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Luis Camnitzer: Retrospective Exhibition 1966-1990

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**Luis Camnitzer: Retrospective Exhibition 1966-1990**

**Organized by  
Jane Farver**

**Lehman College Art Gallery  
Bronx, New York  
February 1- March 16, 1991**

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Atlanta, Georgia  
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## Introduction

Luis Camnitzer was born in Germany and grew up in Uruguay and is a citizen of that country; he has lived in the United States for over twenty years. Like his life, his art is grounded in three continents and reflects his transcultural experience. For Camnitzer, political awareness is crucial to understanding one's environment and making strategies for ethnically based actions. Art is his instrument of choice to implement those strategies. Conceptual in nature, his work is powerful and evocative; it is often humorous, and sometimes deeply disturbing. Always, he challenges and implicates the viewer.

Latin American and European viewers have had opportunities to see major exhibitions of Camnitzer's work in a 1986 traveling retrospective organized by the Museo de Artes Plásticas in Montevideo, and at exhibitions at Museum Wiesbaden (1980) and the Venice Biennale (1988). However, it is possible that he is more widely known in North America through his writings than for his art works. He has produced some of the most cogent pieces about the "mainstream" and "marginal" artworlds published in recent years, and several of these are included in this catalogue. The Lehman College Art Gallery is pleased to present this overview of Luis Camnitzer's work to North American audiences in this, his first retrospective in the United States.

Several of the titles of Luis Camnitzer's works, such as *They Found that Reality Had Intruded Upon the Image*, and *Art and Politics*, came to seem prophetically apt during the organization of this exhibition this past year. 1990 was a turbulent year for the arts in the United States. A museum director and members of a musical rap group were arrested, tried and acquitted; and at the National Endowment for the Arts, grant recipients were obliged to sign a pledge agreeing to abide by the Helms amendment. This retrospective exhibition was selected by the NEA Museum Program to receive an award of fifteen thousand dollars. While it was gratifying to have been selected to receive one of these extremely competitive grants, The Lehman College Art Gallery board and staff, together with Luis Camnitzer, decided the Gallery should not sign this restrictive pledge. All shared in this resolve; but it was Luis, in his eloquent statements, who best articulated for us the fact that artistic freedom is priceless. His actions and words were in keeping with the conviction and passion encompassed in his works from the past quarter century, as evidenced in this exhibition. As this catalogue goes to press, Federal District Judge John G. Davies has just rendered a decision that the restrictive "anti-obscenity" pledge is unconstitutional. We celebrate this ruling along with the opportunity to present this most important retrospective of works by Luis Camnitzer.

Jane Farver  
Director



*Art and Politics*, 1990



# Moral Imperatives: Politics as Art in Luis Camnitzer

By Mari Carmen Ramirez

*We live the alienating myth of primarily being artists. We are not. We are primarily ethical beings sifting right from wrong and just from unjust, not only in the realm of the individual, but in communal and regional contexts. In order to survive ethically we need a political awareness that helps us to understand our environment and develop strategies for our actions. Art becomes the instrument of our choice to implement these strategies.*

Luis Camnitzer, "Access to the Mainstream."

One of the present conditions of artistic practice in First World societies seems to be the difficulty of developing forms of political art to counteract the phenomenon of commodification that has come to determine the social and cultural structures of Post-Modernism.<sup>2</sup> The period characterized by "the logic of the image or the spectacle or the simulacrum,"<sup>3</sup> has not only rendered obsolete the historical avant-garde's contestatory role and its impulse towards the transformation of capitalist society, but has also called into question the traditional operative elements of cultural politics, i.e. the "referent" and the "real."<sup>4</sup> Faced with the impossibility of transcending the space of the spectacle, a number of contemporary artists, rather than engaging the present, have turned to "endgame" strategies based on the replication and simulation of the art of the past.<sup>5</sup> In this context, even leading cultural theorists of the Left such as Frederic Jameson concede that, "... it is no longer possible to oppose or contest the logic of the image-world of late capitalism by reinventing the older logic of the referent (or realism)." According to Jameson, the only viable strategy can be described as "homeopathic: ... to choose and affirm the logic of the simulacrum to the point at which the very nature of that logic is dialectically transformed."<sup>6</sup>

While Jameson's antidote can be considered an accurate description of the current state of political art in the context of post-industrial capitalism, it fails to acknowledge the existence of other forms of political artistic practice outside of

the parameters of this system. In doing so it obviates the fact that referential strategies not necessarily predicated on modes of realism are still present in most forms of art emerging from Third World countries or being produced within the peripheral communities of 'others' inside the First World. In these spaces, both the "non-cultural real" and the "referent" continue to have validity as instruments of intervention or resistance against the mechanisms of repression, assimilation and neo-colonial domination. Whether or not this situation can be attributed to the phenomenon of an "incomplete modernity,"<sup>7</sup> that characterizes many of these social groups, may not be so important at this point as to acknowledge their existence and significance as constitutive elements of a Third World cultural politics.

This distinction becomes particularly relevant when analyzing the case of Third World artists functioning within the First World and the specific mechanisms they have developed to resist total assimilation into mainstream culture. The work of these artists for the most part will reflect the tensions of this First/Third World relation in the persistence and superimposition of modernist referential elements within post-modern artistic languages and strategies. In the case of Latin American artists, these elements assume the form of their concern with issues of cultural identity, contestatory politics and the elaboration of artforms of resistance and communication with a broad audience. While these artists also work within the structure of the simulacrum, their art asserts the possibility of a space outside of its parameters and works to expand this space into a critical stance of resistance.<sup>8</sup>

The art of Uruguayan artist Luis Camnitzer is a concrete example of the way in which this tension can provide the basis for a coherent and successful body of work that addresses the First/Third World problematic while providing an alternative to the question of a viable political art within the parameters of the present system. Born in Germany, raised in the Jewish community of Uruguay since age one, his art is grounded in and responds to a specific worldview and political awareness impressed on one who was formed in the colonial periphery.<sup>9</sup> Yet the fact that he has spent the last 28 years in New York situates his production in a space between his Third World formation and his life and work experience in the First World. While distance from the first has turned him into a "citizen of memory,"<sup>10</sup> the second one has led him to produce his own hybrid form of art — a form of "Spanglish" art<sup>11</sup> — to address the particular issues posed by his transcultural experience.

In its internal logic as well as in his approach to the formal language of his art, Camnitzer's work replicates the tensions between his center/peripheral perspective and environments. His art is about the intellectual process of making art, the irrelevance of learned techniques, the arbitrariness of language and visual icons, the critique of art as commodity and the demystification of the role of the artist in late capitalist society. Yet paradoxically, it is also an art that recuperates the mod-



ernist concern with the evocative power of the image and the signifying function of language, speaks of the discreet seduction of the materials upon the artist, and ultimately manipulates these elements in order to submerge the viewer into a highly-charged field where he himself becomes an active participant. Similarly, while working within the parameters of conceptual art, Camnitzer's conceptualism differs substantially from the formal idiom and logic that characterized both the mainstream conceptual art movements of the 60s, exemplified by the art of Joseph Kosuth and the Art and Language group, as well as their contemporary revivals. In contrast to the stark analytical and scientific bent of that art, in its emphasis on syntactic, formal, tautological linguistic enunciations, Camnitzer's conceptualism is factual, empirical, endowed with a strong semantic charge and loaded with cultural symbols.<sup>12</sup>

The elements that separate Camnitzer's work from mainstream forms of conceptual art are the assertion of the referent and the belief in the possibilities of effecting through art a distinct transformation on thought-processes and modes of perception of the individual in late capitalism. Both of these traits originate in his conception of artistic practice as the exercise of a highly ethical/political worldview. For Camnitzer, "Every aesthetic act is an ethical act, . . . As soon as I do something in the universe, even if it is nothing else than a mark, I am exercising power. That may give my work a political aura . . . political in the sense of wanting to change society."<sup>13</sup> Such a view is grounded on a form of "ethical anarchism" based on the right of every individual to participate of a community that negates power and is predicated on equality.<sup>14</sup> Since these conditions are not found in reality, the goal is to empower the individual with the means to transform his social environment in order to achieve this transformation.

Camnitzer's conception of political and artistic practice, more than endowing his art with a political rationale or 'content,' makes explicit the concept of *politics itself* as art. Camnitzer's politics are founded on a critique of power, and the laws of art serve as a metaphor for this critique. For Camnitzer, power is a game, the conditions or 'rules' of which are recreated by the artist in the very structure of the work. The viewer is then encouraged to figure out the rules laid out by the artist, counterpose to them his own set of rules and then rearrange the work according to the latter, thereby developing his own strategies of deconstruction, construction and ultimately, liberation. This conception also leads to ". . . an integration of aesthetic creativity with all the systems of reference used in everyday life."<sup>15</sup> From this point of view Camnitzer's art will be predicated on what I will refer to as 'the strategy of the banal', i.e. the recourse to objects and materials of ordinary everyday life which constitute 'packages' to communicate his ideas.

The main problem posed by his art is how to produce an interventionist (i.e. political) form of art, that while being non-representational will serve to transform the viewer's consciousness politically, ethically, aesthetically. Conceptual art for him became a strategy to carry out this aim. Conceptual-

ism's fierce attack on art as a commodity, its dematerialization of the artistic object and its equation of art with knowledge offered him a starting point from which to elaborate his own propositions in this direction. Yet, whereas in conceptual art, these combative strategies tended to focus on general assumptions about the definition and status of art itself, ultimately reasserting the autonomy of the artistic sphere, in Camnitzer, these mechanisms are expanded to include the critique of thought-processes directly related to social and political realities. In this sense, Camnitzer's approach, proceeds from the point at which the self-referential aspect of the "art as idea as idea" proposal left off: it combines images, phrases, objects in arbitrary relationships and arrangements which extend the linguistic bases of that idiom into a perceptual, cognitive realm.<sup>16</sup> It thus offers the work as a space in which the sensorial and linguistic operations effected by the viewer intersect and interact with each other, leading him to become an agent in the production of the work and its meaning. The result is a new approach towards political art, where the latter is defined not in the explicit content of the image but in the multivalency of linguistic and visual codes, the subversion of accepted or anticipated meanings, the manipulation of images and language to question the logic of ideological constructs and the mechanisms of social processes in late capitalism.

The synthetic aspect of Camnitzer's art, in its rejection of the autonomy of art and the assertion of a referential dimension replicates the logic of Latin American Modernism. It finds antecedents in the work of Joaquín Torres-García, the Mexican Muralists and many other artists from this region for whom the discourse of the European or North American avant-garde, rather than a model to follow blindly, became a strategy upon which to construct the difference that separated them from the leading artistic movements of their time. In his own period, Camnitzer can be considered both a forerunner and one of the theoretical leaders of Latin American conceptual art. His art occupies a position of leadership in this movement together with that of other 'unclassifiable' Latin American conceptual artists of his generation — Cildo Meireles (Brazil) and Eugenio Dittborn (Chile) —<sup>17</sup> who have approached conceptualism as a practice oriented at deconstructing techniques of colonial domination. Like their art, Camnitzer's art embodies a form of ideological resistance at the same time that it provides the viewer with the instruments to construct his own strategies of liberation.

To analyze Camnitzer's 'Latin Americanness' also implies looking at the way in which this experience has constituted him as a peripheral 'other.' In this sense his art cannot be disassociated from the multiple layers of cultural identity that constitute his life-experience — German, Jewish, Uruguayan, self-appointed Latin American exile in New York — as well as the margins, both real and self-imposed, that separate him from mainstream art and culture. This experience provides the critical edge to his work in that it forces him to



constantly rethink and consider the function and parameters of his artistic production.

Camnitzer's redefinition of conceptual art and his *politics as art* proposition began with the tautological language works produced in the late 60s and early 70s, was further expanded in the evocative series of 1977-79, and has culminated in the complex installations of the last decade that merge his obsession with the juxtaposition of words and images with three-dimensional objects. To delve into the stages of this process is tantamount to apprehending the workings of a highly analytical mind constantly confronted with the demands of his ethical worldview and the inherent magic of the work of art.

II

*I used to marvel that the letters in a closed book did not get mixed up and lost in the course of the night.*

*Jorge Luis Borges*

Between 1967 and 1973 Camnitzer produced a series of etchings and installations based on language that signalled his appropriation of the conceptual idiom as the basis of his art. This initial stage, which announced many of the themes and concerns that would constitute the main focus of his work, involved reducing the formal elements of the work to a single word or phrase in order to apprehend the logic of language as art in much the same way as analytic conceptualism. Yet, this stage already saw his transformation of the tautological idiom to suit his own purposes, mainly the communication of political ideas. It was founded on the assumption that language could provide a more direct means of communicating ideas about a particular situation than images.

This early language series emerged out of the initial propositions of the New York Graphic Workshop, the experimental artists' group established by Camnitzer in 1965 with Lilliana Porter and José Guillermo Castillo.<sup>18</sup> At that time Camnitzer was a printmaker concerned with the communicative potential of graphics and the need to make them accessible to a mass audience. His work consisted of large format expressionist prints which revealed his previous formation in a fine arts academic setting as well as the experience acquired after having spent one year of study in Germany.<sup>19</sup> The NYGW was founded on a form of political activism that rejected the status of art as a privileged commodity and sought to make it accessible to a mass audience. It launched the idea of multiples — serial graphics by which a single element could be assembled in many ways in order to build new objects and images by its own repetition — and the concept of the F.A.N.D.S.O (Free Assemblage, Nonfunctional, Disposable, Serial Object). FANDSOS represented "an attempt . . . to remove the property value concern of the consumer by including the disposability and destruction of the art object in the original idea." Its ultimate objective was to ". . . eliminate the high cost and pompous ritual that separate art from the public."<sup>20</sup>

The objective of producing prints for the masses not only proved untenable in the highly commodified environment of New York but, having constituted the project of the social realist movements of the 30s, was already imbued with a negative weight that limited its formal and ideological outreach in the 60s. Therefore, already by 1966, Camnitzer began looking for ways to develop a more participatory form of art based on the *process* of art itself.<sup>21</sup> A series of works with mail art carried out during this period, not only provided a more direct way of circumventing the gallery and market network, but opened up the possibility of working with forms of language and idea art. Works such as *Adhesive Labels* (1966), which he affixed to elevators and bathrooms, made him look closely at words and the relation to their meanings while at the same time they provided him with a more direct way of creating his own audience. *Envelope* (1967), on the other hand, was based on a constant image that altered its dimensions with respect to the relative position of the viewer, reasserting the latter's right to see things as he pleased.<sup>22</sup>

These works almost immediately led Camnitzer to move away from printmaking towards idea art. The decisive shift, which took place in 1966-67, was the result of having discovered that working with ideas would allow him to free himself of technical considerations and focus more concretely on the intellectual process involved in the production of art.<sup>23</sup> It also led to the realization that ". . . with a modest investment of energy, [he] could change and reorganize the universe according to [his] own wishes and design."<sup>24</sup> This statement would prove revealing in terms of the subsequent development of his production and his position with respect to conceptual art. It already implied the notion of the artist as manipulator of referents encoded in language or linguistic propositions, a fact that was absent from analytic conceptualism but well accorded with his concern for communicating an ethical/political point of view.

