. The second show also presented a variety of artists of different generations, but only from Latin America, to deal with the relationship between artistic practice and social environment, taking its title from a work by Helio Oiticica.³⁵⁰ For Basualdo, these shows represented a specifically leftist political consciousness in Latin American art, which he continued to explore in *The Structure of Survival* for the 2003 Venice Biennale.³⁵¹ These shows indicate the dominant ways in which *El Museo de la Calle* has been read: firstly in relation to economics, and secondly in relation to Latin America.

Both discourses intersect in the debate about poverty, art and the spectacularisation of deprivation; following a long tradition in Latin American art and cinema, and will be discussed below. In a concurrent exhibition at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (2001), curated by Carlos Basualdo and Octavio Zaya, another expression from the 1960s was rescued: the notion of *esztetyka del hambre* [aesthetics of hunger], first put forward by Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha in 1965.³⁵² Rocha's manifesto stated that 'our

³⁴⁹ Carlos Basualdo (ed.), *Worthless (Invaluable) The Concept of Value in Contemporary Art* (exh. cat.), Ljubljana, Moderna Galerija Ljubljana / Museum of Modern Art, 2000; Carlos Basualdo (ed.), *Da adversidade vivemos* (exh. cat.), Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2001.

³⁵⁰ The show included artists such as Minerva Cuevas, Francis Alÿs, Cildo Meireles, Víctor Grippo and Hélio Oiticica. A review of the show in Ricardo Arcos-Palma, "De adversidades vivimos", *Vistazos Críticos*, 7 junio de 2001, available at: <http://criticosvistazos.blogspot.com/2001/06/vistazo-critico-12-de-adversidades.html> (last accessed 29/08/2011). The expression was taken from a 1967 Helio Oiticica text written for the show *Nueva Objetividad Brasileña*, Museo de Arte Moderno de Río de Janeiro. It has been translated as We thrive on adversity or On adversity we thrive.

³⁵¹ Carlos Basualdo was one of the co-curators of the 50th Venice Biennale 2003, with an exhibition called *The Structure of Survival*. It was based on how artists and architects react to the consequences of the political, economic and social crisis in developing countries, and which aesthetic forms of survival and resistance they develop. He also counted on Carolina Caycedo for the show.

³⁵² *Estetyka del hambre* was the title of a 1965 manifesto by Glauber Rocha presented in the *Seminário do Terceiro Mundo* in Genoa. An English version of the manifesto in

originality is our hunger’, a political reworking of Oswald de Andrade’s *antropofagia*, which played with the idea of a western or westernized ‘digestive cinema’.³⁵³ Rocha wanted to abandon a discourse of poverty based on denunciation and victimization, which was too connected to ‘developmentalist’ and charitable politics, and instead to presented hunger and misery with an affirmative, political meaning. Statements by other Brazilian artists, especially Helio Oiticica and Artur Barrio, were no less politicised.³⁵⁴ Barrio’s 1969 text *Estética del Tercer Mundo* [Third World Aesthetics] took its lead from the gap between the scarcity of resources and economic underdevelopment in Latin America. Because industrialized products were not to hand, Third World artists should use ephemeral, precarious and cheap materials, in order to problematise the economic inscription of art production. Paulo Herkenhoff observes that Barrio radicalized the paradox between productive and non-productive labour in relation to artworks and the market, asking the question ‘how can artists produce “use value” from an art made of waste?’³⁵⁵, In this context the ‘povera’ of *arte povera* became radically politicized and the notion of ‘dematerialization’ could designate lack instead of subtraction.³⁵⁶

For these 1960s and 1970s authors who pursued economic independence and social justice with a shared spirit of panamericanism, hunger was a way to bestow an active sense to pain as well as being a metaphor for desire and the advent of revolution. Influenced by Franz Fanon, the aesthetics of hunger was intimately linked to an aesthetics of violence. Ivana Bentes notes that in Rocha’s films, intellectuals lose their privileged position as agents of knowledge and transformation, while other mediators, such as bandits, mystics or mercenaries, are empowered. She considers this ‘anarchic unconscious’ a destabilizing force that can be reversed into a revolutionary one. For Bentes, this flux that de-structures is akin to a materialisation of the unconscious desires.³⁵⁷ Thirty years later, after the bloody

http://www.tempoglauber.com.br/english/t_estetica.html (last accessed 29/08/2011). A second manifesto *Estetyka del sueño* was presented by Rocha in 1971. The exhibition *Estética del sueño* was one of the five shows included in the wider project *Versiones del sur* (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2001).

³⁵³ Oswald de Andrade, “Manifiesto antropófago”, *Revista de Antropofagia*, año 1, nº 1, mayo de 1928; Glauber Rocha, *Estetyka del hambre*, *Ibid.*

³⁵⁴ See María Iñigo and Yayo Aznar, “Arte activista en Brasil durante el AI-5 (1968-1979)”, lecture presented in *XII Encuentro de Latinoamericanistas Españoles*, Santander, Octubre, 2006. Published as “Hay tensión”, *Versiones Magazine*, Madrid, European University of Madrid, 2009.

³⁵⁵ Paulo Herkenhoff, “Libertad, igualdad e ira”, in *Estética del Sueño* (exh. cat.), Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2001.

³⁵⁶ This idea is defended by Mari Carmen Ramírez, “Tactics for thriving on Adversity. Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980” in Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss (ed.), *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origins, 1950s-1980s* (exh cat), New York, Queens Museum of Art, 1999.

³⁵⁷ Ivana Bentes, “Apocalipsis estético: ameryka del hambre, del sueño y del trance”, in *Estética del Sueño* (exh. cat.), Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2001.

consequences of various Latin American armed conflicts, the option of violence has disappeared from artistic discourse. At the same time, pervading violence generated by dictatorships, the state, guerrilla, counter-guerrilla and drug cartels, has been transformed from a means of action into one of the recurring artistic themes identifying and stereotyping the Latin American imaginary as played out in Colombia.

The *aesthetics of hunger*, cleansed of its political violent side and transformed into an aesthetics of poverty, became an unexpected signifier of resistance to neoliberal economies in the 1990s. The political side of an anarchic unconscious of deprivation has been turned, thirty year later, into a romanticised translation of informal economies in the artistic realm – one that has been readily swallowed by western art institutions, markets and discourses. At the turn of the millennium, it brought about a renewed version of the primitive, a new signifier of difference. Joaquín Barriendos alerted us to the danger arising from this renovated romanticism of the peripheral, based on the ‘prejudice that outside the western world artists are in a closer contact with reality, with the people and with the multitudes and therefore their art is more real, more effective “politically speaking”’.³⁵⁸ This idea correlates with the notions that, due to the weakness of the Latin American institutional artistic field, artists are more ‘authentic’ and can intervene in the public sphere with less mediation.

Two different critical positions have connected the creativity of informal economies with *El Museo de la Calle*: Catalina Lozano’s text “Recycling Bogotá” and Michèle Faguet’s “Barriobajando rumbo al prestigio”. Lozano’s text uses Guattari’s notion of ecology to understand recycling as an ecological practice, an itinerant, multiple and molecular economic process that is not opposed to capitalist society, but fully participates in it.³⁵⁹ In her view, recycling is not only an economic practice, but a form of social organization that ‘allows for the emergence of new physical or/and subjective spaces of co-belonging which call into being a revolutionary potential’.³⁶⁰ Recycling is not only a way of living, but also an

³⁵⁸ Joaquín Barriendos, “Desconquistas (políticas) y redescubrimientos (estéticos)” in *Desbordes* n° 0, June 2009. The translation is mine. Available at: http://des-bordes.net/des-bordes/joaquin_barriendos.php (last accessed 30/09/2009).

³⁵⁹ Catalina Lozano Moreno, “Recycling Bogotá”, *Drain Magazine*, November 2005. Available at: http://www.drainmag.com/contentNOVEMBER/RELATED_ESSAYS/Recycling_Bogota.htm (last accessed 29/08/2011).

³⁶⁰ Lozano opposes this experience to Jeremy Deller’s demonstration in *Manifesta 5* (San Sebastian 2004), where different local associations marched together and showed the difficulty of forcing a generation of communal experience. For her: ‘Deller’s attempt was rather clumsy and oblivious of what the city really experiences, and of other conflicts that were being confronted’, in Catalina Lozano Moreno, *op. cit.*

‘expression of life’. Its ‘expressiveness’ can be marked out in the collection of objects that the recyclers deal with. In her text, creativity is related to the D.I.Y., crafty and random transformation of matter and the city, and redefined both as the ‘production of a collective inter-subjectivity which constitutes the creative emergence of a community’ and a channel of empowerment.³⁶¹ Lozano understands creativity as the creation of difference and explores the political potential of this differentiation. She also affirms that these ‘tactics of survival, creative and precarious’ come about ‘without mediation’.³⁶² A similar romanticisation of adversity as a creativity trigger and aesthetisation of precariousness is present in Basualdo’s projects, argues Anna Dezeuze.³⁶³

Lozano states that she is not interested ‘in some kind of *politically committed art*’, and circumvents several questions that usually arise in relation to political art, such as efficacy and the artists’ instrumentalisation of others. Instead, she relies on the automatic potency of words, such as communality and co-belonging, which she connects uncritically to this artistic project. Recyclers are determined by a logic of subsistence on a day-to-day basis, with no social rights, working in the open air, using physical strength and dealing with waste. It is a socially stigmatised activity that takes place in an already stigmatised neighbourhood. It is certainly a creative adaptation in an existent reality, but it is precisely the reality that produces these modes of ‘making a living’ that must be questioned.

³⁶¹Catalina Lozano Moreno, “Recycling Bogotá”, *op. cit.*

³⁶² Catalina Lozano Moreno, “Recycling Bogotá”, *op. cit.*

³⁶³ In the same years Mari Carmen Ramírez was also using the notion of ‘tactics’ in relation to adversity, referring to Michel de Certeau’s theorisation on the invention of the everyday, a conception on subversion that has been later criticised by George Yúdice, in Anna Dezeuze, “Thriving on Adversity: The Art of Precariousness”, *Mute*, vol. 2, September 2006. Available at: <http://www.metamute.org/en/Thriving-On-Adversity> (last accessed 21/07/2011) and in George Yúdice, “Marginality and the Ethics of Survival”, *Social Text*, no. 21, 1989.



Fig. 3: *El Museo de la Calle*. Detail.



Fig. 4: *El Museo de la Calle*. Detail: Toys.



Fig. 5: *El Museo de la Calle*. Detail: Technology.

With increased globalisation, informality has tended to accelerate, as Néstor García Canclini observes, to the extent that it has been able to become a *topos* of its own, as in Rem Koolhaas's 'junk space'.³⁶⁴ An informal economy not only produces, but also reproduces outsider ways of considering labour, determining subjectivities and social alliances. Parallel to the labour of recycling in Latin America cities, and counter to what Lozano states, *El Museo de la Calle* does not create any kind of communality, apart from that between the artists and individual barterers.

Michèle Faguet, by contrast, questions this valorisation of alterity as a subversive element.³⁶⁵ She references Hal Foster's essay "The artist as ethnographer" (1996) and Joshua Decker's use of the concepts 'slumming' and 'schmoozing' (1996) to put into question contemporary artists' 'ethnographic mapping' of the Other³⁶⁶. Faguet argues that 'slumming is highly problematic because it too is all about empowering oneself but through the dis-empowering of another while pretending to do the exact opposite'.³⁶⁷ Faguet is particularly focused on the consumption of images of marginality by First World audiences and connects this phenomenon with the notion of 'pornomiseria' [misery porn], a concept that originated in the Colombian film industry context of the 1970s.³⁶⁸ However, Faguet concentrates her critique on the representation of poverty in art, and pays no attention to informal creativity, which I believe is at the core of the First World's current fascination with art from the developing world. She is highly critical of an ethnographic position that is not only complicit with the structures of domination, but which especially benefits artists. In Faguet's view, 'slumming in Colombia is a useful method of schmoozing

³⁶⁴ Néstor García-Canclini, "Desórdenes: chatarra e informalidad", in *Geografías del desorden: migración, alteridad y nueva esfera social*, Valencia, Universidad de Valencia, 2006.