The language series was articulated upon an extension or transformation of the tautological principle that constituted the basis of analytic conceptualism exemplified in Joseph Kosuth's "an idea is an idea is an idea". More than a new mode of expression, tautology provided him with a formal vehicle that would allow him to present ideas in a very direct, concrete way that almost functioned like a newspaper headline. In works such as *Fragment of a Cloud* (1967), *Self-Portrait* (1969), for instance, the primary emphasis was on the self-descriptive, self-referential aspect of language. In order to facilitate their univocal apprehension the etchings were reduced to a standard format where everything was resolved for the viewer and there were no aesthetic considerations or judgments of taste to distract from the idea. Also important was the fact that in their reductive format, the works carried connotations allusive to an 'aesthetics of poverty' associated with the Third World, a concern which Camnitzer had addressed in his activities with the NYGW.

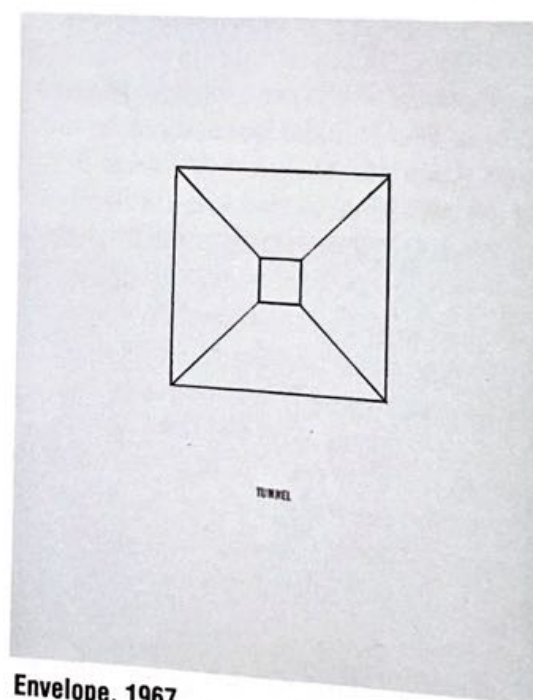
Tautology, however, would prove to have



short value for developing a political form of art as it was essentially antithetical to it. In spite of its concreteness, its value was essentially formal, negating any value or entity outside itself. In order to effectively use it, Camnitzer had to subvert it. His way of carrying out this subversion was to introduce perceptual elements in the structure and forms of the letters and texts. Thus, the outstanding feature of many of the works in this language series was the presence of perceptual referents which signalled Camnitzer's use of tautological words and phrases as signifying vehicles rather than mediums of reproduction, as well as his reluctance to let go completely of the sensorial realm of images. The inclusion within some of these works of such elements as cotton to simulate the idea of the cloud, already established a difference with other conceptual art works based on language. In *Horizon* (1968), for instance, the splitting of the phrase by means of a horizontal line introduced an external element that simultaneously recalled the horizon while graphically illustrating it. Here Camnitzer was functioning on the premise that words themselves, in the spacing and relation of the letters and their placement, have a certain degree of image value. Changing or altering the context can transform this image value. In both cases, they require a viewer to take note of the changes.<sup>25</sup>



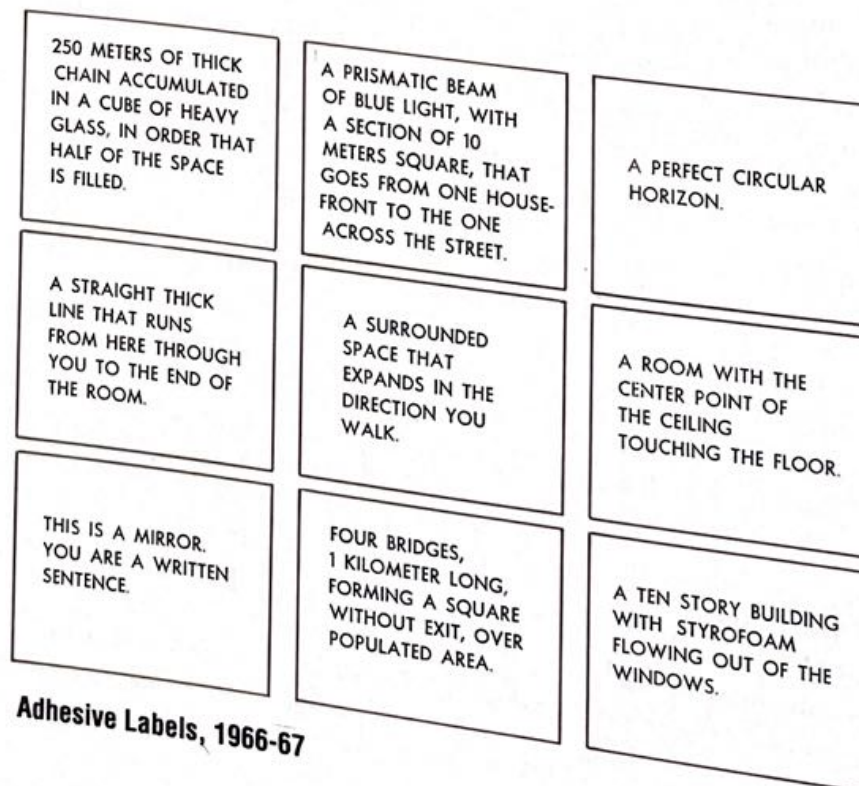
Fragment of a Cloud, 1967



Envelope, 1967

These language works revealed that by endowing the words with semantic or perceptual charge while utilizing the linguistic form of tautology, he could produce a direct effect that provided possibilities for a direct form of political art. They played on the way upon which information is relayed in our media-oriented society; that is, they embodied information in the concrete form of a printed word that in turn could elicit associations on the viewer that would ultimately lead to a heightened awareness of the social issue. This was even more forcefully underscored in *Che*, *Mariaghela*, and *Sosa*, the first series of etchings with overt political connotations executed in the new language. In breaking a blank page with the impression in stenciled letters of the word "Che," for instance, Camnitzer was calling in powerful associations related to revolutionary Third World politics, war, repression, liberation, etc. The result was that the work not only assumed the function of a concrete language portrait of a slain guerrilla leader, but was capable of subsuming the viewer into the implicit narratives associated with those leaders.

Camnitzer's key discovery during this period was the fact that "logic carried to the extreme of its possibilities could lead to something akin to magic."<sup>26</sup> This principle was put to test in the work *Living Room* (1969), an installation piece executed in 1969 at the Museo de Bellas Artes of Caracas. For *Living Room*, Camnitzer covered the entire exhibition room with xeroxed words which reconstructed a model of a living/dining room using words to physically locate the furniture and other dining room objects. As in works by the North



Adhesive Labels, 1966-67



American conceptual artist Mel Bochner, words instead of objects were used to "form" the dining space, they created the idea of the space through self-referential strategies. The significance of this proposition lay not so much in its basic principle but in the reaction which it elicited from the viewer: without instructions, people walked over the words describing the rug, and walked around those designating the fully set dining table. The most important fact revealed by the reception of the piece was that an abstract floor plan, that is the *idea* of a floor plan, with its myriad and multiple associations, could provide a deeper experience than to have been actually situated in that particular space at a specific time.<sup>27</sup> It involved a heightened state of consciousness that would become important in developing a form of political art.

The application of this principle would become the determinant factor of two political installations on the theme of repression in Latin America, *Massacre of Puerto Montt* (1969), executed at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Santiago, Chile, and *Common Grave* (1970), installed at the Instituto di Tella in Buenos Aires. These pieces were conceived at the beginning of a period of dictatorships in Latin America that carried with it great waves of violence and military repression. While the subject of repression carries with it associations of bodily torture, killings, death, 'desaparecidos,' the starting point chosen by Camnitzer for these pieces is the way in which acts of repression always reach us second-hand through the media and thus require our efforts to recreate them. Therefore, in these installation works he set out to create the conditions for that re-enactment.

*Massacre* recreated the killing of peasants who occupied unworked land in the village of Puerto Montt, Chile, during the government of Frei in 1969. Here the theme was reduced to words and strips pasted on the floor. Words were used to indicate port-holes, the soldiers manning them, and the arms used in the operation. By following a series of dotted lines painted on the floor the viewer was enticed to recreate and experience the trajectory of the bullets. *Common Grave* alluded to the anonymous graves where the military dumped the bodies of killed 'desaparecidos.' It consisted of the two words xeroxed over a long piece of paper on the gallery floor. The concrete, reductive quality and ultimate banality of the piece brought attention to the way in which the military destroy all traces of the individual, even denying them adequate burial. Both works could be associated with the Beuysian call for an art that "releases energy in people, leading them to a general discussion of actual problems."<sup>28</sup>

The theme of repression in Latin America was also the subject of another important work of this period, *Leftovers*, (1970) a work that achieves a synthesis of the political propositions of the language series with the concept of the FANDSO.<sup>29</sup> *Leftovers* exemplifies the FANDSO through use of a multiple composed by 200 similar cardboard (disposable) boxes over which stenciled letters with the word "leftovers" have been printed. On the wall next to the boxes, stencilled let-

ters stood for inventories of weapons. The boxes, which were wrapped in gauze and stained to look like blood, were meant as containers of dismembered bodies, illustrating again the principle explored in the previous installation pieces that form itself was not important, it was there to serve the purposes of content. Here repression is objectified for the viewer in the actual packaging of the dismembered and mutilated bodies; it confronts him directly, in a crude, matter-of-fact way, punctuated by the associations of the title: *Leftovers*, i.e. remnants of First World terror mechanisms shipped to the Third World. The monumental scale of the boxes stacked against the gallery wall, in many ways recalls and even plays with the concept of a public monument. Their sole presence desacralized the gallery space, forcing the viewer to "come to terms with the problem."<sup>30</sup>

In spite of the achievements of the language series, however, Camnitzer remained unsatisfied with the tautological form of his political work. The latter was in many ways too literal, ultimately leading him into a dead end. Given the strong expressionist bent of his early art, I am tempted to speculate that the dematerialization of the works in this series proved ultimately too reductive and that it would take a recuperation of visual elements to make feasible a return to forms of political art. After *Leftovers*, therefore, Camnitzer would produce very few significant works of non-artworld related political art until the late 70s.<sup>31</sup> The rest of his production during this decade, exemplified in the *Signature* series was focused almost exclusively on the critique of art as commodity, a general concern of the pop art and conceptual movements of the period, and one of the leading themes of the collective work of the NYGW. His next breakthrough would come about through the exploration of word/image/object relationships.

### III

*People who look for symbolic meanings fail to grasp the inherent poetry and mystery of the image . . . But if one does not reject the mystery, one has quite a different response. One asks other things.*

Magritte<sup>32</sup>

The next phase in Camnitzer's development signalled the production of three transitional series, *Arbitrary Objects and Their Titles* (1979), *Archaeology of a Spell* (1979) and *Fragments of a Novel* (1980) where the formal elements and structure that would constitute his approach to political art were initially elaborated and tested. In these works Camnitzer added images and objects to his use of language. Images, objects or language by themselves did not function anymore for him; they had to come together in order for the reality or idea to exist.<sup>33</sup> The aim, therefore, was to "re-imagize thought processes,"<sup>34</sup> a project which implied a further transformation of the logic of language through the possibilities opened up by the image or object. The purpose was not illustration but the creation of a semantic, connotative field where the role of the artist was reduced to provid-

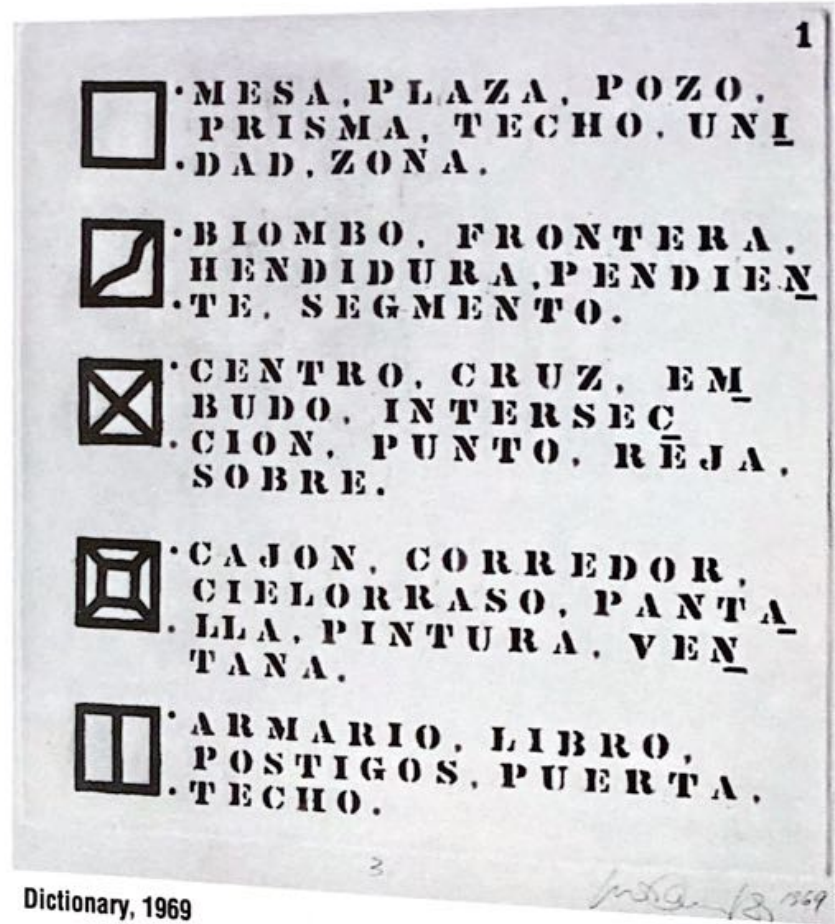


ing "the conditions for the viewer to turn into a creator of images"<sup>35</sup> The two operative elements that Camnitzer developed in this stage were on one hand the conceptual matrix or grid and the elaboration of 'arguments' or underlying narratives to organize the image-object-word sequences. In these series, he would also develop more systematically the concept of magic, which until then he had only pursued rather intuitively.