³⁶⁵ Michèle Faguet, "Barriobajeando rumbo al prestigio" [Slumming for Schmoozing], 2008, available in an English version at <http://michiacevedo.blogspot.com/2010/05/je-est-un-autre-institutionalization-of.html> (last accessed 29/08/2011).

³⁶⁶ Joshua Decker, "Schmoozing and Slumming," *TRANS>arts.cultures.media*, vol. 1, n° 2, 1996. Faguet affirms: 'I'd like to connect this valorization of alterity as a subversive element in culture to the practice of cultural slumming—an activity that can be traced as far back as Victorian London when the East End became a sort of tourist attraction for the wealthy classes', Michèle Faguet, *op. cit.*

³⁶⁷ Michèle Faguet, "Barriobajeando rumbo al prestigio", *op. cit.*

³⁶⁸ The local *cinéma vérité* was accused of exploiting social issues to gain international recognition and prestige. In her words: 'However, a desire to produce critical consciousness through the transparency or visibility of marginality always carries the risk of producing the opposite effect: that of cynical indifference which comes from a saturation and fetishisation of this visibility in the absence of proper analysis or even a basic code of ethics. In Colombia, the most significant cultural historical aspect of Mayolo and Ospina's legacy may very well be the term they invented – "pornomiseria", or "poverty porn" - to articulate a problem that became endemic to Colombian film-making in the 1970s, but that continues to haunt any discussion (historical or contemporary) about the representation of socio-economic hardship'. See Michèle Faguet, "Pornomiseria Or How Not to Make a Documentary Film," London, *Afterall* n° 21, spring 2009.

internationally'.³⁶⁹ She specifically points to Colectivo Cambalache's *El Museo de la Calle* and indicates how the collective was invited to 'quite high profile exhibitions in Europe, most notably Carlos Basualdo's *From Adversity We Live* a sort of who's who of rising young Latin American art stars'.³⁷⁰

In defense of *El Museo de la Calle*, it must be pointed out that it wasn't trying to speak on behalf of the recyclers or attempting to empower them. They didn't want to represent a situation, but rather to create one. Their main tactic was the mimicry and appropriation of a practice that was itself already 'appropriative' of leftovers. In the year and a half that they worked in El Cartucho, they didn't block or intervene the economic patterns there, but followed their dynamics and added to the existing flux. They were not representing economics, but making an economy happen. The collective was well aware of the risks of dealing with *pornomiseria* and their way of avoiding such a static representation of misery was to highlight how goods are constantly redistributed under an economic logic that encompasses the whole social spectrum. Yet, the project only worked when it took place in the real economic field, rather than in the art world. A necessary contradiction arose when the project was re-inscribed in an exhibition context.

This new framework altered inevitably the nature of the project. On its European tour, between the shows in Ljubljana and Paris, *El Museo de la Calle* grew as a result of Caycedo's bartering in London and from a Chaves workshop in Barcelona. In these shows the cart was replaced by a precarious exhibition display system: a blanket on the floor that made it similar to a flea market. In this new static presentation the classification of the items played a different role and the bartering became museified, since it took place under the umbrella of an institution. We could relate this internationalisation of *El Museo de la Calle* with the expansive flux of goods that characterises global economic flows, but this would be too literal an approach to the project. Even if the artists tried to promote the idea of an expanded exchange, we should question what was really exchanged. More than a representation of the global goods market, the participation of *El Museo de la Calle* in these international exhibitions can be read as part of a new global circulation of cultural signifiers

³⁶⁹ Michèle Faguet, "Barriobajeando rumbo al prestigio", *op. cit.*

³⁷⁰ Michèle Faguet, "Barriobajeando rumbo al prestigio", *op. cit.*



Fig. 6: *El Museo de la Calle*. Detail: El Veloz



Fig. 7: *El Museo de la Calle*. Detail: Bartering.



Fig. 8: *El Museo de la Calle*. Detail: El Veloz.

in the 1990s and 2000s, in which Latin American art started to be a significant protagonist – alongside China, India and the Middle East.³⁷¹ One could argue that it was not everyday goods, but difference that was being exchanged.³⁷²

Aesthetisation of Commodities

Globalization has resulted in an increased interest in the artistic practices of so-called peripheral countries, but the impact of neoliberal policies also brought about a broader reflection on economics in the artistic and curatorial field in the late 1990s.³⁷³ Artists such as Minerva Cuevas, Maria Eichorn, Carey Young, Ursula Biemann, Allan Sekula, Santiago Sierra, Andrea Fraser, and Bik Van der Pol, to name just a few, started to address the relationship between art and economy. Cultural industries, art funding, intellectual property, service economy, alternative economies and fictional corporations started to be pervasive in those years, either as a critique or as the proposal of alternative concepts such as generosity, barter, gift and commonality, amounting to a counter-position that connected this work to relational aesthetics.

Exhibitions in Europe at this time included *Services: The Conditions and Relations of Service Provision in Contemporary Project-Oriented Artistic Practice* (1994) and *Exchange-Transform* (2002), and considered the transformation of the conditions of art production by gathering together a cross-section of artist projects that addressed those subjects.³⁷⁴ *El Museo de la Calle* is only one of fifty projects produced since the 1990s that are documented in the book, *What we Want is Free: Generosity and Exchange in Recent Art*, published in 2005.³⁷⁵ Instead of focusing on the aesthetisation of goods or the commodification of art – ideas that had characterised the 1980s, as we have seen – artists and shows looked at the impact

³⁷¹ Mari Carmen Ramírez, “Brokering Identities. Art Curators and the Politics of Cultural Representation”, in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (ed.), *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London, Routledge, 1996, pp. 21-38.

³⁷² As Sarat Maharaj asserts: ‘We have come to see the international space as the meeting ground for a multiplicity of tongues, visual grammars and styles. These do not so much translate into one another as translate to produce difference’, in Sarat Maharaj, “Perfidious Fidelity: The Untranslatability of the Other” in Stuart Hall and Sarat Maharaj, *Modernity and Difference*, Iniva, London, 2001.

³⁷³ Gerardo Mosquera, “The Marco Polo Syndrome: Some Problems around Art and Eurocentrism”, *Third Text*, vol. 6, n° 21, 1992, pp. 35-41.

³⁷⁴ *Services* was organized by Helmut Draxler and Andrea Fraser at the invitation of Beatrice von Bismarck, Diethelm Stoller, and Ulf Wuggenig and it took place at the Kunstraum der Universität Lüneburg, in 1994. *Exchange-Transform* was an exhibition curated by Maria Lind in 2002 at the Kunstverein München. Other concurrent shows in the U.S., *Trade Show*. Mass MOCA, Massachusetts, 2005.

³⁷⁵ Ted Purves (ed.), *What we Want is Free. Generosity and Exchange in Recent Art*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2005. See also Catherine Grant and Tahani Nadim, “Working Things out Together: the Joys of Bootlegging, Bartering and Collectivity”, *Parachute: Contemporary Art Magazine*, July, 2003.

of flexible management methods, the deregulation of the market and labour laws, decentralisation and networking, and the integration of financial markets. Cumulatively, all these factors simultaneously led to the dissolution of traditional communities, institutions and social alliances, and the emergence of new forms of grouping, such as the anti-globalisation movements or bartering communities, which artists found a productive analogy for their practice.

El Museo de la Calle's foundational nature was the act of bartering. But bartering was not the ends, but the means of the project. In their words: 'we always thought that our activity should be about giving or constructing something; not tourism but exchange'.³⁷⁶. We can interpret this statement as a self-conscious position about the imbalanced situation that they had in relation to the deprived neighbourhood. Barter has been defined as an exchange without money, characterised by a reduction of transaction costs and for being relatively impersonal and of an asocial nature, in opposition to the gift, which implies a larger degree of reciprocity and sociability. Although it functions without actual money, barter nevertheless involves a calculative dimension. And as in any kind of exchange, the value is less an inherent property of the objects than a judgement made about them by subjects.

For *El Museo de la Calle*, the bartering process was originally based on the items that Colectivo Cambalache brought to the economic situation ('We collected from our family and friends and a lot of things were brought in. Clothing, toys and home appliances were given away for anything useful or useless that people wanted to give in exchange').³⁷⁷. We have to assume that the impoverished inhabitants of El Cartucho would not have had financially valuable items to exchange. However, following Arjun Appadurai's study on commodities and the politics of value, we concur with his point that it is economic exchange that creates value. Value does not precede economic exchange.³⁷⁸. Appadurai understands the exchange of commodities as a *situation*, that is to say that exchange takes place in a framework conditioned by standards of criteria (symbolic, classificatory and moral) that define the exchangeability of things in particular social and historical contexts. Exchangeability ensures that objects can eventually move in and out of commodity status.

³⁷⁶ Quoted in Ted Purves, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

³⁷⁷ Carlos Basualdo, "Interview with Colectivo Cambalache", *Flash Art*, 214, October, 2000.

³⁷⁸ Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: commodities and the politics of value", in Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 3-63.

The cultural frameworks determining the exchangeability of goods construct different regimes of value.

Looking at *El Museo de la Calle* as a commodity exchange situation, we can understand that it conflated two different regimes of value, the lucrative and the artistic; in other words, the same object would have a different value in the market and in the museum. Colectivo Cambalache brought to the streets items that had at least a modicum of usability, while they took away apparently useless objects that were nevertheless meaningful as documents of how a space was inhabited. Their bartering didn't pursue monetary equivalence, but it involved consent to respect and legitimacy, to stay in the community without problems. Since sociability was also at stake in the process of exchange, it worked more as a gift exchange in which social protocols were necessarily implied, and not only as a pure economic exchange. Ten years later Carolina Caycedo would see her own bartering practice as gift exchange, not as barter.³⁷⁹

It may be interesting to notice that Colectivo Cambalache was not trying to perform the conventional community-specific artwork, since their activities were not about emancipation or empowerment or about producing (potential) social relations. This superseding of a classical Marxist and productivist frameworks is quite telling. Neither the audience nor the authors were perceived as spectators of a fixed representation, but as traders, participants of an image that was constantly changing. The Colectivo could not simply acquire representative objects as souvenirs, because it would have exposed the project to an exoticising gaze. They needed to participate in the real economic process and exchange what was really circulating. If something was represented, it was the flux, not a close (essentialising) picture of the neighbourhood. The everyday practices ended up producing not only a defined set of objects, but also social and economic relationships. The project fulfilled many features of situationist, micropolitical and tactical theories, so prevalent at this time, but was not exempt from the contradictions that artworks in the aesthetic regime carry with them.³⁸⁰

The particular bartering of *El Museo de la Calle*, which provided the neighbourhood with commodities to be exchanged, can best be seen as a counter-appropriative technique.

³⁷⁹ Carolina Caycedo (ed.), *Daytoday 2002-2009*, a publication on the occasion of *Daytoday in LA* at g727, Los Angeles, July-August, 2009.

³⁸⁰ I am talking specifically about the real impact of authors in artistic realm.