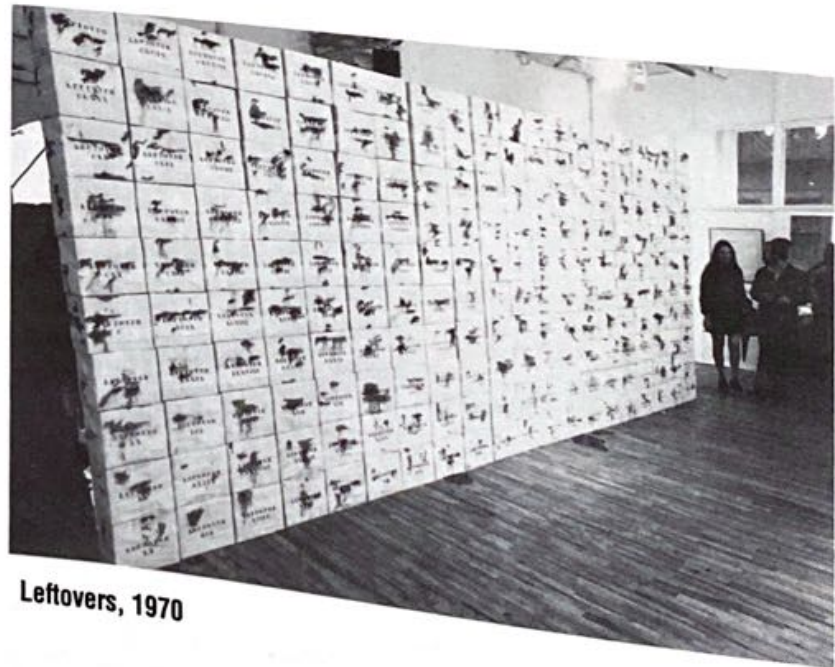
The first step before engaging in new associations of meaning, was a systematic questioning of the arbitrary meanings encoded in words and images. René Magritte's paintings with words that Camnitzer had discovered early on in his career now provided an important starting point for his explorations in this area. The incorporation of aspects of Magritte's art into his own work, helped Camnitzer to break away from the literal, rigid structure of the tautological series and explore unknown possibilities in an almost playful, ironic manner. For Camnitzer Magritte was not a surrealist but a proto-conceptualist.<sup>36</sup> Two of his series, *The Key of Dreams* (1930) and *The Use of Words I* (1928-29) were deliberately intended to demonstrate the arbitrary relation between image-objects and the words used to name or title them.<sup>37</sup> Magritte was also important in terms of suggesting multiple and unusual associations that could be conveyed by a particular image.

The key formal structure that facilitated these pieces, already present in Magritte, was that of the matrix or grid which served to articulate the relations between text and images within a self-contained format. *Dictionary* (1969), a work executed as part of the language series of the late 60s provided the clue for this stage. *Dictionary* comprised a series of language-image dictionary pages where the referential element was not only established but made explicit through free association. In these pages, for instance, Camnitzer would draw a square, next to which he arranged the words 'table', 'plaza', 'well', 'prism', etc. all of which could be related to the shape of the square. In the next sequential image, he introduced a bent line inside a similar square, and proceeded to expound further on its associative meanings. As a result of this interplay between image/object and idea facilitated by the matrix, the content of image and text in themselves became unimportant. The role of the viewer now was to solve the relation between the produced images, the information provided, the connotations of the words, their communication value and their relation and interaction at any particular moment within the overall format. The function of connotation became extremely important as it implied transcending the prescribed social function of words into a cultural context charged with referential and symbolic meaning.<sup>38</sup>

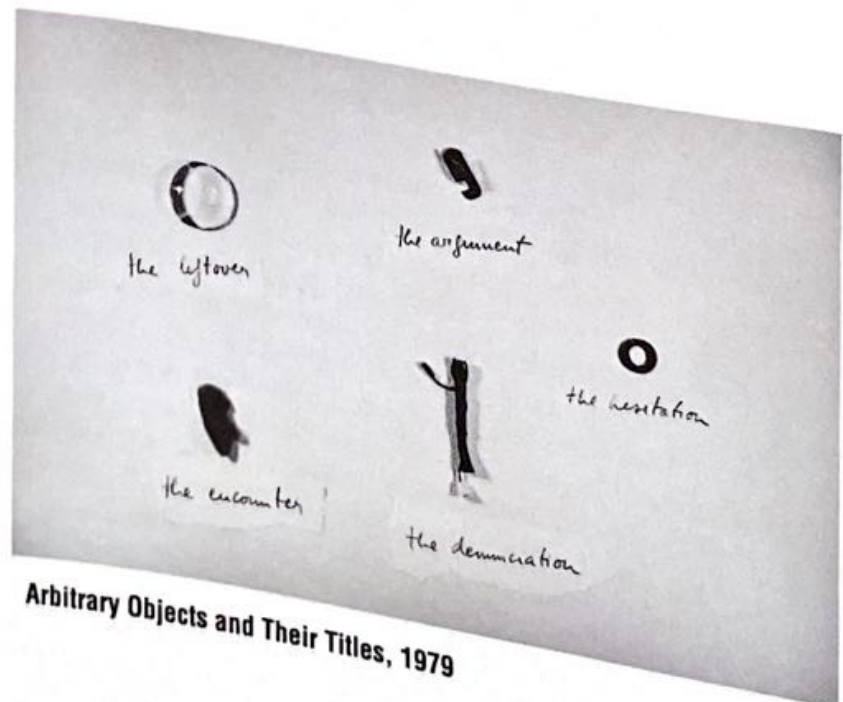
With the matrix in place, Camnitzer proceeded to explore the relationship between images/objects/texts. Images had first re-appeared in Camnitzer's work in a series of boxes, exemplified by *Victim's View found on the Altar of Teotihuacán* (1978), that carried self-explanatory texts in the form of phrases or sentences that substitute the single-word format of the tautology series. The boxes also represent one of the first



Dictionary, 1969



Leftovers, 1970



Arbitrary Objects and Their Titles, 1979



instances of the introduction of objects into his idiom. Although constructed by the artist, they find their antecedent in Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades and represent an attempt to apprehend reality concretely and directly. In this sense they fulfill the same function as the format of language series, i.e. they constitute a form of 'packaging' for the ideatic content of the work.

The most important function of images and objects in Camnitzer's work of this period was their power of evocation which resulted from their random juxtaposition. This evocative function was in some ways similar to Magritte's 'bewilderment'<sup>39</sup> or Foucault's 'similitudes'.<sup>40</sup> It relied on the underlying affinities and similarities that would result from the bringing together of banal, ordinary objects, images, and texts. Together these elements would not only reveal a broad range of unexpected associations but would also produce a lyrical, poetic effect that ultimately lends Camnitzer's work its particular seductive appeal.

The principles of word/image free association and evocation were first explored systematically in *Arbitrary Objects and Their Titles* (1979), a work that presented twenty objects with twenty titles organized at random that the artist wrote and pinned to the wall at the moment of installing the piece. The work is a takeoff on Magritte. Yet whereas Magritte's work with words was oriented at demonstrating the sheer arbitrariness of meaning, in *Arbitrary Objects* Camnitzer went a step further and induced the viewer to organize the chaos and look for coherence in midst of arbitrariness. For the first time it required his active participation in the production of the meaning of the piece.

*The Archaeology of a Spell* (1979) and *Fragments of a Novel* (1980) continued the exploration of image/word relationships while simultaneously expanding the viewer's participatory role. These works combine images or objects and sentences in complex relationships. The texts are handwritten texts, a fact that signals the active presence of the artist within the work. Texts represent factual, logical statements that in many cases describe or reiterate the image although including outside referents. While the inclusion of the caption would seem to reduce the content of the image to one meaning, it actually opens it up offering multiple readings.

These two series signalled the apparition of arguments that provided a structural format for the work. *The Archaeology* carried an argument that was only known to the artist, it was inaccessible to the viewer. *Fragments of a Novel* also carried an argument in the form of an ambiguous narrative which was revealed to the viewer throughout the 13 pieces, in the form of three-dimensional objects and etchings that compose the series. *Fragments of a Novel* is like a Hitchcock film. It leaves clues that incite the viewer to piece together the hidden narrative; yet the narrative is never completely revealed, leaving open the possibilities for many narrative constructs inspired by the combination of texts and images.

The construction and conditions for the presentation of the argument that articulated these works, became

the most important factor developed by Camnitzer during this period that in turn opened a number of possibilities for political art. As stated by the artist, "Once it became clear that it was possible to convey the conditions for an argument without defining the argument itself, I was ready to reintroduce politics into my work. I could bypass both pamphlet and description."<sup>41</sup> The argument can be defined as the underlying narrative that provided the reasons for the work, ultimately related it to a larger narrative or cultural context outside of its parameters in order to explain its meaning. Translated into a political proposition, the argument could take the place of "the message" of earlier forms of political art. Yet the important point in Camnitzer's utilization of the argument was that, while present, it was never completely revealed, leading the viewer to compose his own argument within the matrix or conditions laid out by the artist. These three series already involved stages of questioning the encoded meaning of images, objects and texts, rearranging them within conditions provided by the artist and thereby generating a new construct. Through the questioning and rearranging of meaning, the viewer was ultimately assuming a form of political behavior necessary for the emergence of a new consciousness.

#### IV

*The possibility of art lies in this double movement, to converge upon the real if only to prise open and reveal in the act of perception the very procedures by which that real is made obscure in the violent act of transaction and translation.*

Charles Merewether, "Writing on the Wall"<sup>42</sup>

In the 1980s, building upon the experience of the previous years, Camnitzer produced three series on the theme of torture and environmental mutilation that constitute his most important body of political art work. Two of these, *From the Uruguayan Torture Series* (1982), and *The Agent Orange Series* (1985), were produced through a technique of photoetching developed by Camnitzer in the early 80s as part of his teaching experiments.<sup>43</sup> They consist of 35 and 50 photoetchings respectively that combine images and handwritten texts.<sup>44</sup> The third series was the installation on the theme of torture produced for the XLIII Venice Biennale in 1988 that combined objects, printed images, and texts. In many ways each of these series builds upon the other, increasing the level of complexity between their constitutive elements and ultimately producing a powerful statement on the inner mechanisms of torture.

The three series sum up and expose the nature of Camnitzer's *politics as art* proposition. Here the Uruguayan artist emerges as the master game-player who seduces and provokes the viewer to engage in his fatal explorations through a mine field. While these works continue to exploit the relationship between image and text, they carry it to



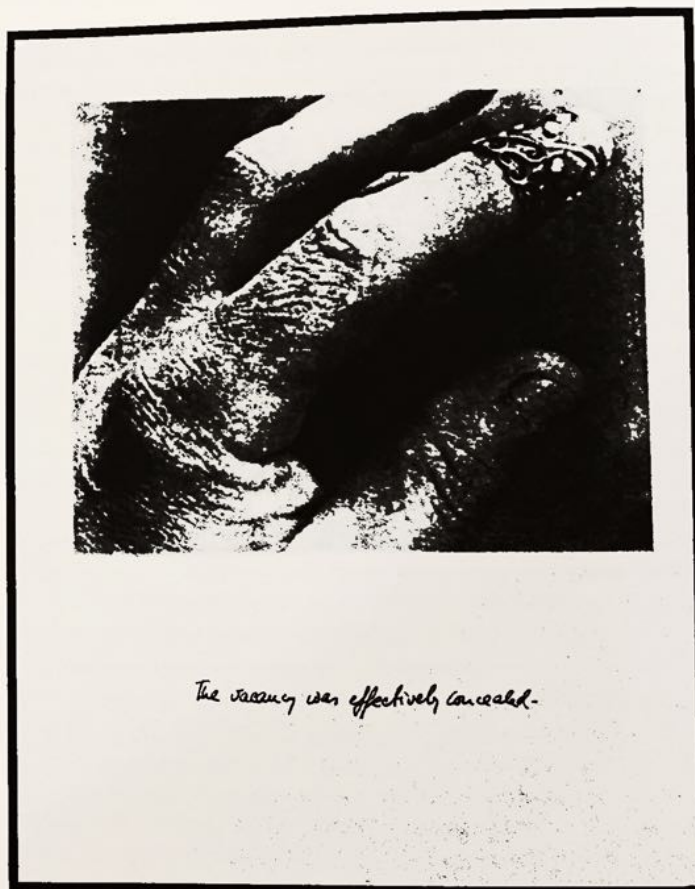
a more sophisticated and complex level. The ambiguity of the arguments of *The Archaeology of a Spell* and *Fragments of a Novel* gives way in these works to a concrete narrative structure and a concrete set of referents: the tortured and the torturer. The articulating principle of this body of work is that of "designing the rules of the game; once these are in place, everything else is easy and errors can be minimized."<sup>45</sup> In a manner similar to that employed by Julio Cortázar in his novel *Hopscotch* Camnitzer has devised a framework for the argument and many different possibilities for the interpretation of the plot, but only one conclusion: the terror generated by the torturer, the terror of torture itself.<sup>46</sup>

The subject of torture is perhaps the one theme that unifies and summarizes the experience of the entire Latin American continent in the last thirty years. It has been the instrument of an institutionalized "technology of terror"<sup>47</sup> in countries like Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil. Torture can be operative at many different levels of social life, from the mutilation of civilian bodies to the small incidents and confrontations that transform the routine of daily life into a reign of fear. It can manifest itself in many different forms: the silencing of public spaces, the anonymous burial sites of the disappeared, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Therefore, in order to produce *From the Uruguayan Torture Series*, Camnitzer carried out extensive research. Each image in the series conveys or alludes to a real incident reported by the media or conveyed through the testimonies of witnesses as told directly to the artist or through reports of human rights groups.<sup>48</sup>

There is, however, no trace of the documentary or testimonial genre in these etchings. Recurring to the banal and the ordinary, Camnitzer has chosen to focus on the quotidian aspect of the relation between the tortured man and the torturer. In this sense the series functions like a "diary of thoughts, words and images,"<sup>49</sup> a journal of silences and interstices, that articulates the relationship between torturer and victim. The images confront the viewer with ordinary objects and things that constitute the confined world of the tortured man: a light bulb, a milk bottle, a glass of water, an intruding cockroach, or the implements of the torturer, a set of pliers, an electric cord, a piece of wrung and twisted cloth, a thimble, nails. Camnitzer approaches torture not as a fact or an action but as a "structure of feeling"<sup>50</sup> which appeals to the viewer's perception and memory working in a subtle way to effect a 'crisis in consciousness'. Here the artist has called upon all the perceptual mechanisms which he tried out in his earlier work. The montage of images, texts, gestures that constitute the tortured man's diary embody slight perceptual changes, allusions, sensations and shifts in points of view which recreate the experience between torturer and victim. In some prints, such as *Cup*, the same image is produced twice, so as to erase the divisions between tortured and torturer and suggest the points of view of both. In other prints, such as *The Letter*, the viewer bears witness to the tortured man's hallucinations in the form of a letter piercing a wall.