Instead of subtracting objects to reframe them in the art world, as in the case of Group Material (discussed in Chapter 3), the Colectivo Cambalache inserted new objects into the economic scene. This new factor altered the usual nature of recycling (dealing with waste) and introduced fairly usable middle class objects whose price was not to be measured in money, but by the buyer's personal choice. It also subverted the nature of bartering, as the value commensurability was distorted. The original providers of the exchanged commodities (family, friends) were not given anything in return. In this regard, the process was in fact a hybrid of bartering and recycling. Colectivo Cambalache played two different roles in *El Museo de la Calle*: they acted as intermediaries and they produced a 'museum'. Its first task was more related to the provision of the conditions of exchange, to gather commodities and make them accessible. From this point of view, their function was closer to the idea of service economy, of bartering activities, rather than objects. Not by chance, just when *El Museo de la Calle* ended, Carolina Caycedo started an individual practice based on an expanded version of barter, which included services and time banking.³⁸¹ I will examine these two functions in the following section.

Service economy, craft and work cultures

In 2002, Caycedo started a long term project entitled *Day to day* (2002-2009), whose first activity took place in Vienna, commissioned by the Secession. She drove the streets of Vienna in an old van emblazoned with the slogan *I Need You Need I Give You Give*.³⁸² With no money in her pockets, she intended to live in the city for three weeks by means of barter and exchange. Through her bartering she shared, gave, received and redistributed knowledge, commodities and services. The project was promoted on the Secession's website as a 'vehicle, a theatre for communication about informal economy'.³⁸³ This notion we can contrast with one of the artist's most important references, Hakim Bey's *Temporary Autonomous Zones* (T.A.Z.).³⁸⁴ For Caycedo, T.A.Z.s are social intersections in which to explore 'the possibilities of learning to inhabit the world in a better way – instead of an

³⁸¹ Carolina Caycedo has recently started a time-bank in Puerto Rico. See Carolina Caycedo, "Seven Years of Chaos", *Art Work*, September 2009. Available at: <http://www.artandwork.us/2009/11/seven-years-of-chaos/> (last accessed 29/08/2011).

³⁸² Ivan Ordoñez, "Entrevista a Carolina Caycedo" en *Privado. Entrevistas con artistas*, 2009. Available at <http://privadoentrevistas.blogspot.com> (last accessed 29/08/2011).

³⁸³ In the Secession web site: '*Day to Day* is based on the concept of places as "Temporary Autonomous Zones". These are proposals for "utopian realities", which elude control by politics, religion and economy and their predominant mechanisms' http://www.secession.at/art/2002_caycedo_e.html (last accessed 29/08/2011).

³⁸⁴ Hakim Bey, *TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, Autonomedia, 1991. Available at: http://hermetic.com/bey/taz_cont.html (last accessed 29/08/2011).

imagined utopia'.³⁸⁵ Caycedo's Vienna van was marked by the same tension that characterised *El Museo de la Calle*: being at the same time an artefact (a museum, a theatre) that represented informal economy and everyday creative invention for the artistic realm, and a process that the artist put into action, in which there was no representation, but an actual economic flow and a conversational social relationship.³⁸⁶ In this case, the van, as the cart, embodies the dialectics between representation and participation that we have examined in previous chapters. However, one of the main differences between *El Museo de la Calle* and *Day to Day* was that in the former the collective acted as intermediary between commodities, while in the latter, Caycedo's own knowledge, skills, and time were exchanged. In her individual practice, participation and action overcame representation.

Lars Bang Larsen and Søren Andreasen have drawn attention to the role of the intermediary in curating, and their approach can be related to *El Museo de la Calle* as a project on the border of artistic and curatorial practice. The authors revisit the idea of Gilles Deleuze's notions of the mediator, and Fernand Braudel's idea of the middleman.³⁸⁷ The middleman is a key agent in the development of capitalism, for he breaks relations between producer and consumer, eventually becoming the only one who knows market conditions at both ends of the chain. Through this figure the transparent exchange of the marketplace is transformed into a sphere of circulation. However, Larsen and Andreasen state that the middleman is not necessarily a capitalist agent, since intermediaries can also be found in different socio-political orders. In the case of *El Museo de la Calle*, the role of the artists as intermediaries was a way to dissent with the prevailing monetary exchange system, by acting as an economic laboratory. We need to recall that at this point, a bartering system was simultaneously taking place in Argentina under the imposition of *el corralito* during the economic crisis.³⁸⁸ Even if the act of bartering usually takes place without middlemen, the insertion of a different economic logic tending to barter needed to occur through their interference. Here, the artists played the role of catalysts, rather than

³⁸⁵ In www.blackandwhiteartgallery.com/works/commune/caycedo_about.pdf (last accessed 29/08/2011). This is a near verbatim quote from Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*. Paris, Presses du réel, 2002, p. 13.

³⁸⁶ I don't want to expand on the individual work by Caycedo, but I would like to highlight some of the aspects that both projects share. The bartering project was highly developed, researched and experienced by Caycedo over the seven years of *Day to Day*.

³⁸⁷ Søren Andreasen and Lars Bang Larsen, "The Middleman: Beginning to talk about Mediation", Paul O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, London, Open Editions, 2007.

³⁸⁸ A brief definition of the situation: 'Bartering was at its height during 2001-2002. During this time, the government had instituted "el corralito", a limit of 250 pesos as the amount of money anybody could withdraw from the bank in a week. In addition, the unemployment rate was close to 25%. Thus, more people throughout Argentina started organising groups at places like schools where a large crowd could gather to exchange goods', Stephanie E. Santana, "¿No Hay Monedas? No Hay Problema in the Bartering World", *The Argentina Independent*, 10 August 2009.

mediators. Following Deleuze, the role would be that of intervention: it is less important to originate than to participate in movements. In Larsen and Andreassen's words: 'to put ideas into orbit and to get caught up in perpetual motion', since movement is creation in itself and it is the way to keep the world open and alive.

The role of curators and artists can be seen as agents of continuous movement and fluidity, in alliance with the prevailing post-Fordist economy. However, despite the emphasis on services and intermediation, skilled work still constitutes the main part of productive labour around the world. Artistic acknowledgment of the diversity and heterogeneity of work experiences, helps to bring to the fore an expanded definition of labour that incorporates not only economic parameters. In the last decade there has been a renewed interest in the assessment of the material aspects of artistic labour. Authors such as Glenn Adamson, John Roberts and Richard Sennett have questioned, from different standpoints, the role of craft and skilling and deskilling in a cultural economics characterised by non-productive labour, and the expansion of intellectual labour in art.³⁸⁹. The stress on creativity in *El Museo de la Calle* therefore involves an anthropological revalorization of artistic practices and of the expressive value of work cultures in a world apparently characterised by immaterial labour.³⁹⁰. Labour not only generates commodities, but it produces and reproduces individual and collective meanings, subjectivities, social life, a relationship with the environment, urban rhythms, power relationships, hierarchies, and routes. To summarise, a mix of practices and ideologies spring from the interactions of people with their work milieu.

In this regard, *El Museo de la Calle* tried to grasp not only the material culture that could eventually represent Bogotá, but also an index of some of its work cultures and their material expressivity. In this way, it can be understood as a contemporary interpretation of an ethnographic museum. Even the museum's architecture, the cart, embodies this ethnographic aspect. This ethnographic re-assessment, along with the use of gift and barter, is in close dialogue with the recognition of amateur and vernacular practices (D.I.Y. culture or Levi-Strauss' notion of *bricoleur*³⁹¹) that have been so present in art of the last two

³⁸⁹ Glenn Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, Oxford, Berg, 2007; John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form. Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade*, London, Verso, 2007; Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008.

³⁹⁰ Pascal Gielen and Paul de Bruyne (ed), *Being an Artist in post-Fordist Times*, Rotterdam, NAI Publishers, 2009.

³⁹¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1968 (orig. pub as *La Pensée Sauvage*, 1962).

decades. All these practices imply a connection to various forms of alternative social organisation, such as informal economy, grassroots political and social activism, ecology, independent culture, that question the prevailing neoliberal economies or reflect its negative effects. This conjunction forms an intellectual horizon, for which *El Museo de la Calle* can be considered paradigmatic.

5.3. *El Museo de la Calle*: Between museum and Exhibition

The notion of perpetual movement was present in the cart, contradicting and resisting any kind of conservative museological impulse. However, even in the most eclectic flea markets, there is a certain way of arranging contents. According to Caycedo, there was a broad range of objects – shoes, clothing, caps, pans, books, a scuba diving set, jewels, toys, and appliances – miscellanea that entered and left the circuit through the collective's friends and families and by bartering around different neighbourhoods of the city. At first, the artists gathered the objects and spread them over a blanket on the floor. Soon they realised that the exchange provided a portrait of El Cartucho. It was at this point that the idea of the museum came about. Many of the objects they were getting were related to the specific subculture of the criminal and drug scene, especially hand-made guns and crack pipes.³⁹² Caycedo highlights the handcrafted creativity of these objects, which could be considered quasi-sculptures. In the same vein, she mentions a man who customised caps by adding different things to them. Whenever a hat was ready, he bartered it with them and started a new one.

The craft, D.I.Y., ethnographic aspect of *El Museo de la Calle* was also present in the museum's physical structure, when Colectivo Cambalache abandoned the blanket for the cart. They constructed the cart themselves, following the recyclers instructions, but embellished it with a red felt fabric and created drawers so that they could keep the objects locked up. The fact of having drawers already entailed notions of custody and cataloguing. When the museum started to grow, the collective decided to initiate some form of classification. In Bogotá, this was done with a functional logic: jewellery, toys, books, clothes, radios, pieces of wire, and so on, were all categorised in order to help efficient exchange. Since they were aware that the notion of museum was paradoxical, and didn't want to keep the commodities they were getting at El Cartucho, they started to expand the

³⁹² For an analysis of the relationship between drugs and Colombian contemporary art see Santiago Rueda Fajardo, *Una línea de polvo. Arte y drogas en Colombia*, Bogotá, Fundación Gilberto Alzate Avendaño, 2009.

bartering to other parts of the city. That kept the museum in motion. However, as Caycedo points out, when *El Museo de la Calle* travelled to Europe, they indulged themselves in organising ‘more free and personal spaces’ and instituting a subjective taxonomy.³⁹³ This type of poetic arrangement can be read within the framework of the relation between curating and *wunderkammern*. This process of aestheticisation seems as inevitable as the changing of the nature of their practice, as it trespassed the invisible threshold that frames the symbolic space of art.

El Museo de la Calle also contained a smaller museum within itself, performing a custodian function. Caycedo recounts that there was a box that kept ‘treasures’ which were not bartered for different reasons. Some were objects which were dangerous, such as guns or pipes for smoking crack. In the case of guns and crack pipes, the logic of removal is ethical and legal. These objects belong to a sphere that exists, but needs to remain invisible. They symbolically occupy a taboo position. They speak of social restrictions that contradict the actual economic flows that characterise the neighbourhood. Beyond their crafted,

³⁹³ Carolina Caycedo, “Interview with the author”, 12/07/2010 (my translation)



Fig. 9: *El Museo de la Calle*. Detail: 'Treasure Box

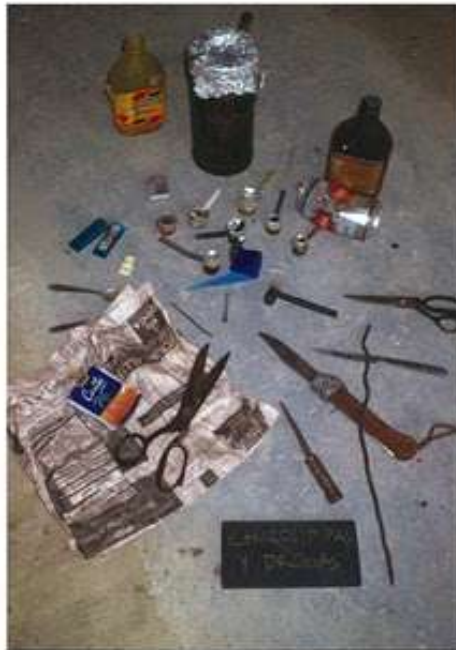


Fig. 10: *El Museo de la Calle*. Detail: *Chuzos, Pipas y Drogas*
[Guns, Pipes and Drogues]



Fig. 11: *El Museo de la Calle*. Installation view. Modern Gallery of Ljubljana (2001).

aestheticised value, they need to be kept apart as a symbolic contribution to the imagination of an alternative model of community. In this case, the artists, through their action, take a position in relation to the context. They decide not to hide, but to represent the ‘ecosystem’, presenting the banned objects in the treasure box, but at the same time offering an ethical point of view which endorses a potential transformation.

Some objects were held back because of their sentimental value (she comments that ‘as owners of the museum, it was a luxury we could afford’.³⁹⁴). In this case, commodities acquired a symbolic status. Their sentimental value speaks of the affective bond that is created among persons. Objects become symbols of the relationship and therefore it is harder to place them in a commercial situation. They embody a value which is subjective, not because of the owner, but because objects are invested with subjectivity, loaded with significance and meaning. This approach is also useful in understanding *The People’s Choice*. Finally, others were reserved because they were gifts to the museum itself, which invalidated the bartering rationale. For instance, she speaks of a local poet who, every time he went to El Cartucho, wrote a poem and made a rhyme for *El Museo de la Calle*.

³⁹⁴ Carolina Caycedo, “Interview with the author”, 12/07/2010 (my translation).

Interestingly, in this example provided by Carolina Caycedo, besides the gift aspect, we can point out the aesthetic value ascribed to the poems. In this case, we could talk of a predetermined homogeneity. The museum naturally accepts objects of this kind, that is to say, aesthetic objects. Contrary to museums, in the recycling realm of El Cartucho, poems do not have use value.

Arjun Appadurai asserts that, in order to fully comprehend the exchange of commodities, we need to rethink the relationship between the paths and the diversions that characterises the circulation of objects. For him, following the anthropologist Nancy Munn, paths are defined by the laws of supply and demand that organise socially regulated paths for the flow of commodities. In parallel, objects can be diverted from culturally conventionalized paths and these diversions can also become institutionalised. Diversions serve different purposes. They can be used, for instance, for opening new paths. They also operate to remove or protect objects and place them beyond a demarcated zone of commoditization. This process of decommoditization is known as transvaluation. Appadurai points out that this type of transvaluation is typical of aesthetic objects and *sacra*. For transvalued objects the commodity phase is ideally brief and its movement restricted, as they are not 'priced' in the way other things might be.³⁹⁵

For Appadurai, this zone of art and ritual is a type of enclave, where the aesthetic, the ritual, and the social come together in the assignment of value.³⁹⁶ In *El Museo de la Calle*, the 'treasure box' performed the role of an enclave, in which objects were diverted from the exchange flux and became decommoditized. Appadurai draws on these ideas to understand how tools and artefacts of the non-Western cultures were involved in a paradoxical process of decommoditization and an intensification of commoditization in the Western world.³⁹⁷ In Western collections, diversity generated a specific aesthetics of decontextualisation, as I have examined in the previous chapter. However, we can suggest

³⁹⁵ Terminal commodities are objects which, because of the context, purpose, and meaning of their production make only one journey from production to consumption. They are never permitted to re-enter the commodity state. Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value", in Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 23.

³⁹⁶ Enclave is a notion used in political geography that designates a territory whose geographical boundaries lie entirely within the boundaries of another territory.

³⁹⁷ Appadurai states: 'It is the aesthetics of decontextualisation that is at the heart of display, in highbrow Western homes, of the tools and artefacts of the "other?". In these objects, we see not only the equation of the authentic with the exotic everyday object, but also the aesthetics of diversion. Such diversion is not only an instrument of decommoditization of the object, but also of the (potential) intensification of commoditization by the enhancement of value attendant upon its diversion.' Arjun Appadurai, *Ibid.*, p. 28.

that this decontextualisation is at the heart of display, in the same way that diversions (enclaves) are in correlation to paths. In *El Museo de la Calle* poems are as decontextualised as a gun with no aesthetic intention in the middle of an ever changing museum. *El Museo de la Calle* encapsulates both an economic model and an aesthetic one, and reveals their interdependency. Value is not only linked to the demand and supply logic operating in the streets, but it undergoes a transformation, a transvaluation, when objects are treasured and removed from this logic. This collection rationale behind *El Museo de la Calle* also seems to be related to a long tradition of artists' museums throughout the twentieth century, such as Robert Fillou's *Galérie Legitime* (ca 1962).³⁹⁸

Museums and exhibitions represent a distinctive situation of enclaving in which any kind of object can be temporarily diverted and decommoitized, such as we have seen in *The People's Choice* or *Rooms with a view*, discussed in previous chapters. *El Museo de la Calle* has a double paradoxical nature. On the one hand, it stands between the exchange of commodities (the path) and the treasure box (the diversion). On the other, it is at the same time a museum (with a permanent collection), a storefront, and an exhibition, whose condition is basically situational and unstable. The case of *El Museo de la Calle* is illustrative of the accumulation of dynamics that we have examined in this thesis and that have affected the process of exhibition making. It exemplifies the debates between representation, participation and collectivism, between collection, exhibition and museum, between fluidity, portability, temporality and stability, between uncertainty and legitimacy. Ambiguity is inherent to its nature; at the same time an artistic project, an exhibition and a museum. This blurring of boundaries between artists and curators was a central debate at the time of this project.³⁹⁹ We could see *El Museo de La Calle* contributing to the debate, with an ever changing collection that resists any fixed determination in relation to artistic categorisations, and the same time as a parody of the numerous museums that were inaugurated in the 2000s.

Counter to the other examples I have examined, this is the only case study to take place in open public space. As an exhibition it is as difficult to grasp as the street itself. Its chosen format is ambiguous, as the project is an amalgam of museum, exhibition and

³⁹⁸ For a list of projects of this kind, see AA Bronson and Peggy Gale (ed.), *Museum by Artists*, Toronto, Art Metropole, 1983; James Putnam, *Art and Artifact: the Museum as Medium*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2001.

³⁹⁹ JJ Charlesworth, "Curating Doubt", *Art Monthly*, no. 294, March 2006; Paul O'Neill, "The Curatorial Turn: from Practice to Discourse", in Filipovic, van Hal & Ovstebo (ed.), *The Biennial Reader*, Kunsthall Bergen y Hatje Cantz, 2010.

public space in constant flux. At a time of extreme institutionalisation and internationalisation in the art world, flexible structures seem to be prospective models in which to practice new forms of imagination and dissensus. Placed in a double bind – between co-optation and romanticisation, its temporality conditioned its disappearance – *El Museo de la Calle* might not have such an unhappy ending. Back in Bogotá, the last event of *El Museo de la Calle* saw it fading in economic flux.⁴⁰⁰ The recycling cart was returned to the neighbourhood in a free raffle shortly before El Cartucho disappeared to become the Third Millennium Park. Energy cannot be created or destroyed, only transformed.

⁴⁰⁰ Before its ending, it was presented in the Museo de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Sala Pizano, October-November, 2000.

6. CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to examine the dissenting value of the exhibition medium, through a number of case studies. The notion of dissensus is understood as ‘undoing the formatting of reality’, following Jacques Rancière; exhibitions have been considered suitable to enact creative analysis and imaginative propositions because it is a flexible medium able to experiment with any presumed content, form, aim or procedure. Exhibitions are complex assemblages of different layers, the material they exhibit (objects, images, texts), the display and installation system they use, the atmosphere they create, all of them referring to a wider context. They are based in generating relationships and associations: a whole that exceeds the sum of its parts for an unpredictable and diverse audience. This associative quality is not always directed to provoke aesthetic harmony, intellectual consistence or consensus. On the contrary, ever since the avant-garde, exhibitions have been used to disconcert, challenge, experiment, trigger discomfort, wonder, discrepancy and dissensus. This capacity is extremely useful to convey problems and inconsistencies, as well as new poetic, intellectual and political connections.

In spite of this potential, exhibitions and curating histories are still a very recent field of academic research. My intention was therefore to examine the critical and dissenting potential of exhibitions, while enriching this new area of study. I am aware that the academisation of this field runs the risk of detachment from the pragmatics of actual practice. However, my perspective within the discipline has emphasised dissensus, and acknowledges that research is aimed at producing certain effects in the field (both intellectually and practically), and that authors need to be aware of the implications of their analysis and methodologies. This point of view has also influenced the choice of case studies. I chose to examine exhibitions made by artists and collectives, rather than curators, which constitute a particular case in the exhibitions landscape because they are more receptive to exploring the limits and possibilities of a medium beyond imposed conventions.

There is a conspicuous risk in my chosen approach, which underlines singularity over representativeness. At the same time, all the individual cases are connected through a paradigm of dissent that traverses the intellectual and artistic horizon of the twentieth century, signalling, at transitional moments, the limits and contingency of a specific power

and knowledge formation. The cases can be considered breaking points in a continuum that they undo and redo. In each case study I have emphasised the context in which they arose, and the specific praxis that they brought about: each exhibition is tied to a concrete time and location. Because of their shared project of dissensus, there are some unexpected coincidences between them; they all occurred at moments of political and economic change, a factor that contributes to their openness and instability.

Tucumán Arde was unique in its context. In a climate of an historic political radicalisation, the artists decided to break drastically with the institutions, collaborate with the unions, set up a collaborative project and challenge everything that had been taken for granted regarding what was an exhibition. *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* experimented with a participative format, interrogating the process by which cultural objects were classified and collected, at a time when activist practices were being reconsidered. *Rooms with a view*, *We the People* and *Art/Artifact* confronted the epistemological framework in which non-Western objects were catalogued and displayed, in exhibitions that deconstructed self-reflectively a long tradition of Eurocentric institutions. *El Museo de la Calle* put together an ever changing exhibit of objects, blurring the boundaries between exhibition, storefront and museum, and challenging assumptions about the economic circulation and commodities. However, besides their specificities, they all participate of, and contribute to, a legacy of exhibition making that builds on a Marxist or neo-Marxist approach to the analysis of reality.

Even if the thesis did not want to formulate any kind of historicisation, throughout the years we can observe certain tendencies in the way dissensus has adopted one or other 'aesthetics', in relation to a common Marxist philosophical origin. The constant updating of aesthetic and theoretical strategies in relation to art and social change, through contextual interpretations in times of crisis, is a common feature in all the case studies. How to aesthetically interpret dialectics, montage, contradiction, hybridity, apparatus, and change; how to navigate between representation and participation; and how to render visible invisible relations of power, are questions that all the cases address. Marxist experimental exhibitions played an important role in the construction of a new exhibitionary language, both in propaganda shows and in Soviet museology. Their legacy can be perceived in exhibitions remote in time and space, with or without the simplification and didacticism that the early exhibitions contained. The quest for critical visual and spatial strategies sometimes

led to similar results, such as comparisons or mimicry. Beyond direct formal influence, the staging of a dialectical or a counter-hegemonic situation seemed to bring about recurrent solutions throughout the century.

A different reading of a Marxist exhibition was put forward in the Benjaminean model, which also receives distinctive iterations at different historical moments. In this schema, the boundary between producers and audience should ideally disappear. The exhibition, understood as a socialised means of production, is generated by the participants, and the outcome (display, content, conditions) was open to unexpected configuration. Also stemming from a Marxist genealogy, a situationist aesthetics has more recently gained popularity, gathering a multiplicity of practices under the same umbrella (including exhibitions) that intervene on a micropolitical, tactical level. Each of the case studies has a different way of interpreting dissensus within a theoretical paradigm already characterised by active critique, which has undergone a historical evolution.