*Fragments of a Novel (Detail)*, 1980



*From the Uruguayan Torture*, 1983



out his production. This second reading of the piece is confirmed by the simultaneous quotation of elements from the art of Magritte, Duchamp and Marcel Broodthaers: Magritte's pipe, Duchamp's ready-mades and broken mirrors, Broodthaers playful objects.<sup>31</sup> Although references to the work of these artists had appeared before in Camnitzer's work, their explicit presence in this piece both confirms and legitimizes the works' function as critique of the modern artist: through them Camnitzer is assailing the presumed liberty of the artist to create something new given the elusive nature of 'the real' embodied in images and texts and its intrusion into the work regardless of the author's intentions. The artist ultimately cannot evade ethical/political commitment in the rearrangement of reality.

Several of the texts can also be read as confirmation of Camnitzer's position described throughout this essay: "He organized things as he perceived them"; "Reference proved a form of assertion" "Some of the meanings remained inaccessible"; "They found that reality had intruded upon the image." These texts function as the artists' voice in the work suggesting a further reading of the *Venice Biennale Installation* as a self-reflective metaphor. The associations of the creative act with torture, and the imprisoned situation of the tortured as a metaphor for the artist carry implications beyond the critique of the autonomous artist. Through this construct Camnitzer also seems to be reflecting on the role of the artist as master game-player or ultimate manipulator that he has carved for himself. He seems to recognize that to engage in *politics as art* is a risky game that implies the role of artist as constant arbiter of moral and ethical positions. It is impossible to assume that role and not expose oneself or not err in judgment. Similarly, there is the risk of internalizing authority and reducing all the possibilities of the game to those of the author, the latter emerging in the combined role of dictator and torturer. Camnitzer's piece is a testimony of the vulnerability of this position and the inherent dangers it poses to the artist. Hopefully, however, the artist will have given his audience enough insight into the process of the game for the viewer to effect his own deconstruction of the author's assumed power.

## V

*At the end of the tunnel, there is a mirror.*

*Look, see.*

*See yourself.*

*And seeing yourself, see what the system does not want you to see . . .*

*Eduardo Galeano<sup>32</sup>*

Camnitzer's work is the result of a slow but consistent build-up process where every element is thought and fleshed out for its capacity to evoke and construct meaning in a way that will effect an intervention in some level of practice or 'the real'. It therefore should not surprise us that in *Los San Patricios*, his most recent installations (still in progress) on the torture and

massacre of a brigade of Irish desertors during the Mexican American War,<sup>33</sup> Camnitzer has approached the subject of history itself. Making use of his master-game strategy he has called upon both himself and the viewer to engage in techniques of construction and deconstruction reserved for historians, to participate in the historicizing process itself. Yet as in most of his works, we can anticipate that there will be not one single historical narrative to the piece, but many. History will be dealt with as a collective construct or memory of the past, the result of many shifting perspectives and points of view created or deciphered by the viewer.

The idea of tackling history or memory itself can be seen as a summation of the strategies and positions elaborated by Camnitzer thus far. It extends the master-game strategy into the construction and deconstruction of histories or memories of past events, making the participant viewer aware of his own frame of historical reference as well as of his ability to change it. Such a position entails a political and ethical choice on the part of the viewer, as the act of rewriting or reconfiguring history ultimately entails the desire for transformation of the present. From this point of view *Los San Patricios* represents Camnitzer's most daring *politics as art* statement. For if one of the conditions of the present moment is the lack of a sense of history, of the sense of the past, in favor of the present embodied in the image or simulacrum,<sup>34</sup> Camnitzer's work functions to confront this state and remind us not only that there can be a space outside of the simulacrum, an alternate logic to that of the image, but that that space is ultimately constructed and created by those who learn how to look, perceive, and act beyond the staticity of the image. *Los San Patricios*, thus summarizes the fundamental proposition of Camnitzer's work: that there can be no 'endgame' but a *pro-active* game where the 'real' and the 'referent' are transacted and negotiated, where the logic of history, politics, and art come together. ■

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# Imperativos Morales: La Política como Arte en la Obra de Luis Camnitzer

Mari Carmen Ramírez

Traducido por Walter Krochmal

*Vivimos el mito enajenador de ser "artistas antes que nada." No lo somos. Somos, antes que nada, entes éticos que tratamos de separar lo bueno de lo malo, lo justo de lo injusto, no solo en la esfera individual sino también en los contextos comunales y regionales. Para nuestra sobrevivencia ética necesitamos una conciencia política que nos ayude a comprender nuestro ambiente y a desarrollar estrategias para nuestras acciones. Hemos escogido el arte como el instrumento predilecto para implementar dichas estrategias.*

Luis Camnitzer, "Access to the Mainstream"

Evidentemente, la dificultad de desarrollar formas de arte político para contrarrestar el fenómeno de la reificación que ha venido a dictar las estructuras sociales y culturales del Post-Modernismo,<sup>2</sup> es una de las condiciones del quehacer artístico actual en las Sociedades del Primer Mundo. El período caracterizado por "la lógica de la imagen o el espectáculo o el simulacro,"<sup>3</sup> no solo torna obsoleto ya el papel contestatario que históricamente ha desempeñado la vanguardia, ya sus impulsos dirigidos a transformar la sociedad capitalista, sino también pone en tela de juicio los elementos operativos tradicionales de la política cultural, esto es "lo referente" y "lo real."<sup>4</sup> Muchos artistas contemporáneos al toparse con la imposibilidad de trascender el espacio del espectáculo han optado no por encarar el presente, sino por adoptar estrategias que podríamos caracterizar como de "final de partido" basadas en la duplicación y la simulación del arte del pasado.<sup>5</sup> Dentro de este contexto, hasta los principales teóricos culturales de la izquierda, como Frederic Jameson, conceden que "... ya no es posible ni oponer ni cuestionar la lógica del mundo—imagen del capitalismo tardío con la reinención de la lógica antigua del referente (o sea del realismo)." Según Jameson, la única estrategia factible se podría describir como "la homeopática: ... escoger y

afirmar la lógica del simulacro hasta el punto en que la naturaleza misma de esa lógica se transforme dialécticamente."<sup>6</sup>

Si bien el antídoto de Jameson se podría considerar una descripción correcta del estado actual del arte político en los contextos del capitalismo post-industrial, por otro lado hace caso omiso de la existencia de otras modalidades de la práctica artística política más allá de los parámetros de dicho sistema. Consecuentemente, viene a negar el hecho de que ciertas estrategias referenciales no necesariamente arraigadas en el modo realista siguen presentes en gran parte de la producción artística que emerge actualmente de los países del Tercer Mundo o que se produce en las comunidades periféricas "de los otros" situadas dentro del Primer Mundo. En estos espacios, tanto lo "real no-cultural" como "el referente" siguen vigentes como instrumentos de intervención o de resistencia contra los mecanismos de represión, asimilación y dominación neo-colonial. A estas alturas la pregunta de si esta condición se debe al fenómeno de la "modernidad incompleta"<sup>7</sup> que caracteriza a muchos de estos grupos sociales, quizá no sea tan importante como lo es el reconocer su existencia y su significado como elementos coyunturales de una política cultural del Tercer Mundo.

Esta distinción adquiere particular relevancia cuando se analiza el caso de los artistas del Tercer Mundo que funcionan dentro del Primer Mundo y los mecanismos específicos que han adoptado para resistir la total asimilación a la corriente cultural dominante. La obra de dichos artistas por lo general refleja las tensiones de esta relación entre Primer y Tercer Mundo en la persistencia y superposición de elementos referenciales modernistas dentro de vocabularios y estrategias post-modernistas. En el caso de los artistas Latinoamericanos, estos elementos se manifiestan en su preocupación con la identidad cultural, con el comportamiento político contestatario y con la elaboración de formas artísticas de resistencia y de comunicación con un público amplio. Si por un lado estos artistas trabajan también dentro de la estructura del simulacro, por otro lado su obra afirma la posibilidad de un espacio más allá de esos parámetros y procura expandirlo y convertirlo en foco de una posición crítica de resistencia.<sup>8</sup>

El arte del uruguayo Luis Camnitzer es un ejemplo concreto de como esta tensión puede servir de base para una obra coherente y exitosa que gira en torno a la problemática del Primero y el Tercer Mundo al mismo tiempo que ofrece una alternativa al problema de un arte político factible dentro de los parámetros del sistema actual. Nacido en Alemania, criado en la comunidad judía del Uruguay desde la edad de un año, su obra artística es concebida en, y responde a una visión de mundo y a una conciencia política propias de un individuo formado en la periferia colonial.<sup>9</sup> El hecho de haberse radicado en Nueva York hace 28 años además sitúa a su obra en un espacio intermedio entre su formación en el Tercer Mundo y su experiencia vital y profesional en el Primer Mundo. Si bien la distancia que lo



separa del primero lo ha convertido en "ciudadano de la memoria,"<sup>10</sup> el segundo le ha llevado a producir su propia modalidad híbrida de arte — una especie de arte en "Spanglish"<sup>11</sup> — para hacerle frente a los problemas particulares suscitados en torno a su experiencia transcultural.

Tanto en su lógica interna como en su acercamiento a los aspectos formales de su arte, la obra de Camnitzer duplica las tensiones entre su perspectiva y ambientes de centro y periferia. Su obra trata acerca del proceso intelectual del arte, la irrelevancia de las técnicas aprendidas, la arbitrariedad de los íconos visuales e idiomáticos, la crítica del arte como artículo de consumo y la desmistificación del papel del artista en la sociedad capitalista tardía. Paradójicamente, también es un arte que rescata la preocupación modernista con la potencia evocadora de la imagen y la función significativa del lenguaje, que habla de la seducción discreta que ejercen los materiales sobre el artista, y que en última instancia manipula todos estos elementos para sumergir al observador en un campo recargado de electricidad, donde éste se convierte en un participante activo. De igual manera, a pesar de ceñirse a los parámetros del arte conceptual, el conceptualismo de Camnitzer difiere sustancialmente de la lógica y el lenguaje formal que caracterizaron tanto a los movimientos conceptuales dominantes en los años 60, representados por la obra de Joseph Kosuth y el grupo *Art and Language* (*Arte y Lenguaje*), como a sus seguidores en el presente. Contrástense las inclinaciones fríamente analíticas y científicas de esa escuela, que enfatizaba las enunciacines lingüísticas tautológicas, sintácticas y formalistas, con el conceptualismo empírico de Camnitzer, que se apoya en lo concreto y que viene dotado de una recarga semántica y de una profusión de símbolos culturales.<sup>12</sup>

Los elementos que distinguen a la obra de Camnitzer de la corriente predominante del conceptualismo son la afirmación del referente y la creencia en la posibilidad de efectuar, por medio del arte, una transformación cualitativa de los procesos intelectuales y de los modos de percepción del individuo dentro de la sociedad capitalista tardía. Ambos atributos brotan de su concepción de la práctica artística como el ejercicio de una visión de mundo altamente ético-política. Para Camnitzer, "Todo acto estético es un acto ético... En cuanto hago algo en el universo, aunque más no sea un punto, estoy haciendo uso de poder. Puede ser que eso le dé la aureola política a mi obra... política en el sentido de querer cambiar la sociedad."<sup>13</sup> Tal actitud está fundada en una forma del "anarquismo ético" basada en el derecho de todo individuo a participar en una comunidad que niega el poder y que predica la igualdad.<sup>14</sup> Ya que estas condiciones no corresponden al mundo actual, el objetivo es capacitar al individuo para que transforme su medio ambiente social y lograr así esta otra transformación.

El concepto que tiene Camnitzer de la práctica política y artística, más que dotar a su obra de justificación o 'contenido' político, hace explícito el concepto de

la política misma como arte. La política de Camnitzer está fundamentada en la crítica del poder, y las leyes del arte funcionan como la metáfora de esa crítica. Para Camnitzer, el poder es un juego cuyas condiciones o "reglas" el artista recrea en la estructura misma de su obra. Al espectador entonces se le incita a descubrir cuáles son las reglas establecidas por el artista, a contraponerlas a su propio conjunto de valores y a reestructurar la obra conforme a los mismos, elaborando así sus propias estrategias de deconstrucción, construcción y, en última instancia, de liberación. Este concepto estético con todos los sistemas referenciales de la vida cotidiana.<sup>15</sup> Desde este punto de vista, la obra artística de Camnitzer parte de lo que llamaré "la estrategia de lo banal," o sea la apropiación de objetos y materiales de la vida cotidiana, que funcionan como las "envolturas" a través de las cuales nos comunica sus ideas.

El principal problema planteado por su obra es cómo producir una forma de arte intervencionista (político) no representacional que sirva para transformar la conciencia del espectador política, ética y estéticamente. En sus manos el arte conceptual se convirtió en una estrategia para cumplir ese objetivo. El ataque feroz del conceptualismo sobre la reificación del arte, su desmaterialización del objeto artístico y su equiparación del arte con el conocimiento constituyeron la plataforma desde la cual se propuso elaborar sus propios planteamientos en ese sentido. Mas si en el arte conceptual estas estrategias combativas tendían a enfocar ciertas presunciones universales sobre la definición y el estatus del arte mismo, en última instancia reiterando la autonomía de la esfera artística, en la obra de Camnitzer se amplían estos mecanismos para incluir la crítica de los procesos intelectuales ligados directamente a realidades sociales y políticas. En este sentido, la técnica de Camnitzer comienza donde el aspecto auto-referencial del planteamiento "el arte como idea como idea" termina: combina imágenes, frases, objetos en relaciones y configuraciones arbitrarias que extienden las bases lingüísticas de ese lenguaje hacia la esfera de lo perceptual y lo cognoscitivo.<sup>16</sup> De esa manera presenta la obra como un espacio dentro del cual las operaciones lingüísticas y sensoriales del observador convergen y se entrelazan, convirtiéndolo finalmente en agente de la producción y del significado de la obra. El resultado es un acercamiento nuevo al arte político, en el cual éste no se define por el contenido explícito de la imagen sino por la polivalencia de códigos lingüísticos y visuales, la subversión de los significados aceptados o anticipados, la manipulación de la imagen y el lenguaje para cuestionar la lógica de los axiomas ideológicos y de los mecanismos de los procesos sociales en el capitalismo tardío.