Another common feature in all the cases is that these shows not only represented thematically, but tried to embody in their proceedings the issue they were aiming to address. These exhibitions tried to *do* politics, to *construct* a social space, to *produce* an encounter, or to *be* an economic laboratory. They performed what they were trying to convey. The results were not free of contradictions. However, these contradictions are precisely what needed to be worked out, rather than erased. This experimentation was facilitated by the fact that all the exhibitions took place in moments of crisis, in which political, social, intellectual or economic hegemonic formations were undergoing a shift. In these situations, 'laboratories' looking for alternatives coincided with a medium able to indicate breaking points, due to the exhibition's specific relational nature, open to new imaginary associations.

Along with the common intellectual landscape that frames the cases, there are also coincidences in terms of the methodologies they used. All of them defied dominant institutional logics, regarding what to show (information, archival material, domestic collections, everyday things, decontextualised objects), how to show them (juxtaposed, in a cart, in historicised settings, in a treasure box, with supplementary texts), and for whom (for unionists, for anyone in the street, for neighbours). The dissenting factor tends to be visually and spatially constructed with recognisable *modus operandi*. On the one hand,

techniques such as montage and hybridization were reworked and updated to different historical moments, something that we can relate to the aesthetic legacy of Marxism, synchronous with the historic avant-garde. On the other hand, they made use of other avant-gardist techniques, such as estrangement, games of placement and displacement, strategies of de- and re-contextualisation; we could speak of exhibitionary versions of surrealist poetic assemblages. This other aspect can be related to some extent with the legacy of the 1930s connection between surrealism and anthropology that we have examined in the third chapter.

All these procedures aimed to make the viewer active, aware of display techniques and of the challenges posed by their contents. Therefore we could say that these four case studies, which aimed to produce dissensus in a historicised critical framework, used certain forms and methods that embodied this dissensus in their own structures, thereby overcoming representational thematic shows. In the time lapse of 1968-1998, a period in which first the white cube, and then the global white cube, have fostered an increasing number of thematic exhibitions; these cases introduced collectivism, heterogeneity, uncertainty, fluidity or transvaluation to interrogate and re-imagine the limits of their own medium in a challenging intersection with other fields.

Within a genealogy of artist-curated shows, a new question could be posed: do curators have the same freedom and dissenting capacity when doing an exhibition? This question can be related to the singularity that I am highlighting in the cases. It is difficult to draw conclusions from the analysis of the four cases, since the examined projects are also singular in these artists' and groups' careers. The artists producing *Tucumán Arde* never worked together again. Colectivo Cambalache produced other projects, but these were not exhibitions. Fred Wilson didn't curate any other contemporary artists show, but his modus operandi changed to interventions in museums with historical objects and installations. Jimmie Durham continued his practice as an artist. Group Material was the only one to continue and expand their practice with exhibition as their primary medium, making of them an inspiring model for new generations of artists and curators.

A further study could be undertaken, relating these experiences with antecedents, such as Marcel Duchamp, Robert Fillou, Marcel Broodthaers, Claudio Costa, Claes Oldenburg, Tom Marioni, an established critical mass that I have commented in the Introduction.

Contemporary artists who have worked in the boundaries of exhibition, museum and installation, such as Mark Dion, Susan Hiller, Fernando Bryce, Sandra Gamarra, Mabe Bethônico, Museum of American Art, Goshka Macuga, Thomas Hirschorn, Haris Epaminonda, Meschac Gaba, or Khalil Rabah, to name but a few, also merit further study. It is interesting to point out the number of artists that since the 1990s have chosen to expand, permanently or occasionally, their practice in this way. Memory, modernity, history and globalisation seem to be topics that could be addressed in new contemporary intersections. There is yet another type of artist-curated show dating from the 1990s, which could also be examined. For instance, a number of artists curated shows in institutions: Joseph Kosuth's *The Play of the Unmentionable* (Brooklyn Museum, 1990), Mike Kelley's *The Uncanny* (Sonsbeek '93), Tacita Dean's *An Aside* (Camden Arts Centre, 2006), Jeremy Deller's *From one Revolution to another* (Palais de Tokyo, 2008), and Mark Wallinger's *The Russian Linesman* (Hayward Gallery, 2009), instead of using the exhibition as medium.

From the examination of all these examples and contexts we could raise a number of questions. Are artists allowed to propose (dissenting) challenges that curators cannot put forward, under the prevailing exhibition system? Are curators challenging representational thematic shows? Do institutions choose artists to counterpoint a regulated rhythm and demand on exhibitions? Is it precisely institutions, and not only the projects, that promote this singularity, establishing different conditions for artists and curators? In which conditions could contemporary curators' shows be dissenting? Is there a settled tradition of dissenting exhibitions by curators before the 1990s? To what extent have contemporary curators used these previous artists' exhibition models for their own shows? Are curators interested in pursuing, developing or reflecting on a Marxist legacy of exhibition making? All these questions will contribute towards the exploration of new paths in an academic field still in its early stages.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bibliography about History of Exhibitions and Curating

- Altshuler, B., *The Avant-garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th century*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1994.
- Altshuler, B., *Salon to Biennial* (vol.1), London, Phaidon, 2008.
- Bauer, U. M., *The New Spirit in Curating*, Stuttgart, Kunstlerhaus Stuttgart, 1992.
- Barker, E. (ed.), *Contemporary Cultures of Display*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1999.
- Basu, P. and Macdonald, S. (ed.), *Exhibition Experiments (New Interventions in Art History)*, London, Blackwell, 2007.
- Beech, D. and Gavin, W. (ed.), *Curating in the 21st Century*, Walsall and University of Wolverhampton, 2000.
- Bennett, T., *The Birth of the Museum. History, Theory, Politics*, New York, Routledge, 1995.
- Bezzola, T. and Kurzmeyer, R. (ed.), *Harald Szeemann, With By Through Because Towards Despite. Catalogue of all Exhibitions 1957-2005*, Zurich and Wien-New York, Edition Voldemeer and Springer, 2007.
- Bortolotti, M., *Il critico come curatore*, Milano, Silvana Editoriale, 2003.
- Brennan, M., *Curating Consciousness: Mysticism and the Modern Museum*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 2010.
- Bronson, AA and Gale, P., *Museums by Artists*, Toronto, Art Metropole, 1983.
- Buren, D., Esche, C., O'Neill, P. and Wilson, M., *Curating and the Educational Turn (Occasional Table Critical)*, London, Open Editions, 2010.
- Carbonell, B. (ed.), *Museum Studies in Context: An Anthology*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2004.
- Crimp, D., *On the Museum's Ruins*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1993.
- Derieux, F. (ed.), *Harald Szeemann, Individual Methodology*, Zurich, Jrp and Ringier, Kunstverlag AG, 2008.
- Drabble, B. and Richter, D. (ed.), *Curating Degree Zero. An International Curating Symposium*, Nuremberg, Verlag fur Modern Kunst, 1999.
- Duncan, C., *Civilizing Rituals. Inside Public Art Museums*, New York, Routledge, 1995.
- Eigenheer, M. (ed.), *Curating Critique*, Frankfurt am Main, Revolver, 2007.
- Filipovic, E., van Hal M. and Ovstebo, S. (ed.), *The Biennial Reader*, Kunsthall Bergen and Hatje Cantz, 2010.
- Graham, B., Cook, S. and Dietz, S., *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 2010.

- Greenberg, R. et al., *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London and New York, Routledge, 1996.
- Hannula, M. (ed.), *Stopping the Process: Contemporary Views on Art and Exhibitions*, Helsinki, NIFCA, 1998.
- Hiller S., and Martin, S. (ed), *The Producers: Contemporary Curators in Conversation* (vol. 1-5), Newcastle, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, 2000-2004.
- Karp, I. and Levine, S. D. (ed), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.
- Klonk, C., *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009.
- Klüsser, B. and Hegewisch (ed), *L'art de l'exposition: une documentation sur trente expositions exemplaires du XXe siècle*, Paris, Editions du Regard, 1998.
- Knell, S. J. (ed.), *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and Are Changed*, New York, Routledge, 2007.
- Kravagna, C. (ed), *The Museum as Arena: Artists on Institutional Critique*, Köln, Kunsthau Bregenz, König, 2001.
- Kuoni, C., *Words of Wisdom A Curator's Vade Mecum*, New York, Independent Curators International, 2001.
- Luckhurst, K. W., *The Story of Exhibitions*, London, The Studio Publications, 1951.
- Marincola, P. (ed), *Curating Now: Imaginative Practice? Public Responsibility*, Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2001.
- Marincola, P., *What makes a great exhibition*, Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2006.
- McShine, K., *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect* (exh. cat.), New York, MoMA, 1999.
- Michaud, Y., *L'artiste et les commissaires*, Nîmes, Editions Jacqueline Chambon, 1989.
- Miró, N. (ed.), *La exposición como dispositivo. Teorías y prácticas en torno a la exposición*, Lérida, Centro de Arte La Panera, 2008.
- Möntmann, N. (ed), *Art and its institutions. Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations*, London, Black Dog Publishing, 2005.
- Müller, H-J., *Harald Szeemann. Exhibition Maker*, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006.
- O'Doherty, B., *Inside the White Cube*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999.
- Obrist, H. U., *A Brief History of Curating*, JRP and Ringier, 2008.
- Obrist H. U., and Lamm, A.E., *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Curating But Were Afraid to Ask*, Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2011.
- O'Neill, P. (ed), *Curating subjects*, London, Open Editions, 2007.
- Open Magazine 16. The Art Biennial as Global Phenomenon: Strategies in Neo-Political Times*, Rotterdam, NAI Publishers, March 2009.

- Putnam, J., *Art and Artifact: the Museum as Medium*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2001.
- Quemin, A., *Les commissaires-priseurs. La mutation d'une profession*, Paris, Anthropos-Economica, 1997.
- Sherman, D. J. and Rogoff, I. (ed.), *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Schubert, K., *The Curator's Egg. The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present*, London, One-Off Press, 1999.
- Serota, N., *Experience or Interpretation?*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1996.
- Staniszewski, M. A., *The Power of Display, A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1998.
- Steven, R. and Kouris, H. (ed.), *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating*, Apexart, 2007.
- Szeemann, H., *Écrire les expositions*, Bruxelles, La lettre volée, 1996.
- Ribalta, J. (ed.), *Public Photographic Spaces. Propaganda Exhibitions from Pressa to The Family of Man, 1928-55*, Barcelona, MACBA, 2009.
- Rugg, J. and Sedgwick, M. (ed.), *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, Bristol, Intellect Books, 2008.
- Tannert, C. and Tischler, U., *Men in Black. Handbook of Curatorial practice*, Berlin and Frankfurt, Künstlerhaus Bethanien and Revolver, 2004.
- Thea, C. (ed), *Foci; Interviews with 10 International Curators*, NY, Apexart, 2001.
- Thomas, C. (ed), *The Edge of Everything: Reflections of Curatorial Practice*, Alberta, Canada, Banff Centre Press, 2002.
- Townsend, M. (ed), *Beyond the box: Diverging Curatorial Practices*, Alberta, Canada, Banff Centre Press, 2003.
- Vanderlinden, B. and Filipovic, E. (ed), *The Manifesta Decade, Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2006.
- White, P. (ed), *Naming a Practice: Curatorial Strategies for the Future*, Alberta, Canada, Banff Centre Press, 1996.