El aspecto sintetizador de la obra de Camnitzer, en cuanto que rechaza la autonomía del arte y afirma la dimensión referencial, duplica la lógica del Modernismo Latinoamericano. Esta postura encuentra antecedentes



importantes en la obra de Joaquín Torres-García, la de los Muralistas mexicanos y la de muchos artistas más de la región, para quienes los postulados de los movimientos de vanguardia europeos y norteamericanos constituyen, no un modelo para ser copiado ciegamente, sino una estrategia sobre la cual construir la diferencia que los separaba de los principales movimientos artísticos de su momento. En nuestro momento actual a Camnitzer se le puede considerar como precursor y como uno de los principales teóricos del arte conceptual Latinoamericano. Su obra ocupa una posición de prominencia dentro del movimiento, junto con la obra de sus coetáneos, los "inclasificables" conceptuales Latinoamericanos - Cildo Meireles (Brasil) y Eugenio Dittborn (Chile)<sup>17</sup> - quienes han abordado el lenguaje conceptual como una práctica orientada a la deconstrucción de las técnicas de dominación colonial. Así como las obras de éstos, la obra de Camnitzer representa un modo de resistencia ideológica al mismo tiempo que provee al espectador con los instrumentos para construir sus propias estrategias de liberación.

Analizar la "latinoamericanidad" de Camnitzer implica también estudiar cómo esta experiencia lo ha llegado a colocar en la periferia. En este sentido, su obra no se puede disociar de las múltiples vetas de identidad cultural que caracterizan su vivencia - alemán, judío, uruguayo, exiliado Latinoamericano en Nueva York por decisión propia - ni de los márgenes, tanto reales como autoimpuestos, que lo separan de las corrientes culturales y artísticas dominantes. Esta experiencia es la que le imparte el filo crítico a su obra, porque le obliga constantemente a considerar y a reformular las funciones y los parámetros de su producción artística.

La redefinición que efectuó Camnitzer del arte conceptual y su planteamiento *política como arte* comienzan en la serie de obras tautológicas basadas en el lenguaje producidas a finales de los 60 y a principios de los 70, que amplió en las series evocadoras realizadas entre 1977-79, las cuales a su vez culminan en las instalaciones complejas de la última década, donde combina su obsesión con la yuxtaposición de palabra e imagen con los objetos tridimensionales. El analizar las diferentes etapas de este proceso implica adentrarnos en los procesos intelectuales de una mente altamente analítica, en confrontación constante con las demandas de su visión ética de mundo y con la magia intrínseca de la obra de arte.

## II

*Me maravillaba que las letras en un libro cerrado no se confundieran ni se perdieran en el transcurso de la noche.*

Jorge Luis Borges

Entre 1967 y 1973 Camnitzer produjo una serie de grabados al aguafuerte e instalaciones que señalaron su apropiación del lenguaje conceptual como fundamento para su arte. Esta etapa inicial, que anunció gran parte de los temas y planteamientos que luego elaboraría en su produc-

ción posterior, se caracterizó por una reducción de los elementos formales de la obra a una sola frase o palabra, con el propósito de facilitar que el público captara la lógica del lenguaje como arte, así como lo había hecho el conceptualismo analítico. Sin embargo ya en esta etapa era evidente cómo había transformado el vocabulario tautológico para fines propios, principalmente la comunicación de ideas políticas. La misma partía de la premisa de que el lenguaje provee una forma más directa de comunicar ideas relacionadas a una situación específica que la imagen.

Esta serie lingüística surgió de los planteamientos primeros que hiciera el New York Graphic Workshop, un grupo experimental de artistas que Camnitzer estableció en 1965 junto con Liliana Porter y José Guillermo Castillo.<sup>18</sup> Para ese entonces, Camnitzer era un grabador a quien le interesaba el potencial comunicativo de las artes gráficas y el proyecto de hacerlas más accesibles al público de masas. Su obra consistía de grabados expresionistas de gran formato que reflejaban su previa formación académica y las experiencias que había adquirido después de un año de estudios en Alemania.<sup>19</sup> El New York Graphic Workshop fue fundado sobre una plataforma de activismo político que rechazaba el estatus reificado de la obra de arte como objeto de consumo para la élite y procuraba ponerla al alcance de un público de masas. El NYGW lanzó el concepto de los múltiples - grabados en serie en los cuales un elemento se ensambla de distintas maneras para construir objetos e imágenes nuevas a través de la repetición - y el concepto del F.A.N.D.S.O. (siglas que en inglés significan Objeto Seriado, Desechable, Afuncional, y de Ensamble y Gratuito). Los FANDSOs representaron "... un intento... de negarle al consumidor las consideraciones de valor comercial, al incluir en la idea original la desechabilidad y destrucción del objeto." En última instancia su objetivo era "... eliminar el alto costo y el rito pomposo que separa al arte del público."<sup>20</sup>

El objetivo de producir gráficas para las masas no solo resultó ser un obstáculo insalvable en el ambiente altamente reificado de Nueva York, sino que venía imbuído ya con el peso negativo de haber constituido el proyecto del movimiento del realismo social de los años 30, lo cual limitaba su alcance ideológico y formal en el Nueva York de los 60. Por lo tanto, ya para 1966, Camnitzer comenzaba a buscar elaborar una forma artística más participatoria basándose en *la idea del proceso mismo* del arte.<sup>21</sup> Una serie de obras de arte postal que realizó durante esta etapa, además de mostrarle la posibilidad de trabajar con las formas del lenguaje y el arte de las ideas, le brindaron un camino más directo para circumvenir la red de galerías y mercados. Obras tales como *Self-Adhesive Labels (Etiquetas Auto-Adhesivas, 1966)*, las cuales pegaba en el interior de ascensores y baños, le obligaron a desentrañar las palabras y su relación con el significado, al mismo tiempo facilitándole el crear su propio público de la manera más directa. Por otra parte, la obra *Envelopes (Sobres, 1967)* se basó en una



imagen constante cuyas dimensiones se alteraban conforme a la posición relativa del observador, reiterando el derecho de éste a interpretar las cosas a su antojo.<sup>22</sup>

Estas obras llevaron a Camnitzer casi inmediatamente a abandonar la gráfica y a abordar el arte de ideas. La ruptura decisiva con la gráfica, que ocurrió en 1966-67, se dió cuando descubrió que el trabajar con las ideas le liberaba de consideraciones técnicas, y le permitía el enfocar de manera más concreta el proceso intelectual requerido en la producción artística.<sup>23</sup> La incursión en esta nueva modalidad artística también le hizo caer en cuenta de que "... con una inversión modesta de tiempo, podía cambiar y reorganizar el universo de acuerdo a [sus] propios deseos y diseño."<sup>24</sup> Esta declaración resultaría iluminadora en cuanto al desarrollo posterior de su producción y su posición con relación al arte conceptual. Ya llevaba implícita la noción del artista como manipulador de los referentes codificados en las proposiciones lingüísticas, elemento que estaba ausente del conceptualismo analítico pero que encajaba con su inquietud de comunicar un punto de vista ético-político.

La serie lingüística se articuló sobre una extensión o transformación del principio tautológico fundamental del conceptualismo analítico, expresado en la declaración "una idea es una idea es una idea," de Joseph Kosuth. Más que una forma nueva de expresión, la tautología le ofrecía un vehículo formal que le permitía presentar sus ideas directa y concretamente, a manera de un titular de periódico. En obras tales como *Fragment of a Cloud (Fragmento de una Nube, 1967)*, *Self-Portrait (Autorretrato, 1969)*, y *Self-Portrait (Autorretrato, 1970)*, por ejemplo, el énfasis primario recae sobre el aspecto auto-descriptivo y auto-referencial del lenguaje. Para facilitar su comprensión unívoca, los grabados al aguafuerte fueron reducidos a un formato standard que se presentaba al espectador ya resuelto, sin que entraran en juego consideraciones o juicios estéticos para distraer la atención de la idea representada. De notar también es el hecho que en su formato reductivo, las obras aludían a una "estética de la pobreza" asociada con el Tercer Mundo, modalidad en la que Camnitzer ya había incursionado en su trabajo con el NYGW.

La tautología, sin embargo, resultó, en última instancia, de valor limitado para desarrollar una propuesta de arte político, ya que en el fondo es su expresión antitética. A pesar de su concretismo, su valor era esencialmente formal, y negaba la existencia de otros valores y entidades. Para usarla efectivamente, Camnitzer tenía que subvertirla. Con este fin, introdujo elementos perceptuales en la estructura y forma de las letras y los textos. Así, las características sobresalientes de muchas de las obras de esta serie lingüística son la presencia de referentes perceptuales, que subrayan el uso que hacía Camnitzer de palabras y frases tautológicas como vehículos de significado más que como medios de reproducción, y la dificultad que el artista hallaba para abandonar completamente la esfera sensorial de las

imágenes. La inclusión en algunas piezas de elementos tales como un poco de algodón para simular la idea de una nube ya marcaban una ruptura con otras obras conceptuales basadas en el lenguaje. En *Horizon (Horizonte, 1968)* por ejemplo, el rompimiento de la frase por medio de una línea horizontal introduce un elemento externo que evoca el horizonte y simultáneamente lo ilustra gráficamente. Aquí Camnitzer se apoyó en la premisa de que las palabras mismas, de acuerdo a los espacios que las separan y a las relaciones entre las letras y sus configuraciones, tienen cierto grado de valor como imágenes. Un cambio una alteración del contexto transforma el valor de la imagen. En ambas instancias, se necesita un espectador para tomar nota de los cambios.<sup>25</sup>

Estas obras lingüísticas le revelaron que al dotar a las palabras de una carga semántica o perceptual y combinarlas con el uso de la forma lingüística de la tautología, podía lograr un efecto directo que apuntaba a las posibilidades de crear un arte político directo. En ellas se jugaba con las reglas de transmisión de información vigentes en esta sociedad nuestra tan orientada hacia los medios de comunicación, es decir, encapsulaban la información en la forma concreta de una palabra impresa, la cual a su vez evocaba asociaciones en el espectador que le llevarían por fin a una percepción más aguda del problema social. A este concepto se le dió particular importancia en *Che, Marighela y Sosa*, la primera serie de grabados con connotaciones claramente políticas ejecutadas en el lenguaje nuevo. Al romper una página en blanco con las letras impresas en estarcido de la palabra "Che," por ejemplo, Camnitzer lograba evocar fuertes asociaciones con la política revolucionaria del Tercer Mundo, la guerra, la represión, la liberación, etc. Consecuentemente, la obra no solo asumía la función de un retrato concreto, en términos lingüísticos, de un líder guerrillero asesinado, sino que a la vez subsumía al espectador dentro de las narrativas implícitas asociadas con estos dirigentes.

El hallazgo clave de Camnitzer durante esta etapa fue el hecho de que "la lógica llevada al extremo de sus posibilidades podía producir algo parecido a la magia."<sup>26</sup> Este principio fue sometido a prueba en la obra *Living Room (Comedor)*, una instalación ejecutada en 1969 en el Museo de Bellas Artes de Caracas. En *Living Room*, Camnitzer empapeló toda la sala de exhibición con palabras en fotoestática que reproducían el modelo de una sala/comedor, utilizando las palabras para situar los muebles y otros objetos caseros. Al igual que en las obras del artista conceptual norteamericano Mel Bochner, se usaron las palabras en lugar de los objetos para "formar" el espacio del comedor, creando la idea del espacio utilizando estrategias auto-referentes. El significado de esta propuesta yace no tanto en sus fundamentos básicos, sino en la reacción que ocasionó en los espectadores. Sin recibir instrucciones, el público caminaba encima de las palabras que denotaban la alfombra, y le daban la vuelta a las que designaban la mesa puesta del comedor. La reacción de los espectadores ante la obra reveló un descubrimiento de



suma importancia, y es que un plano abstracto, la *idea* de un plano arquitectónico con sus muchas y variadas asociaciones, podía proveer una experiencia más profunda que el estar físicamente en ese espacio definido en un tiempo específico.<sup>27</sup> Aquí estaba operando ya un estado de conciencia más agudo, que sería de vital importancia para el desarrollo de las formas de arte político.

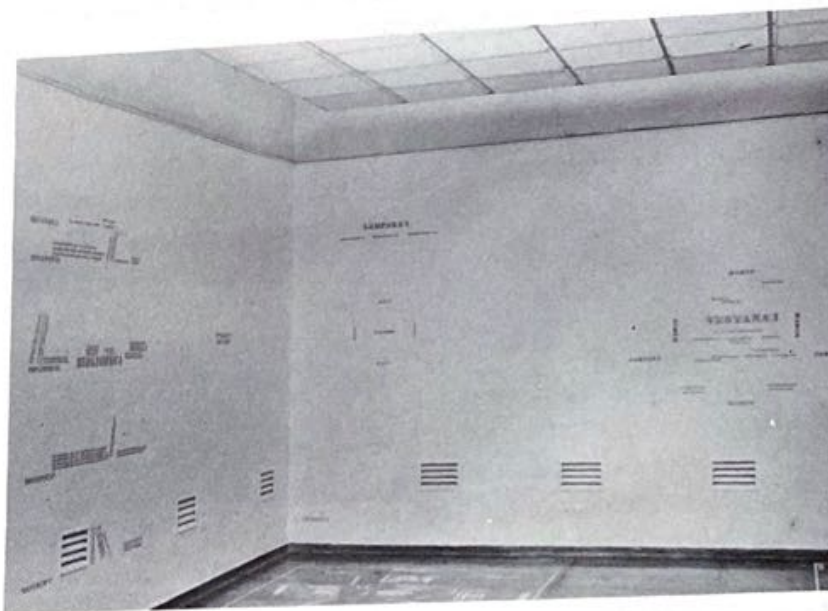
La aplicación de este principio llegaría a ser el factor determinante de dos instalaciones sobre el tema de la represión en Latinoamérica, *La Masacre de Puerto Montt*, 1969, ejecutada en el Museo de Bellas Artes en Santiago de Chile, y *Fosa Común*, 1970, instalada en el Instituto de Tella de Buenos Aires. Estas obras fueron concebidas al principio de una era de dictaduras en Latinoamérica, la cual trajo consigo grandes oleadas de violencia y de represión militar. Aunque el tema de la represión arrastra consigo asociaciones de tortura física, muerte, y desaparecidos, Camnitzer escoge como punto de partida en estas obras el concepto de cómo a través de los medios de comunicación, requiriendo un esfuerzo de parte nuestra para re-vivirlos.

*La Masacre* recreó el asesinato de campesinos que ocupaban tierras baldías en la aldea de Puerto Montt, Chile, durante la administración de Frei en 1969. Aquí el tema fue reducido a unas palabras y a unas tiras de papel pegadas en el piso. Las palabras indicaban las portillas, los soldados que las ocupaban, y las armas usadas en la operación. Al espectador se le incitaba a recrear y a experimentar la trayectoria de las balas al seguir una serie de líneas perforadas pintadas en el piso. *Fosa Común* aludía a los pozos malacates donde los militares echaban los cuerpos ultimados de los desaparecidos. Consistía de dos palabras fotocopiadas sobre una larga tira de papel pegada en el piso de la galería. La cualidad concreta y reductiva, y en última instancia la banalidad de la pieza, llamaban la atención sobre la manera en que los militares destruyen hasta la última huella del individuo, negándole incluso una sepultura adecuada. Ambas obras se podrían asociar con la consigna Beuysiana que pide un arte que "libere la energía que la gente lleva adentro, llevándoles a una discusión general de problemas de actualidad."<sup>28</sup>

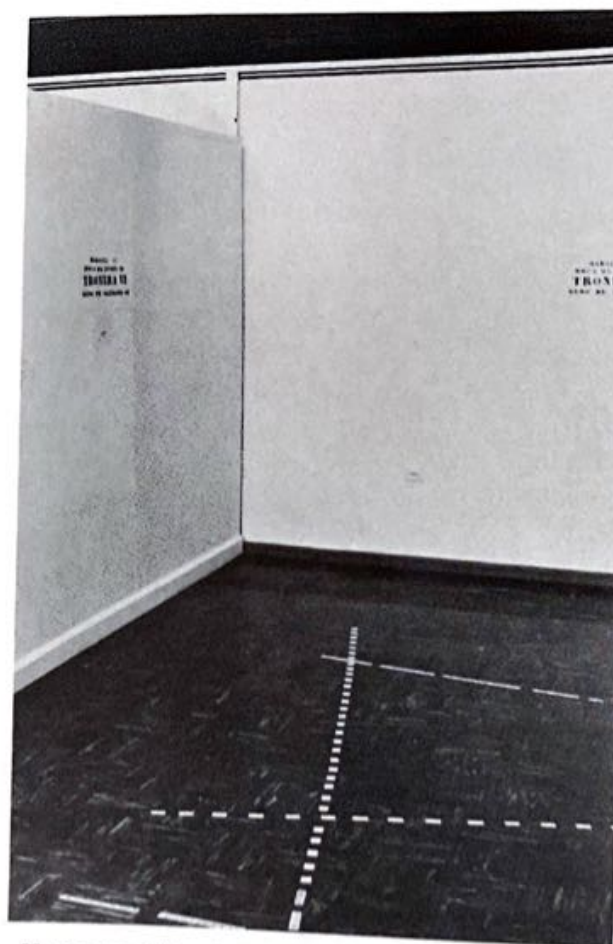
El tema de la represión en Latinoamérica fue también el tema de otra obra importante de este período, *Leftovers (Sobras)*, 1970, en la cual Camnitzer logró sintetizar los planteamientos políticos de la serie lingüística y el concepto de los FANDSOs.<sup>29</sup> *Leftovers* representa el FANDSO en el uso de un múltiple compuesto de 200 cajas desechables de cartón, todas similares, que iban impresas en estarcido con la palabra "leftovers." En la pared más próxima a las cajas, letras de estarcido representaban inventarios de armas. Las cajas, que iban envueltas en gaza y manchadas con sangre humana, representaban contenedores de cadáveres descuartizados, ilustrando de nuevo el principio que se exploró en las instalaciones previas: que la forma no



Horizon, 1968



Living Room (Detail 1969-90)



Massacre of Puerto Montt, 1969-90



tiene importancia más allá de servir al contenido. Aquí la represión se objetiviza para el público en la envoltura física de los cadáveres descuartizados y mutilados; sale a enfrentarlo de manera directa, desnuda, y sin rodeos, acentuada por las asociaciones que evoca el título: *sobras*, es decir, remanentes de los aparatos de terror Primer Mundistas enviados al Tercer Mundo. La escala monumental de las cajas apiladas contra la pared de la galería evoca de muchas maneras, y hasta juega con el concepto de un monumento público. Su sola presencia desacraliza el espacio de la galería, obligando al público a "ver el problema frente a frente."<sup>30</sup>

A pesar de los logros de la serie lingüística, Camnitzer se mostraba insatisfecho con la forma tautológica de su obra política. Esta era demasiado literal, y lo llevaba una y otra vez a un callejón sin salida. Dada la fuerte inclinación expresionista de sus primeras obras, me atrevería a sugerir que la desmaterialización de su obra en esta etapa resultó al fin demasiado reductiva, y que se necesitaría una recuperación de los elementos visuales para hacerle factible un regreso a las formas del arte político. Después de *Left-overs* y hasta finales de los años 70, pues, Camnitzer produciría muy pocas obras significativas de arte político con temas ajenos al de la esfera artística.<sup>31</sup> El restante de su producción durante esta década, tipificada en la serie *Signature (Firma)*, enfocó casi exclusivamente la crítica del arte como objeto de consumo, inquietud que compartían los movimientos "pop" y conceptuales y que aparecía una y otra vez en las obras colectivas del NYGW. Su próximo avance vendría como consecuencia de una exploración de la relación palabra/imagen/objeto.

### III

*Aquellos que buscan los significados simbólicos fracasan al querer captar la poesía y el misterio intrínseco de la imagen.... Pero si uno no rechaza el misterio, la reacción es muy distinta. Uno busca otras cosas. Magritte<sup>32</sup>*

La próxima fase en el desarrollo de Camnitzer la marca la producción de tres series transicionales, *Arbitrary Words and Objects (Palabras y Objetos Arbitrarios, 1979)*, *The Archaeology of the Spell (La Arqueología del Hechizo, 1979)* y *Fragments of a Novel (Fragmentos de una Novela, 1980)*, en las que inicialmente prueba y elabora los elementos formales y estructurales que habían de constituir su acercamiento al arte político. En estas series Camnitzer añadió a su uso de lenguaje las imágenes y los objetos. Estos solos ya no funcionaban para él; necesitaban juntarse para que existiera la idea o la realidad.<sup>33</sup> El objetivo, pues, era "re-imagenizar los procesos intelectuales,"<sup>34</sup> proyecto que implicaba aún otra transformación más de la lógica del lenguaje por medio de las posibilidades que presentaba el objeto o la imagen. No se trataba de ilustrar, sino de crear un campo semántico y connotativo donde el papel del artista se

reducía al de "proveer las condiciones para que el observador se vuelva creador de imágenes."<sup>35</sup> Los dos elementos operativos que desarrolló Camnitzer en esta fase fueron: la matriz o el armazón conceptual y la elaboración de "argumentos" o narrativas subyacentes para organizar las secuencias imagen-objeto-palabra. En estas series también desarrollaría de manera más sistemática el concepto de la magia, que hasta ese momento solo había explorado de manera puramente intuitiva.

Antes de explorar nuevas asociaciones de significados, se hacía necesario un cuestionamiento sistemático de los significados arbitrarios codificados en las palabras y las imágenes. Las pinturas con palabras de René Magritte, que Camnitzer había descubierto al principio de su carrera, ahora le brindaban un punto de partida importante para sus exploraciones en ese campo. El incorporar a su obra ciertos aspectos de la obra de Magritte, facilitó su ruptura con las estructuras literales y rígidas de la serie tautológica y le permitió la exploración de nuevas posibilidades de manera casi irónica y juguetona. Según Camnitzer, Magritte no era surrealista sino proto-conceptualista.<sup>36</sup> Dos de sus series, *La Clave de Sueños, 1930* y *El Uso de las Palabras, 1928-29* fueron creadas deliberadamente para demostrar la relación arbitraria entre la imagen-objeto y la palabra que se usa para designarlo.<sup>37</sup> La obra de Magritte también le sugirió a Camnitzer las múltiples e inusitadas asociaciones que podrían ser evocadas por una imagen particular.

La estructura formal que facilitó la elaboración de estas piezas, ya presente en la obra de Magritte, es la matriz o el armazón que sirvió para articular las relaciones entre texto e imagen dentro de un formato auto-suficiente. *Diccionario, 1969*, obra ejecutada como parte de la serie lingüística a fines de los años 60, nos da la clave para entender esta etapa. *Diccionario* consistía de una serie de páginas de diccionario con imágenes y palabras, donde el elemento referencial no solo se establecía sino que se volvía explícito a través de la libre asociación. En estas páginas, por ejemplo, Camnitzer dibujaba un cuadrado, al lado del cual escribía las palabras "mesa," "plaza," "pozo," "prisma," etc., todas las cuales podían relacionarse con el cuadrado. En la próxima imagen secuencial, introducía una línea quebrada dentro de un cuadrado similar, procediendo a extender sus significados asociativos. Como consecuencia de este juego entre imagen/objeto e idea, hecho posible por la matriz, el contenido mismo de la imagen y el texto perdieron importancia. El papel que le tocaba ahora al espectador era el de resolver la relación entre las imágenes reproducidas, la información provista, las connotaciones de las palabras, su valor como comunicadores y su relación y transacción en cualquier momento dado dentro del formato. La función connotativa adquiría importancia vital, ya que implicaba trascender la función social proscrita de las palabras hacia un contexto cultural recargado de significado simbólico y referencial.<sup>38</sup> Ya colocada la matriz, Camnitzer procedió



a explorar la relación entre imagen, objeto y texto. Las imágenes ya habían reaparecido en su producción en una serie de cajas, tal como las de *Victim's View found on the Altar of Teotihuacán* (*Vista de una Víctima hallada en el Altar de Teotihuacán*, 1978), las cuales llevaban impresos textos auto-explicativos en forma de frases u oraciones que venían a sustituir el formato de la serie tautológica. Las cajas también representan una de las primeras instancias en que Camnitzer introdujo objetos en su vocabulario. Aunque eran construidas por el artista, encontraban su antecedente en los "ready-mades" de Marcel Duchamp, y representaban un intento de captar la realidad de manera concreta y directa. En ese sentido, cumplían la misma función que el formato de la serie lingüística, es decir constituyen una especie de "envoltura" para el contenido ideológico de la obra.

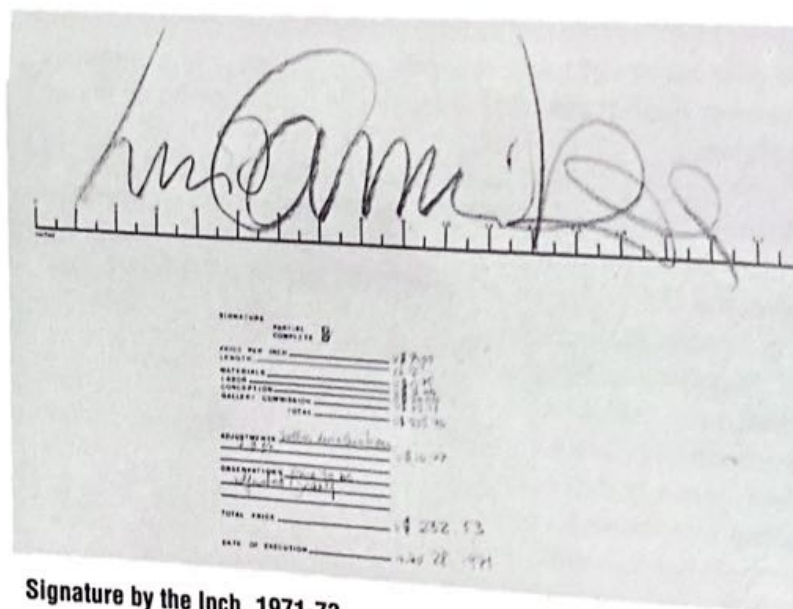
La capacidad evocadora de las imágenes y los objetos, yuxtapuestos al azar, cumplen una función importante en la obra de Camnitzer durante esta etapa. Esta función evocadora se parecía de cierta manera al "desconcierto" <sup>39</sup> de Magritte o a las "similitudes" de Foucault.<sup>40</sup> Se apoyaba para su significado en las afinidades y similitudes subyacentes que resultaban de la confluencia de objetos banales y ordinarios, imágenes y textos. Estos elementos juntos no solo revelaban una amplia gama de asociaciones inesperadas, sino también producían un efecto lírico y poético que a fin de cuentas es el que le imparte a la obra de Camnitzer su particular atractivo seductor.

Los principios de la libre asociación y la evocación de la palabra/imagen fueron explorados de manera sistemática en *Arbitrary Words and Objects* (*Palabras y Objetos Arbitrarios*, 1979), una obra que presentaba veinte objetos con veinte títulos organizados al azar y escritos y pegados a la pared por el artista en el momento de instalar la pieza. Esta obra es una parodia de Magritte. Pero si la obra de Magritte en el juego de palabras iba orientada a demostrar la pura arbitrariedad de los significados, en *Arbitrary Words* Camnitzer se adelantó otro paso, induciendo al espectador a que organizara el caos, a que procurara la coherencia dentro de lo arbitrario. Por primera vez, se necesitó de la participación activa del espectador para producir el significado de la pieza.

*The Archaeology of a Spell* (1979) y *Fragments of a Novel* (1980) señalan la exploración sistemática de la relación imagen/palabra al mismo tiempo que aumentan el papel participativo del espectador. Estas obras combinan imágenes u objetos y oraciones en relaciones complejas. Los textos están escritos a mano, lo cual señala la presencia activa del artista dentro de la obra. Los mismos representan declaraciones lógicas y reales que en muchos casos describen o reiteran la imagen, aún cuando incluyen referencias ajenas a la obra. Aunque la inclusión de una leyenda parecería reducir el contenido de la imagen a un solo significado, en realidad deja las puertas abiertas a múltiples interpretaciones. Estas dos series marcan la aparición de los



Common Grave, 1970



Signature by the Inch, 1971-73



Victim's View, 1978



argumentos que vienen a enmarcar la obra estructuralmente. *The Archaeology* contenía un argumento vedado al público, que solo el autor conocía. *Fragments of a Novel* también contenía un argumento en forma de una narrativa ambigua que se le revelaba al público a través de las 13 piezas, objetos tridimensionales y grabados al aguafuerte que constituían la serie. *Fragments of a Novel* es como una película de Hitchcock. Deja tras sí huellas que incitan al que las ve a configurar la narrativa escondida; pero la misma narrativa nunca se deja saber del todo, dejando abiertas las posibilidades de muchas conjeturas inspiradas por la combinación de textos e imágenes.