Online resources

<http://www.curatorial.net>

<http://publiccurating.cont3xt.net/>

<http://www.curatingdegreezero.org>

<http://www.curating.info/>

<http://www.on-curating.org/>

<http://www.universes-in-universe.de/english.htm>

http://www.situations.org.uk/research_rr_publishedarticles.html

Magazines and Journals

Manifesta Journal (2003-ongoing), Amsterdam, Manifesta Foundation.

Mousse Contemporary Art (2006-ongoing), Milan, Mousse Publishing

Kaleidoscope (2009-ongoing), Milan, Kaleidoscope Press

The Exhibitionist (2010-ongoing), published by Archive Books, Berlin.

Introduction

Alberro, A. and Stimson, B., *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, Cambridge, the M.I.T. Press, 2009

Alloway, L., *The Venice Biennale, 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl*, London, Faber, 1969.

Bennett, T., "The Exhibitionary Complex", in Greenberg, R., Ferguson, B. and Nairne, S. (eds.), *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London, Routledge, 1996.

Bryan-Wilson, J., "A Curriculum for Institutional Critique or the Professionalization of Conceptual Art", in Jonas Ekeberg (ed.), *New Institutionalism*, Oslo, Office for Contemporary Art and Verksted, 2003.

Bourdieu, P., *The Field of Cultural Production*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1993.

Buchloh, B., "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions", *October*, vol. 55, winter, 1990.

Bürger, P., *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Bürger, P., "Aporias of Modern Aesthetics", *New Left Review* n° 184, November-December, 1990.

Butler, J., "What is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue", in Ingram, D. (ed.), *The Political: Readings in Continental Philosophy*, London, Basil Blackwell, 2002.

Calderoni, I., "Creating Shows: Some Notes on Exhibition Aesthetics at the End of the Sixties", in O'Neill, P. (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, London, Open Editions, 2007.

Charlesworth, J. J., "Curating doubt", *Art Monthly*, 294, March 2006.

Collicelli Cagol, S., "Crossing the exhibition. Meanings and Possibilities in the Contemporary Art Exhibitions", unpublished essay, 2008.

- Duncan C. and Wallach, A., "The Universal Survey Museum," *Art History* 3, no. 4, December, 1980.
- Farquharson, A., "Curator and Artist", *Art Monthly*, 270, October, 2003.
- Foucault, M., "What is Critique?", in Lotringer, S. and Hochroth, L. (eds), *The Politics of Truth*, New York, *Semiotext(e)*, 1997.
- Foster, H., "What's Neo about the Neo-AvantGarde?", *October*, vol. 70, autumn, 1994.
- Fraser, A., "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique", *Artforum*, September 2005.
- Guénoun, S. and Kavanagh J.H., "Jacques Ranciere: Literature, Politics, Aesthetics: Approaches to Democratic Disagreement", *SubStance*, n° 92, 2000, p. 13.
- Haskins, C., "Kant and the Autonomy of Art", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 47, n° 1, winter, 1989.
- Heinich, N. and Pollack, M., "From museum curator to exhibition *auteur*", in Greenberg, R., Ferguson, B. and Nairne, S. (eds.), *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London, Routledge, 1996.
- Hinderliter, B., Maimon, V., Mansoor, J. and McCormick, S. (ed.), *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2009.
- Lykkeberg, T. "Interview to Hans Ulrich Obrist", in *Kopenhagen*, 11th June 2009.
- Morton, T., "The Name of the Game", *Frieze*, 97, March 2006.
- Nicodemus, E., "Bourdieu out of Europe?", *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace*, Cambridge, the M.I.T. Press, 1999.
- O'Neill, P., "I am a Curator", *Art Monthly*, 275, April, 2004.
- O'Neill, P., "The Curatorial Turn: from Practice to Discourse", in Filipovic, E., van Hal, M. and Ovstebo, S. (eds.), *The Biennial Reader*, Kunsthall Bergen and Hatje Cantz, 2010.
- Osborne, P., *Conceptual Art*, London, Phaidon, 2002.
- Storr, R., "Reading Circle", *Frieze*, 93, September, 2005.
- Storr, R., "The Exhibitionists", *Frieze*, 94, October, 2005.
- Szeemann, H., *Documenta 5. 100 Days of Inquiry into Reality -- Today's Imagery*, Kassel, Documenta 5, 1972.
- Szylak, A. and Szczerski A., *The Mousetrap Book: On Dealing with Institutions in Contemporary Curatorial Practice*, Gdansk and Frankfurt, Wyspa Institute of Art and Revolver, 2005.
- Rancière, R., *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
- Rancière, R., *The Politics of Aesthetics*, London, Continuum, 2004.
- Rancière, R., *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, London, Continuum, 2010.

VVAA, *Marcel Broodthaers* (exh. cat.), Paris, Éditions du Jeu de Paume, 1991.

Ward, F., "The Haunted Museum: Institutional Critique and Publicity", *October*, vol. 73, summer, 1995.

Ward, M., 'What's Important about the History of Modern Art Exhibitions', in Greenberg, R., Ferguson, B. and Nairne, S. (eds.), *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London, Routledge, 1996.

Watkins, J., "The Curator as Artist", London, *Art Monthly*, n° 111, November, 1987.

Welchman, J. (ed.), *Institutional Critique and After*, Zurich, Jrp and Ringier, 2006.

Wuggenig, U., "Paradoxical Critique", *eipcp.net*, 2008,
<http://eipcp.net/transversal/0808/wuggenig/en>

Exhibition as political site: the case of *Tucumán Arde*

Akinsha, K., "The End of Avant-Garde. Radical Art Forms in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, 1927-1937", Salzberger Art Association. Salzburg, Austria. 2000.

Alberro, A. "Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1977", in Alberro, A. and Stimson, B. (eds.) *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1999, pp. xxv-xxvi.

Amar Sánchez, A.M., *El relato de los hechos. Rodolfo Walsh: testimonio y escritura*, Rosario, Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 1992.

Barron, S. *Degenerate Art The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (exh. cat.), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991.

Benjamin, W., "The Author as Producer", in *Understanding Brecht*, London, Verso, 1983.

Bertone Crippa, M., "Proximidades y distancias entre las narrativas de Walsh y Borges" *La Trama de la Comunicación*, vol. 12, Rosario. Argentina. UNR Editora, 2007.

Birri, F. *La Escuela Documental de Santa Fe*, Rosario, Prohistoria Ediciones, 2008.

Bradley, W. and Esche, C. (ed.), *Art and Social Change, a Critical Reader*, Afterall Books and Tate publishing, 2007.

Buchloh, B. "Allegorical Procedures", *Artforum* n° 21, New York, September, 1982.

Buchloh, B. "From Faktura to Factography", *October*, n° 30, fall 1984.

Buergel, R. and Noack, R., *Documenta 12* (exh. cat.), Kassel, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, 2007.

Burton J. (ed.), *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America: Conversations with Filmmakers*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1986.

Burton, J., *The Social Documentary in Latin America*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990.

- Camnitzer, L., Farver, J. and Weiss, R., *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950-1980* (exh. cat.), New York, Queens Museum of Art, 1999.
- Carson, J., “Roberto Jacoby’s 1968: el culo te abrocho”, 1/10/2009, available at: <http://studioart.arts.uci.edu/gallery/jacoby/jacoby.html>.
- Colombres, A., (ed.), *Cine, antropología y colonialismo*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones del Sol, 2005.
- Cramerotti, A., *Aesthetic Journalism: How to Inform Without Informing*, Bristol, Intellect Books, 2009.
- Didi-Huberman, G., *Cuando las imágenes toman posición*, Madrid, A. Machado Libros, 2008.
- El Lissitzky, “The Future of Book” *New Left Review*, n° 41, January- February 1967.
- Fantoni, G., “Rosario: opciones de la vanguardia”, in *Cultura y política en los años ’60*, Buenos Aires, Oficina de Publicaciones del CBC – UBA, 1997.
- Fernández, O., “Conceptualism, a Historiographic Necessity for Latin American Art?”, Center for Latin American Visual Studies, Univ. of Austin (Texas), 2010. Available on line: http://www.finearts.utexas.edu/aah/files/latin_seminar_conference_papers/PAPER%20-%20Olga%20Fernandez.pdf
- Fore, D. (ed.), *October* n° 118, (monographic issue on Factography), fall 2006.
- Foster, H. *The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1996.
- Frontini, A.D., “Tucumán Arde. Campaña publicitaria de la 1° Bienal de Arte de Vanguardia”, in *La Trama de la Comunicación* n°. 10, Anuario del Departamento de Ciencias de la Comunicación, Universidad Nacional de Rosario, UNR Editora, 2005.
- Giunta, A., *Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics. Argentine Art in the Sixties*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2007.
- Graduating Students on the MA Curating Contemporary Art, *Again for Tomorrow* (exh. cat.), London, Royal College of Art, 2006.
- Grasselli, F., “Concepto de vanguardia y escritura testimonial en los programas estético-políticos de Rodolfo Walsh y Francisco Urondo”, in *Espéculo. Revista de estudios literarios*. Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2010.
- González, H. (ed.), *Historia crítica de la sociología en Argentina*, Buenos Aires, Ed. Colihue, 2000.
- Jolles, A., “Stalin’s Talking Museums”, *Oxford Art Journal* n° 28, Oxford, October, 2005.
- Katzenstein, I., (ed.) *Listen Here Now! Argentine Art of the 1960s: Writings of the Avant-Garde*, New York, MoMA, 2004.

- King, J., *El Di Tella y el desarrollo cultural argentino en la década del sesenta*, Buenos Aires, Gaglianone, 1985.
- Krauss, R., "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism", *October*, n° 19, winter, 1981.
- Longoni, A. and Mestman, M. *Del di Tella a Tucumán Arde. Vanguardia y política en el 68 argentino*, Buenos Aires, Ed. El cielo por asalto, 2000.
- Longoni, A. and Davis, F., *Inventario 1965-1975. Archivo Graciela Carnevale*, Rosario, Centro Cultural Parque de España, 2008.
- López, M. "How Do We Know What Latin American Conceptualism Looks Like?", in *Afterall*, 23, spring 2010.
- Manifesta Journal*, n° 8, monographic issue on Collective Curating, Manifesta Foundation, 2009/2010.
- Marchán Fiz, S., *Del arte objetual al arte de concepto (1960-1974). Epílogo sobre la sensibilidad "postmoderna". Antología de escritos y manifiestos*, Madrid, Akal, 1994.
- Masotta, O., *Conciencia y estructura*, Buenos Aires, Jorge Álvarez, 1969.
- McLuhan, M., *Understanding Media*, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1964.
- Mestman, M., "Testimonios obreros, imágenes de protesta: el directo en la encrucijada del cine militante argentino", in Ortega Gálvez, M.L. and García, N. (ed.), *Cine directo. Reflexiones en torno a un concepto*, T&B Editores, 2008.
- Padín, C., "En las avanzadas del arte latinoamericano", *Escáner Cultural*, n° 13, año 3, Santiago de Chile, April, 2001.
- Paine, C., "Militant Atheist Objects: Anti-Religion Museums in the Soviet Union", *Present Pasts*, 1, February 2010.
- Pera, R., *Ambulantes. Cultura Portátil* (exh. cat.), Sevilla, Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, 2004.
- Pohlmann, U., "El Lissitzky's Exhibitions Designs: The Influence of His Work in Germany, Italy, and the United States, 1923-1943", in Tupitsyn, M. (ed.), *El Lissitzky: Beyond the Abstract Cabinet: Photography, Design, Collaboration*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1999.
- Quiles, D., "Publicity as an Art Form: David Lamelas's Publication", unpublished paper, *Transnational Latin American Art International Research Forum*, Austin, University of Texas, November 2009.
- Salmond, W., "Notes on the Experimental Marxist Exhibition", *X-Tra*, vol 5 n° 1, fall 2002.
- Salmond, W., "The Soviet Art Museum, 1933" in *X-Tra*, vol 5 n° 1, fall 2002.