El factor clave refinado por Camnitzer durante esta etapa y que a su vez le abrió infinitas posibilidades para elaborar su propuesta de arte político, fue la construcción del argumento y el establecimiento de condiciones para presentarlo. Según el artista, "Una vez que me dí cuenta de que era posible describir las condiciones para un argumento sin definir el argumento mismo, estaba listo para reintroducir la política en mi obra. Lograba evadir tanto el panfleto como la descripción."<sup>41</sup> El argumento se podría definir como la narrativa subyacente que provee la razón de ser de la obra, relacionándola en última instancia con una narrativa global o con un contexto cultural más allá de sus parámetros para explicar su significado. Traducido a los términos de un planteamiento político, el argumento podría sustituir al "mensaje" de las formas de arte político anteriores. Pero lo que hay que destacar en cuanto a la utilización que Camnitzer hace del argumento es que, a pesar de estar presente, éste nunca se expresa del todo, llevando al espectador a componer su propio argumento dentro de la matriz o de las condiciones establecidas por el artista. Estas tres series ya incluían varias etapas: el cuestionamiento de los significados codificados en las imágenes, los objetos y los textos; su reconfiguración bajo las condiciones brindadas por el artista; y la producción de nuevas propuestas. Por medio de este cuestionamiento y reconfiguración de los elementos de la obra, el espectador en última instancia está asumiendo una forma de comportamiento político necesario para el surgimiento de una nueva conciencia social.

#### IV

*Las posibilidades del arte yacen en este movimiento doble, de converger sobre lo real aunque sea para abrir e iluminar en el acto de la percepción, los procedimientos a través de los cuales lo real se sumerge en tinieblas en el hecho violento de transacción y traducción.*

Charles Merewether, "Writing on the Wall"<sup>42</sup>

En la década de los 80, construyendo sobre la experiencia de los años previos, Camnitzer produjo tres series sobre el tema de la tortura y la mutilación del medio ambiente que constituyen su más importante conjunto de obras artísticas políticas. Dos de ellas, *From the Uruguayan Torture Series* (*De la Serie de la Tortura Uruguaya*, 1982) y

*The Agent Orange Series* (*La Serie Agent Orange*, 1985) fueron producidas con una técnica de fotograbado desarrollada por Camnitzer a principios de los años 80, como parte de sus experimentos como docente.<sup>43</sup> Estas series consisten de 35 y 50 fotograbados respectivamente, que combinan imágenes con textos escritos a mano.<sup>44</sup> La tercera serie fue una instalación sobre el tema de la tortura producido para la XLIII Bienal de Venecia en 1988, que combinaba objetos, imágenes impresas, y textos. De formas varias, cada serie brota de la anterior, aumentando el nivel de complejidad entre sus elementos coyunturales y produciendo una declaración contundente sobre el mecanismo interior de la tortura.

Estas tres series resumen y exponen la naturaleza del planteamiento de *la política como arte* elaborado por Camnitzer. Aquí el artista uruguayo emerge como el supremo estratega que seduce y provoca al espectador para que participe de sus exploraciones mortales en un campo minado. Aunque estas obras siguen explorando la relación entre texto e imagen, llevan esta relación a un nivel mucho más complejo y sofisticado. La ambigüedad de los argumentos de *The Archaeology of a Spell* y *Fragments of a Novel* cede a una estructura narrativa concreta y a un conjunto concreto de referentes: el torturado y el torturador. El principio articulador de estas obras es el de "diseñar las reglas del juego; una vez que estas están instituidas, todo lo demás es fácil y los errores se minimizan."<sup>45</sup> De manera similar a la empleada por Julio Cortázar en su novela *Rayuela*, Camnitzer ha inventado un marco conceptual para el argumento y muchas posibilidades distintas para interpretar la trama, pero una sola conclusión: el terror que genera el torturador, el terror de la tortura misma.<sup>46</sup>

El tema de la tortura es quizá el único tema que unifica y conjuga la experiencia del continente Latinoamericano durante los últimos treinta años. Ha sido el instrumento de una "tecnología de terror"<sup>47</sup> institucionalizada en países como Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay y Brasil. La tortura opera en muchos niveles distintos de la vida social, desde la mutilación de cadáveres de civiles hasta los pequeños incidentes y enfrentamientos que transforman la rutina de la vida cotidiana en un reino del terror. Se manifiesta de muchas formas diferentes: el silencio de los espacios públicos, los cementerios anónimos de los desaparecidos, las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. Así, pues, que para realizar *From the Uruguayan Torture Series*, Camnitzer realizó una investigación exhaustiva. Cada imagen en la serie relata o alude a algún incidente real enfocado por los medios de comunicación o transmitido por boca de testigos al artista o a través de los reportajes de las organizaciones de derechos humanos.<sup>48</sup>

Sin embargo, no hay indicio alguno de los géneros documental o testimonial en estos grabados al aguafuerte. Recurriendo a lo banal y ordinario, Camnitzer ha elegido enfocar el aspecto cotidiano de la relación entre el torturado y el torturador. En este sentido, la serie funciona como



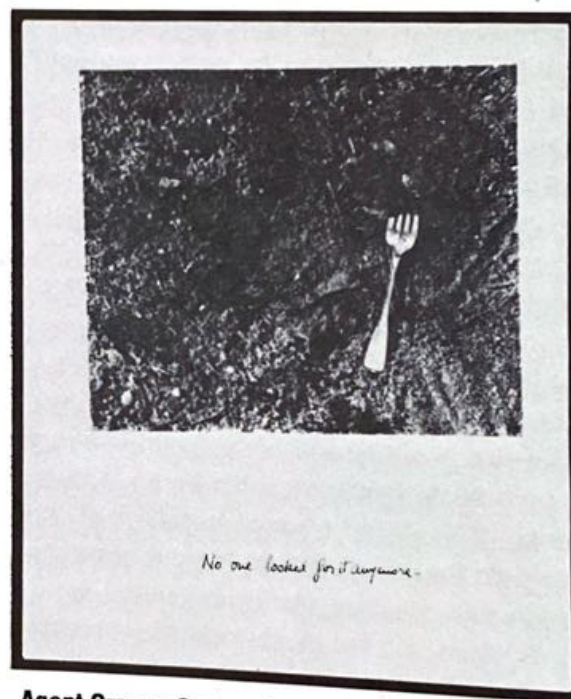
“un diario de pensamientos, palabras e imágenes,”<sup>49</sup> un reportaje íntimo de silencios e intersticios que articula la relación entre el verdugo y la víctima. Las imágenes confrontan al espectador con los objetos y las cosas que constituyen el mundo aislado del torturado: un bombillo, una botella de leche, un vaso de agua, una cucaracha intrusa, o los implementos del torturador, un alicate, un cable eléctrico, un pedazo de tela retorcida, un dedal, clavos. Camnitzer aborda el tema de la tortura no como un hecho o una acción, sino como una “estructura de sentimiento”<sup>50</sup> haciendo de esta manera un llamado a la percepción y a la memoria del espectador, obrando sutilmente para provocarle una “crisis de conciencia.” Aquí el artista aplica todos los mecanismos perceptuales con que experimentó en trabajos anteriores. El montaje de imágenes, textos, gestos que constituyen el diario del torturado reflejan pequeños ajustes perceptuales, alusiones, sensaciones y alteraciones de punto de vista que recrean la experiencia entre torturador y torturado. En algunos grabados, como en *Cup (Taza)*, la misma imagen se produce dos veces para borrar la línea divisoria entre torturador y torturado y sugerir la perspectiva de ambos. En otros grabados, como en *The Letter*, el espectador se vuelve testigo de las alucinaciones del hombre torturado por medio de una carta traspasada en la pared.

El proceso a través del cual el espectador reconstruye “lo real” en esta serie es bastante revelador. Lo “real,” o sea la tortura, emerge como resultado de una compleja economía de elementos de significado, representados en la relación entre el texto y la imagen, y que hacen un llamado al espectador para producir su significado. Hay en primera instancia una seducción conciente, efectuada por el aspecto material de la obra, que funciona para llamar la atención del espectador. El aspecto pulido del fotograbado mismo refleja cierto preciosismo, cierto refinamiento y esmero en el acabado que contrastan fuertemente con la brutalidad del tema. Pero el espectador se siente atraído por los colores y el refinamiento del grabado, de manera que se deja introducir en la obra solamente para descubrir la realidad grotesca del contenido.

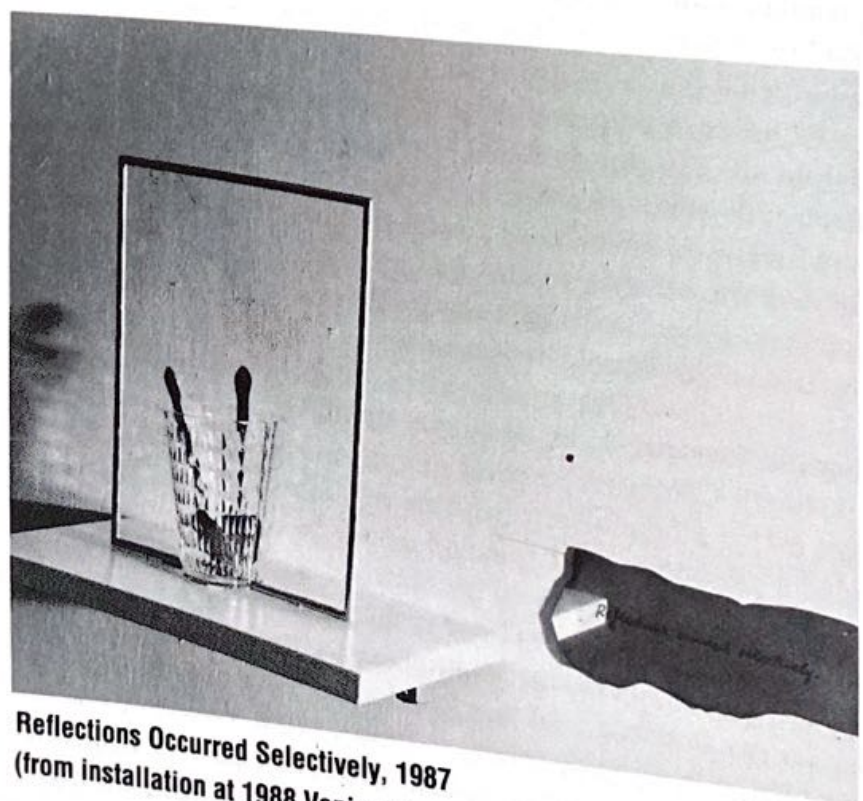
Una vez que se adentra en la obra, se ve forzado a encarar la relación entre la imagen y el texto. Las imágenes le presentan objetos sencillos o partes del cuerpo cuya función denotativa ya viene alterada por la inclusión del texto. En algunas instancias el texto es el que aporta el elemento referencial [“La herramienta le producía placer”]; en otras lo aporta la imagen, como en la mano traspasada por clavos [“Practicaba todos los días”]. Lo importante, sin embargo, es que lo “real” emerge a través de la diferencia o de las fisuras entre imagen y texto. Estas fisuras abren un espacio referencial, y le piden al espectador que construya su significado. Así las imágenes de un vaso con agua hasta la mitad [“Le temía a la sed”]; un dedo envuelto en cable eléctrico [“Su fragancia aún quedaba”]; una imagen espeluznante de cucarachas caminando sobre la mano del hombre



April 1970 (from Agent Orange Series), 1984



Agent Orange Series, 1984-86



Reflections Occurred Selectively, 1987  
(from installation at 1988 Venice Biennale)



["El tacto reclamó la ternura acabada"]. En el primer ejemplo, la función normal de saciar, asociada con el agua, queda invertida, se vuelve otro instrumento del miedo cotidiano para el hombre torturado. En el segundo ejemplo, el género femenino del torturador se revela de tal forma que la imagen del dedo queda subvertida en imagen de un miembro masculino mutilado. Lo siniestro de la tercera imagen se transforma en un cuadro de ternura, el único contacto físico que se le permite al prisionero dentro de su celda solitaria.

La tortura, pues, asalta al espectador participante desde los ángulos más inesperados, al mismo tiempo que lo obliga a encarar sus mecanismos más sutiles. El último grabado le hace la burla mortal al espectador, poniendo a prueba sus reflejos más básicos: le ofrece la imagen de una picana tomada de un anuncio de catálogo de pedido comercial. De esta manera, Camnitzer le hace ver al espectador que los mecanismos de nuestro sistema actual ponen los implementos de la tortura al alcance de todos, que todos hacemos el papel de verdugo en cuanto que somos cómplices del sistema actual. Agregaríamos que a final de cuentas todos hemos asumido el papel de torturador, ya que el significado de la obra realmente se produce en la mente del espectador.

*The Agent Orange Series*, producida dos años después, está basada en los mismos principios, un argumento subyacente, múltiples posibilidades de interpretación y una sola conclusión: el efecto de la guerra química en la raza humana. Específicamente, *The Agent Orange* se refiere al uso actual de la dioxina, uno de los venenos más tóxicos producidos por el hombre, usado para desforestar áreas selváticas durante la guerra de Viet Nam, y a los efectos mutiladores de esta operación tanto en los soldados como en la población civil. Sin embargo, así como en *From the Uruguayan Torture Series*, en este conjunto gráfico no hay indicio ni de lo documental ni de lo testimonial. Aquí el contexto y las imágenes se han vuelto aún más ordinarios y banales. Las fotografías que inspiraron esta serie de grabados son del traspatio del artista: son retratos de hojas, insectos muertos, una tuerca, huevos, desechos, la mano del artista, una caja de cartón, un contenedor de metal oxidado. En esta serie Camnitzer convierte el traspatio de su casa en un lugar propicio para un potencial genocidio, ilustrando como sus efectos pueden ocurrirse en los espacios cotidianos.

La instalación producida para la Bienal de Venecia, por otro lado, es una de las piezas más sintéticas que produjera Camnitzer, a pesar de que en ella combina grabados, textos y objetos por primera vez. Hay una gran austeridad y economía en la relación de las partes, así como en los significados codificados en los textos. La pieza consistía de un área central delimitada por césped artificial y cubierta de periódicos viejos e imágenes impresas. Unos objetos colocados contra la pared a su alrededor, acompañados de textos, cumplen la función de estaciones: un zapato, un florero, un escritorio, una vela, un dibujo infantil, una pipa, un espejo quebrado, una lata, una silla. Una vez más, Camnitzer obliga

al espectador a tomar conciencia de la experiencia de un hombre en aislamiento. Pero aquí el uso de los objetos tridimensionales y del espacio físico de la instalación le permiten llevar su estrategia a un nivel más concreto y objetivo: el espacio en su totalidad evoca la celda de prisionero o un patio. De modo que el espectador ya no solo observa y reconfigura las imágenes, sino que participa en el espacio de la acción, al igual que en las instalaciones basadas en el lenguaje.