- Ramírez, M.C. and Olea, H., *Heterotopías. Medio siglo sin-lugar: 1918-1968*, Madrid, Museo Reina Sofía, 2000.
- Ramírez, A.J., “Tucumán 1965-1969: movimiento azucarero y radicalización política”, *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*, Debates, 2008. Available on line: <http://nuevomundo.revues.org/38892>, last accessed 26/08/2011.
- Ramírez, M.C., *Inverted Utopias*, Houston, Fine Arts, Houston, 2004.
- Ribalta (ed.), J., *Public Photographic Spaces. Exhibitions of Propaganda, from Prensa to The Family of Man, 1928-1955*, Barcelona. MACBA, 2009.
- Río, V. del *Factografía. Vanguardia y Comunicación de masas*, Madrid, Abada Editores, 2010.
- Rizzo, P. (ed.). *Instituto Di Tella. Experiencias'68*, Buenos Aires: Fundación Proa, 1998.
- Roberts, J. *The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography, and the Everyday*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998.
- Roca, C., “Las Bienales de Córdoba como "illusio"”, in *Huellas, Búsquedas en Artes y Diseño*, n° 2, Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, 2002.
- Verón, E., “La obra” (1967), *Ramona*, n° 9-10, Buenos Aires, 2000-2001.
- Vindel, J., “Los 60 desde los 90”, en *Ramona*, n° 82, julio, 2008.
- Vindel, J. “Tretiakov en Argentina”, *eipcp*, August 2010, available on line: www.eipcp.net/transversal/0910/vindel/es
- Vignoli, B., “Eduardo Favario o el retrato del artista como lugarteniente”, *Página 12*, Rosario, 14 de marzo de 2006.
- What, How and for Whom, *Collective Creativity: Common Ideas for Life and Politics* (exh. cat.), Kassel, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, 2005.

Exhibition as social space: the case of *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)*

- Allen, K., “Reflections on Walter Hopps in Los Angeles”, *X-Tra*, volume 8, n° 1, fall 2005.
- Apple, J., *Alternatives in Retrospect. An Historical Overview.1969-1975* (exh. cat.), New York, The New Museum, 1981.
- Ashford, D., “Kiss of Death”, *Real Life Magazine* n 11/12, winter 1983-84.
- Ault, J. (ed), *Alternative Art New York. 1965-1985*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- Ault, J. (ed.), *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material*, London, Four Corners, Books, 2010.
- Avgikos, J., “Group Material Timeline: Activism as a work of art”, in Felshin, N. (ed.), *But is it Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*, Bay Press, Seattle, 1995.

- Bishop, C., *Installation Art. A critical History*, London, Tate Publishing, 2005.
- Bishop, C., "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents", *Artforum*, February 2006.
- Bishop, C., *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London, Verso, forthcoming.
- Bourriaud, N., *Relational Aesthetics*, Paris, Presses du réel, 2002.
- Burgin, V., *The End of Art Theory*, London, Macmillan, 1986.
- Cameron, D., "Group Material talks to Dan Cameron", *ArtForum*, April, 2003.
- Crow, T., "The practice of Art history in America", *Daedalus*, vol. 135, spring 2006.
- Deitcher, D., "Social aesthetics", in Brian Wallis (ed.), *Democracy. A project by Group Material*, Bay Press, Seattle, 1990.
- Deitcher, D., "Looking at Whitney Annuals and Biennials, 1968-2000" in Ault, J. (ed), *Alternative Art New York. 1965-1985*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- Deitcher, D., "Tim Rollins talks to David Deitcher", *ArtForum*, April 2003.
- Deutsche, R. and Gendel Ryan, C., "The Fine Art of Gentrification", *October*, vol. 31, winter 1987.
- Felshin, N. (ed.), *But is it Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*. Bay Press, Seattle, 1995.
- Foster, H., "The Artist as Ethnographer," in *The Return of the Real*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1996.
- Goldstein, R., "Enter the Anti-Space", *Village Voice*, 11th November 1980.
- Gough, M., "Paris, Capital of the Soviet Avant-Garde," *October*, n° 101, summer, 2002.
- Green, A., "Citizen Artists: Group Material", *Afterall*, n° 26, spring 2011.
- Hall, P., "Interview to Group Material", in *Real Life Magazine* n 11/12, winter 1983-84.
- Hess, E., "Home-Style Looking", *Village Voice*, Jan 28th – Feb 3rd, 1981.
- Kester, G.H. (ed.), *Art, Activism and Oppositionality. Essays from Afterimage*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1998.
- Kwon, M., *One Place after Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 2002.
- Lacy, S. (ed.), *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art*, Seattle, Bay Press, 1995.
- Larsen, L. B., "People's Choice", *Frieze*, n° 132, June-August, 2010.
- Larson, K., "Rooms with a Point of View", *ArtNews*, 76, no 8, New York, October 1977.
- Lawson, T., "'The People's Choice,' Group Material", *Artforum*, n° 8, April, 1981.
- Lefebvre, F., *The Production of Space*, Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, 1991.
- Lippard, L. *The Lure of the Local*, New York, The New Press, 1997.

- Lippard, L., *Six years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2001.
- Little, D.E., "Colab Takes a Piece, History Takes It Back: Collectivity and New York Alternative Spaces", *Art Journal*, spring 2007.
- Meyer, J., "The Functional Site; or the Transformation of Site-Specificity", in Suderburg, E. (ed.), *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Obrist, H. U., "Interview with Walter Hopps", *A Brief History of Curating*, Zurich and Dijon, JRP/Ringier and Les Preses du Réel, 2008.
- Olander, W., "Material world", *Art in America*, n° 77, January, 1989.
- Owens, C. "The Problem with Puerilism," *Art in America* 72, no. 6, summer 1984.
- Rollins, T., "Particles, 1980-83", *Real Life Magazine* n 11/12, winter 1983-84.
- Rollins, T., "A radical art is one that helps organize people who can speak for themselves, but lack the vehicles to do so", in Olander, W., "Material World", *Art in America*, January, 1989.
- Sholette, G., "News from Nowhere: Activist Art and After. A Report from New York City", *Third Text*, 45, winter 1998-99.
- Smith, S., "Mapping the Terrain, Again". *Afterall*, n° 27, summer 2011.
- Stimson, B. and Sholette, G. (ed), *Collectivism after Modernism. The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- Tucker, M., *A Short Life of Trouble: Forty Years in the New York Art World*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008.
- Webster, A., *Fashion Moda: A Bronx experience*, February 1996, available at: <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/vpadvance/artgallery/gallery/talkback/fmwebster.html>.
- What How and for Whom, "New Outlines of the Possible", *Collective Creativity: Common Ideas for Life and Politics* (exh. cat.), Kassel, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, 2005.

Exhibition as encounter: the cases of *Rooms with a View*, *We the People* and *Art/Artifact*

- Art Journal* (monographic issue Recent Native American Art), vol. 51, n° 3, autumn, 1992.
- Artforum* (monographic issue New York art in the 1980s), October 1999.
- Bateson, G., "Arts of the South Seas", *Art Bulletin*, 28, n° 2, June, 1946.

- Beaujour, M., "Anthropology and Ethnography", in Kritzman, L.D. (ed.), *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Buchloh, B., "The Museum Fictions of Marcel Broodthaers", in Bronson AA and Gale, P. (ed.), *Museums by Artists*, Toronto, Art Metropole, 1983.
- Buchloh, B., "From Faktura to Factography", *October* n° 30, autumn 1984.
- Burton, J., "For Presentation and Display: Some Art of the '80s'", 2005, available at: web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/amcarticles/Burton-80s.pdf.
- Cameron, D., *East Village USA* (exh. cat.), New York, New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005.
- Carson, J., "On Discourse as Monument: Institutional Spaces and Feminist Problematics", in Ault, J. (ed.), *Alternative Art New York 1965-1985*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- Christov-Bakargiev, C., *Around 1984: A Look at Art in the Eighties* (exh. cat.), New York, P.S.1, 2000.
- Clifford, J., "On Ethnographic Surrealism", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* vol. 23, n° 4, October 1981.
- Clifford, J., "Histories of the Tribal and the Modern", *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Collins and Milazzo, *Hyperframes: A Post-Appropriation Discourse*, vol. 1, Paris, Éditions Antoine Candau, 1989.
- Colomina, B., "La psique del edificio: La *Space House* de Frederick Kiesler", in *Doble Exposición. Arquitectura a través del arte*, Madrid, Akal, 2006.
- Crimp, D., "On the Museum's Ruins", *October*, 1980, n°. 13, summer 1980.
- Crow, T., "Marx to Sharks: The Art-Historical '80s", *Artforum*, New York, April 2003.
- Cusset, F., *French Theory, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and Cie et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux États-Unis*, Paris, La Découverte, 2003.
- Danto, A. C., "Artifact and Art.", in *Art/Artifact* (exh.cat.), New York, The Center for African Art and Prestel-Verlag, 1988.
- Danto, A.C., *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Dorner, A., *The way beyond art*, New York, New York University Press, 1958.
- Dutton, D., "Tribal Art and Artifact", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, 1993.
- Enwezor, O., "Topographies of Critical Practices: Exhibition as Place and Site", *The Exhibitionist*, n° 2, June, 2010.

- Errington, S., *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and other Tales of Progress*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998.
- Faris, J.C., "Art/Artifact: On the Museum and Anthropology", *Current Anthropology*, vol. 29, n° 5, December, 1988.
- Farmer, J.A. and Gardner, A. (ed.), *Fred Wilson, Objects and Installations 1979-2000. Issues in Cultural Theory*, No. 4, Center for Art and Visual Culture, UMBC, 2004.
- Federov-Davydov, A., "The Soviet Art Museum, 1933" in *X-Tra*, vol 5 n° 1, fall 2002.
- Filipovic, E., "The Global White cube" in *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in post-Wall Europe*, Vanderlinden, B. and Filipovic, E. (ed), Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 2005.
- Fisher, J., "In Search of the 'Inauthentic'. Disturbing Signs in Contemporary Native American Art", *Art Journal*, vol. 51, n° 3, autumn 1992.
- Fisher, J., "The Health of the People is the Highest Law", in *Vampire in the Text. Narratives of Contemporary Art*, London, inIVA, 2003.
- Fisher, J., "Through the Mirror of Seduction... Judith's Barry Film and Video Installations", in *Vampire in the Text. Narratives of Contemporary Art*, London, inIVA, 2003.
- Fisher, J., "Fictional Histories. Magiciens de la Terre", in *Vampire in the text. Narratives of Contemporary Art*, London, inIVA, 2003.
- Foster, H., "Subversive Signs" *Art in America*, n° 70/10, March 1982.
- Foster, H., "The primitive "Unconscious" of Modern Art", *October*, vol. 34, autumn, 1985.
- Fraser, A., "In and Out of place", *Art in America*, 76/3, June 1985.
- Gell, A., "Vogel's Net. Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps" in *Journal of Material Culture*, vol. 1, n° 1, 1996.
- González, J.A., "Fred Wilson. Material Museology" in *Subject to Display. Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 2008.
- Jolles, A., "Espèces d'espaces surréalistes: Architecture/Mise-en-scène/Exposition", in Chénieux-Gendron, J. (ed.), *Pensée de l'expérience, travail de l'expérimentation au sein des surréalismes et des avant-gardes en Europe*, Paris and Leuven, Peeters, 2005.
- Katenhusen, I., "Alexander Dorner (1893-1957): A German Art Historian in the United States", Washington, American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, 2002.
- Kiesler, F., *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display*, New York, Brentano, 1930.
- Kwon, M., "Reflections on the Intellectual History of the ISP", *Independent Study Program: 25 years, 1968-1993*, New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993.

- Lewis, K., *Displaying the Marvellous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí and Surrealist Exhibition Installations*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 2001.
- Lotringer, S. and Cohen, S. (ed.), *French theory in America*, New York, Routledge, 2000.
- Martin, J.H., *Magiciens de la Terre*, (exh. cat.), Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1989.
- McEvelly, T., "Doctor Lawyer Indian Chief", *Artforum*, n° 23, November 1984.
- Mignolo, W., *Museums in the Colonial Horizon of Modernity*, in Annual CIMAM Conference (International Association of Museums of Modern Art), edited by Board of CIMAM, 2005.
- Mignolo, W., "Delinking", *Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, n° 2, 2007.
- Morgan, R. C., "The Exhibition Catalog as a Distancing Apparatus: Current Tendencies in the Promotion of Exhibition Documents", *Leonardo*, vol. 24, n° 3, 1991.
- Morphy, H. and Perkins, M. (ed.), *The anthropology of art: a reader*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
- Ockman, J., "The Road Not Taken: Alexander Dorner's Way beyond Art," in Somol, R.E. (ed.), *Autonomy and Ideology: Positioning an Avant-Garde in America*, New York, Monacelli Press, 1997.
- O'Doherty, B., *Inside the White Cube*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986.
- Pearlman, A., *Unpackaging art of the 1980s*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2003.
- Pindell, H., "Art(world) and racism. Statistics, Testimony and Supporting Documentation", *Third Text*, vol. 2, n° 2-3, 1988.
- Price, S., *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Raynor, V., "Objects are Subject of 'Damaged Goods'", *New York Times*, July 18, 1986.
- Rees, L. and Borzello, F. (eds.), *The New Art History*, London, Camden Press, 1986.
- Rushing, J., "Native American Art and the New York avant-garde. A history of cultural primitivism" in Berlo, J.C., (ed), *The Early Years of Native American Art History*, Seattle and Vancouver, University of Washington Press and University of British Columbia Press, 1992.
- Rubin, W. (ed.), "Primitivism" in *Twentieth-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (exh. cat.), New York, MoMA, 1984.
- Schjeldahl, P., "The Desire of the Museum", in *The 7 days art columns, 1988-1990*, New York, Figures Press, 1990.
- Shrader, R., *The Indian Arts and Crafts Board*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1983.
- Singerman, H., "A history of the Whitney Independent Study Program - In Theory & Practice", *Artforum*, February 2004.

Sleeper-Smith, S., *Contesting Knowledge: Museums and Indigenous Perspectives*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2009.

Smith, R., “The Whitney Interprets Museums' Dreams”, *The New York Times*, July 23, 1989.

Staniszewski, M.A., “Aestheticized Installations for Modernism, Ethnographic Art, and Objects of Everyday Life”, in *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1998.

Third Text (special issue *Magiciens de la Terre*) n° 6, vol 3, spring 1989.

Vogel, S., *Art/Artifact* (exh. cat.), New York, The Center for African Art and Prestel-Verlag, 1988.

Wallis, B., “A Product you could kill for”, in *Damaged Goods: Desire and the Economy of the Object* (exh. cat), New York, The New Museum, 1986.

Welchman, J.C., (ed.), *Art after Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s*, G+B Arts International, 2001.

Wilson, F. and Corrin, L. (ed.), *Mining the Museum: An installation*, New York, The New Press, 1994.

Exhibition as an exchange situation: the case of *El Museo de la Calle*

Adamson, G., *Thinking through Craft*, Oxford, Berg, 2007.

Andrade, O. de, “Manifiesto antropófago”, *Revista de Antropofagia*, n° 1, mayo de 1928.

Andreasen S. and Larsen, L. B., “The Middleman: Beginning to talk about Mediation”, O'Neill, P. (ed.), *Curating subjects*, London, Open Editions, 2007.

Agamben, G., *State of exception*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Appadurai, A., “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value”, in Appadurai, A. (ed.), *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Arcos Palma, R., “De adversidades vivimos”, *Vistazos Críticos*, 7 junio de 2001.

Arcos Palma, R., “El performance en Colombia a finales del siglo XX. Apuntes sobre una investigación de una generación olvidada”, *Reflector*, julio 2007.

Barriandos, J., “Desconquistas (políticas) y redescubrimientos (estéticos)” in *Desbordes* n° 0, June 2009.

Basualdo, C. (ed.), *Worthless (Invaluable) The Concept of Value in Contemporary Art* (exh. cat.), Ljubljana, Moderna Galerija Ljubljana, 2000.

Basualdo, C., “Interview with Colectivo Cambalache”, *Flash Art*, 214, October, 2000.

Basualdo, C. (ed.), *De adversidade vivemos* (exh. cat.), Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2001.

Bentes, I., "Apocalipsis estético: ameryka del hambre, del sueño y del trance", in *Estética del Sueño* (exh. cat.), Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2001.

Bernal, M^a C., Escobar, F. and MacKinno, K. (ed.), *Displaced: Contemporary Art from Colombia* (exh. cat.), Swansea, Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, 2007.

Bey, H., *TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, Autonomedia, 1991. Available at: http://hermetic.com/bey/taz_cont.html

Bourriaud, N., *Relational Aesthetics*. Paris, Presses du réel, 2002.

Bronson, AA and Gale, P. (ed.), *Museum by Artists*, Toronto, Art Metropole, 1983.

Caycedo, C. (ed.), *Daytoday 2002-2009*, Los Angeles, g727, 2009.

Caycedo, C., "Seven years of chaos", *Art Work*, September 2009.

Certeau, M. de, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984.

Charlesworth, J.J., "Curating doubt", *Art Monthly*, n° 294, March 2006.

Colectivo Cambalache, <http://museodelacalle.blogspot.com/>, 1998.

Cortés, R. A., *El artista como testigo: testimonio de un artista*, 2006, artescenicas.uclm.es/.../El_artista_como_testigo_RolfAbderbalden.pdf

Debord, G., *Theory of the Dérive*. Paris, Les Lèvres Nues #9, 1956.

Decter, J., "Schmoozing and Slumming," *TRANS>arts.cultures.media*, vol 1, n° 2, 1996.

Deleuze, G, and Guattari, F., *A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

Dezeuze, A., "Thriving on Adversity: The Art of Precariousness", *Mute*, vol. 2, London, September 2006. Available at: <http://www.metamute.org/en/Thriving-On-Adversity> .

Esfera pública, "Entrevista con Federico Guzmán", *Esfera pública*, 21 mayo 2007, available at <http://esferapublica.org/nfblog/?p=846>.

Faguet, M., "Barriobajeando rumbo al prestigio", 2008, available in an English version at <http://michiacevedo.blogspot.com/2010/05/je-est-un-autre-institutionalization-of.html>

Faguet, M., "Ponomiseria Or How Not to Make a Documentary Film," London, *Afterall* n° 21, Spring 2009.

Fernández, C.A., *Arte en Colombia 1981-2006*, Medellín, Universidad de Antioquia, 2007.

Foster, H., "The Artist as Ethnographer," in *The Return of the Real*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1996.

García-Canclini, N., "Desórdenes: chatarra e informalidad", in *Geografías del desorden: migración, alteridad y nueva esfera social*, Valencia, Universidad de Valencia, 2006.

- Gielen, P. and Bruyne, P. de (ed), *Being an artist in post-fordist times*, Rotterdam, NAI Publishers, 2009.
- Góngora, A. and Suárez, C. J., “Por una Bogotá sin mugre: violencia, vida y muerte en la cloaca urbana”, *Universitas humanística*, nº 66, julio-diciembre de 2008.
- Grant, C. and Nadim, T., “Working Things Out Together: the Joys of Bootlegging, Bartering and Collectivity”, *Parachute: Contemporary Art Magazine*, July, 2003.
- Harvey, H., *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography*, New York, Routledge, 2001.
- Herkenhorff, P., “Libertad, igualdad e ira”, in *Estética del Sueño* (exh. cat.), Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2001.
- Iñigo, M. and Aznar, Y., “Arte activista en Brasil durante el AI-5 (1968-1979)”, 2006 lecture, published as “Hay tensión”, *Versiones Magazine*, Madrid, European University of Madrid, 2009.
- Iregui, J., “Modos de operar”, *Esfera pública*, 16 noviembre de 2002, available at http://esferapublica.org/portal/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=617&Itemid=79.
- Lévi-Strauss, C., *The Savage Mind*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1968.
- Lozano-Moreno, C., “Recycling Bogotá”, *Drain Magazine*, November 2005. Available at: http://www.drainmag.com/contentNOVEMBER/RELATED_ESSAYS/Recycling_Bogota.htm.
- Maharaj, S., “Perfidious Fidelity: The Untranslatability of the Other” in Hall, S. and Maharaj, S., *Modernity and Difference*, Iniva, London, 2001.
- O’Neill, P., “The Curatorial Turn: from Practice to Discourse”, in Filipovic, E., van Hal, M. and Ovstebo, S. (ed.), *The Biennial Reader*, Kunsthall Bergen y Hatje Cantz, 2010.
- Oiticica, H. *Nueva Objetividad Brasileña*, Museo de Arte Moderno de Río de Janeiro, 1967.
- Ordoñez, I., “Entrevista a Carolina Caycedo” en *Privado. Entrevistas con artistas*, 2009. Available at <http://privadoentrevistas.blogspot.com>
- Pera, R., *Ambulantes. Cultura portátil* (exh. cat.), Sevilla, Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, 2004.
- Purves, T. (ed.), *What we Want is Free. Generosity and Exchange in Recent Art*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2005.
- Putnam, J., *Art and Artifact: the Museum as Medium*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2001.
- Ramírez, M^a C., “Brokering Identities. Art curators and the politics of cultural representation”, in Greenberg, R., Ferguson, B. and Nairne, S. (ed.), *Thinking about exhibitions*, London, Routledge, 1996.

- Ramírez, M^a C., “Tactics for thriving on Adversity. Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980” in Camnitzer, L., Farver J. and Weiss, R. (ed.), *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origins, 1950s-1980s* (exh cat), New York, Queens Museum of Art, 1999.
- Roberts, J., *The Intangibilities of Form. Skill and Deskillling in Art after the Readymade*, London, Verso, 2007.
- Roca, J., “Entrevista a Raimond Chaves”, *La Columna de Arena*, n° 63, 2003.
- Rocha, G., *Ezřtetyka del hambre*, Seminário do Terceiro Mundo, Genova, 1965.
- Rojas-Sotelo, M., “Postales de un territorio excéntrico”, in *Calle 14 Revista de investigación en campo del Arte*, vol. 4 n°. 5, julio-diciembre, 2010.
- Rueda Fajardo, S., *Una línea de polvo. Arte y drogas en Colombia*, Bogotá, Fundación Gilberto Alzate Avendaño, 2009.
- Santana, S.E., “¿No Hay Monedas? No Hay Problema in the Bartering World”, *The Argentina Independent*, 10th August 2009.
- Sennett, R., *The Craftsman*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008.
- Soja, E., *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 2000.
- Yúdice, G., “Marginality and the Ethics of Survival”, *Social Text*, no. 21, 1989.

Author’s Interviews

Interview to Graciela Carnevale, London, 27/05/2009

Interview to Doug Ashford, New York, 08/02/2009

Interview to Fred Wilson, New York, 10/02/2009

Interview to Carolina Caycedo, Madrid, 12/07/2010

The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than for which it is now submitted.

Olga Fernández López

September 2011