Si bien Camnitzer elaboró un argumento para esta instalación basado en el mismo tema de la tortura, ese argumento se queda en la ambigüedad, oscilando entre dos niveles de interpretación: la experiencia cotidiana del prisionero torturado por un lado y del artista encarcelado por otro. El primer nivel de interpretación hace eco del prisionero torturado que alucina su libertad y fracasa. Aquí se recalca, no tanto la mutilación física y el dolor, sino la experiencia misma del aislamiento como una forma de tortura psicológica. Tal como en *From the Uruguayan Torture Series*, la experiencia del hombre torturado se comunica a través de los leves cambios perceptuales implícitos en la relación entre el objeto y el texto: un vaso con agua hasta la mitad, apoyado contra un espejo aparentemente real ["Los reflejos ocurrían selectivamente"]; un jarro de cerámica con ladrillos adentro ["Aprendió a creer"]; el ojo omnipresente ["Vivía encarcelado por el eco de su mirada"]; el intento fútil de "contar las estrellas." La experiencia del aislamiento se comunica por medio de una tabla con un pedazo de firmamento impreso ["Tuvo que crear su propia ventana."]

Sin embargo, buena parte de los textos y las imágenes aluden a una segunda interpretación representada en la metáfora del artista modernista y del proceso creativo. Desde esta perspectiva, la pieza se podría interpretar como un resumen de la crítica del papel libre y autónomo del artista ["Disfrutaba de lo que percibía ser su libertad"] que Camnitzer ha venido elaborando a lo largo de toda su producción. Esta segunda interpretación de la pieza es respaldada por las citas simultáneas de elementos tomados de la obra de Magritte, de Duchamp y de Marcel Broodthaers: la pipa de Magritte, los "ready-mades" y los espejos rotos de Duchamp, los objetos juguetones de Broodthaers.<sup>51</sup> No obstante la inclusión de referencias a la obra de estos artistas en obras previas de Camnitzer, su presencia explícita en esta instalación confirma y legitima la función de esta obra como crítica del artista moderno: mediante la apropiación de estos elementos, Camnitzer arremete contra la presunta libertad del artista para crear algo nuevo, dada la naturaleza elusiva de lo 'real' representado en la imagen y el texto. De esta manera está reafirmando que el artista en última instancia no puede esquivar el compromiso ético/político si se ha propuesto reordenar la realidad.

Varios de los textos se podrían interpretar también como una confirmación de la posición de Camnitzer que se ha venido describiendo en el ensayo presente: "Orga-



nizaba las cosas conforme las percibía"; "La referencia demostró ser una forma de confirmación"; "Algunos de los significados permanecían en la esfera de lo inaccesible"; "Encontraron que la realidad había incursionado en el territorio de la imagen." Estos textos asumen el papel de las voces del artista dentro de la obra, lo cual sugiere todavía otra interpretación de la instalación de la Bienal de Venecia como metáfora auto-reflexiva. La equiparación del acto creativo con la tortura, y el uso del encarcelamiento de los torturados como metáfora del artista autónomo. A través de este juego Camnitzer parece también contemplar el papel del artista como supremo estratega, o como el mejor de los manipuladores, papel que se ha adjudicado él mismo. Parece reconocer que el involucrarse con *la política como arte* es un juego arriesgado que le asigna al artista el papel de árbitro constante de posiciones éticas y morales. Es imposible asumir ese papel sin exponerse, o sin sufrir lapsos de juicio. Asimismo, existe el riesgo de internalizar la autoridad y de reducir todas las posibilidades del juego a los dictámenes del autor, emergiendo éste en el papel simultáneo de dictador y de torturador. La pieza de Camnitzer ofrece un testimonio de la vulnerabilidad de esta posición y de los peligros natos que presenta al artista. No obstante, se supone que el artista proveyó a su público con suficientes conocimientos relacionados al proceso del juego como para que el espectador pudiese efectuar su propia deconstrucción del poder asumido por el autor.

## V

*Al fin del túnel, hay un espejo.*

*Mire, vea.*

*Véase.*

*Y viéndose, vea lo que el sistema no quiere que vea . . .*

Eduardo Galeano<sup>52</sup>

La obra de Camnitzer es el resultado de un proceso cumulativo lento pero consistente, en el cual todos los elementos son planificados y dotados de vida conforme a su capacidad de evocar y construir significados de modo que efectúen una intervención en algún nivel de la praxis o de "lo real." No sorprende, pues, que en *Los San Patricios*, su más reciente instalación (aún en proceso de elaboración), donde trata el tema de la tortura y la masacre de una brigada de desertores irlandeses durante la Guerra entre Estados Unidos y México.<sup>53</sup> Camnitzer abordara el mismo tema en la historia. Haciendo uso de su juego de supremo estratega, se ha instado a sí mismo, y ha instado al espectador, a activarse en las técnicas de construcción y deconstrucción, antes reservadas a los historiadores, para participar en el mismo proceso de construcción de la historia. Pero como sucede con la mayoría de sus obras, podemos anticipar que la pieza contendrá, no una sola narrativa histórica, sino muchas. A la histo-

ria se le tratará como un juego colectivo o como un recuerdo del pasado, el resultado de muchos puntos de vista y muchas perspectivas en constante proceso de transformación creadas o decifradas por el espectador.

Podemos considerar la idea de abordar el tema de la historia o la memoria como tal, como resumen de las estrategias y posiciones elaboradas por Camnitzer hasta el presente. En esta instancia Camnitzer extiende la estrategia del juego hacia la construcción y deconstrucción de historias o recuerdos de eventos del pasado, despertándole al espectador participante la conciencia de su propio marco de referencia histórica y de su habilidad para efectuar cambios. Tal posición implica un acto de decisión político y ético por parte del espectador, porque el acto de re-escribir o de reconfigurar la historia en última instancia implica el deseo detransformar el presente. Desde este punto de vista, *Los San Patricios* representa la más temeraria de las declaraciones de *política como arte* que pronunciara Camnitzer. Porque si una de las condiciones de la actualidad es la falta de un sentido de la historia, de un sentido del pasado, y la predilección por un presente tipificado en la imagen o el simulacro,<sup>54</sup> la obra de Camnitzer funciona para confrontar este estado y para recordarnos que hay un espacio más allá del simulacro, una lógica alternativa a la de la imagen, pero que ese espacio en última instancia es construido y creado por aquellos que aprenden a mirar, a percibir y a actuar más allá de lo estático de la imagen. *Los San Patricios* pues, resume el planteamiento fundamental de la obra de Camnitzer: que no puede haber "un final de partido," sino más bien un juego *pro-activo* en el que el "referente" y lo "real" se negocian, creando un espacio donde la lógica de la historia, la política y el arte convergen. ■

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*He practiced every day.*



# Politics and Ethnicity in the Work of Luis Camnitzer

**W**hat attracts me most in the work of Luis Camnitzer is his perspective toward a political art oblivious to propaganda and graphic illustration. He does not pursue it to its limits, which artists involved in militant social action would do, but this relates to the ambiguity which informs his work and his personal life. A conceptualist who focuses on analyzing the language and concept of art, he breaks tautology in the direction of reality. Rational to the point of asepsis, interested in ideas, he searches, however, for magic and mystery. The poetry of objectivity does not exclude intense subjectivity. But ambiguity does not only reside in the double orientation of his work, it also becomes the content.

Camnitzer's social and political work is made to elicit thought. At once it possesses a complex metaphorical dimension while also stressing the more individual aspects. It is an art of ideas and experimentation with language, which eschews messages directed at involving the viewer's participation. Without grandiloquence, achieving distance through humor, his work can be intellectual or carried on picket-signs. The intellectual side of his production created through force of circumstance runs the risk of appealing to a limited audience and the danger of being reified as merchandise. Nevertheless, his work is paradigmatic in as much as it counteracts the nihilism, banality, and narrowness of much contemporary art.

The permanent integration of social critique with subjectivity, of objectivity with poetic symbolism, clearly separates his work from that of Alfredo Jaar, Hans Haacke, or Group Material, where conceptual discourse is used to achieve more direct effect, with a greater sense of denunciation and deconstruction. Some Cuban artists, like Ponjúan, René Francisco, and Somoza, move with a double-barreled approach close to Camnitzer's. However, no matter how tropologically they work, their work addresses concrete problems. Eugenio Dittborn, by way of contrast, can be placed on the other extreme, with social criticism merged with anthropology.

The series about torture stands out in this Camnitzerian style of making art political and presents a singular case within the topic: it is not a work of denunciation, but of

By Gerardo Mosquera

internalization of torture. I could even dare to call it a lyric paen to torture. Poor Latin America, which has achieved poetry through the electric prod!

Of course the series conveys an accusation, possibly the most effective that can be uttered, since it evidences the degree of growth of practice throughout the region to the extent that it has become entrenched in our subconscious. The imaging of terror, so delicately and subjectively, denotes profound recognition.

One of Max Aub's literary characters comments that, in spite of the advance of technology, torture has not made great strides. "Can anything hurt more than having fingernails torn off?, and that is as old as the world." He was wrong. Western progress soon prevailed also in this field. Starting with the war in Algeria, scientific torture design came into being and then became systematized most rationally in the Southern Cone during the 1970s. It was introduced by the United States, mainly through the School of the Americas in the Panama Canal Zone. Perfected by its technicians in practical settings and mass-distributed to unprecedented extremes, it proved crucial to the repression of revolutionary movements, and the dominance exerted by military regimes. Camnitzer's style adjusts to express cold, bloodless, and unhurried torture in contrast to the emotional brutality imposed by former Latin American dictatorships.

The series avoids sado-masochism and the testimony of horrors to concentrate on the humanity of the tortured, in his or her spiritual survival in an extreme situation. It is torture viewed from within, but without sentimentality, in conjunction with the objective phrase, metaphor, and subjectivity. It may also be a balancing of personal accounts by the author, enduring a guilt complex for not having suffered under the dictatorship. Taking refuge outside of Uruguay, he found a symbolic way of enduring torture, which adds a sense of intimacy to the pieces in the series.

The work of Camnitzer breaks the expected clichés in Latin America art. A Latin American *idea art* seems a contradiction in terms for those who think of the continent's culture only as a mixture of romanticism, atmosphere, the fantastic, and a sweetish memory of fire. Many ignore the fact that Latin America was a *foyer* of concretism and kinetic art. But not even all the geometric artists put together would achieve the prices of Remedios Varo. What is bought is "otherness," to satisfy the more sophisticated needs for exoticism under the guise of cultural relativism. The hegemonic is always Me, while we

Fortunately, the culture of the Southern Cone has escaped this international division of labor, and has given its own responses to contemporary problems, breaking down "traditions" and "authenticities." Works like those by Camnitzer or Jaar do not respond to the "reality of the marvelous" of Latin America, but to the "reality of the dreadful," as



Saul Yurkievich has said. Their Latin-Americanism is more social than cultural: its authenticity resides in an internalization of problems that are acute, daily reminders for the societies of the continent. It would be suicidal for cultures on the periphery — always subordinated to a center — to wrap themselves in traditions that cannot challenge domination. These traditions should become a substratum from which to set off a course of action in defense of our own interests and values. We should not exhibit old roots anymore; we should use them to create new leaves.

But ethnocultural concerns are not excluded.

In the work of Camnitzer or that of Alejandro Otero, these parameters infuse a personal poetics in areas normally untouched by them. Otero designed huge, industrially produced, kinetic towers inspired by a mysticism about the grandeur of landscape rather than by an interest in machinery. Camnitzer's work derives from the metaphysical humor typical of the River Plate area and its approach to the mystery of life and with the "plot reversals" that knit existence. He belongs to the tradition of Borges, Marechal, and Cortázar. He responds to a background of late European immigration, with its tension between uprootedness and the recognition of a new ethnic self-awareness.

Because of a lag in the development of an anthropology about nontribal societies, we tend to relate ethnicity with the "primitive." WASPs are not "ethnic"; "ethnic art" is only that produced by dependent "minorities." Therefore it is expected that they be at least somewhat "primitive" in order to be themselves. This bias would cost Borges the Nobel Prize, since he seemed too European. But Borges, as Camnitzer, is very Latin American, even if neither has "Indian" roots.

These complexities enhance the interest of Camnitzer's trajectory beyond its intrinsic coherence and the value of his work. His retrospective exhibit shows an artist alive, contending with problems of his time. ■

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## Lo Político Y Lo Etnico En Camnitzer

Gerardo Mosquera

Lo que más me atrae en la obra de Luis Camnitzer es la perspectiva hacia un arte político ajeno a la propaganda y la ilustración. El no la prosigue hasta sus últimas consecuencias, que serían las de un arte de acción social, militante; pero esto tiene que ver con la ambigüedad que preside su trabajo y su propia vida. Conceptualista centrado en analizar el lenguaje y el concepto de arte, rompe la tautología hacia la realidad. Asépticamente racional, interesado en las ideas, busca sin embargo la "magia", el "misterio". Su poética de objetividad no excluye un gran subjetivismo. Pero lo ambiguo no está sólo en la orientación doble de su labor: llega a ser el contenido mismo.

Su arte político y social está hecho para pensar, y al unísono posee una compleja dimensión metafórica, además de situar en primer plano lo individual. Es un arte de ideas y de experimentación con el lenguaje, que rehuye los mensajes fijados en pos de la participación del receptor. No resulta grandilocuente y se distancia a través del humor. Puede ser intelectualista o para llevar en pancartas. La primera de estas vertientes es la que se ha desarrollado debido a las circunstancias, y es una lástima, pues siempre porta el *handicap* de un radio de acción limitado y el peligro de ser reificado como mercancía. De cualquier modo resulta paradigmático contra el nihilismo, banalización y estrechez de mucho arte contemporáneo.

La permanente integración de la crítica social con el subjetivismo, de la objetividad con el simbolismo poético, diferencia su obra de la de Alfredo Jaar, Hans Haacke o el Group Material, donde el discurso conceptual se emplea para un conocimiento más directo y con un mayor sentido de denuncia y deconstrucción. Algunos cubanos, como Ponjuán, René Francisco y Somoza, se desenvuelven dentro de una duplicidad próxima a la de Camnitzer, pero por más tropológicamente que procedan atacan problemas concretos. Eugenio Dittborn estaría en el costado opuesto, con la crítica social fundida hacia lo antropológico.

La serie sobre la tortura se destaca en esta manera camnitzeriana de hacer arte político, y constituye un caso singular dentro del tema: no es una obra de denuncia sino de interiorización de la tortura. Casi me atrevería a decir que se trata de una lírica de la tortura. Pobre América Latina, que ha llegado a hacer poesía con la picana eléctrica!



Por supuesto, la serie entraña una acusación, quizás la más fuerte que puede realizarse, porque evidencia el grado de extensión de esta práctica en el continente, al extremo de haberse sumergido ya en la conciencia. Una obra imaginal, delicada y subjetiva acerca del horror implica una profunda familiaridad con él.

Un personaje de Max Aub decía que en eso de torturas no se adelanta gran cosa, a pesar de tantos inventos: "puede doler algo más que arrancarle a uno las uñas?, y eso es tan viejo como el mundo". Se equivocaba, porque pronto el progreso occidental se impuso también en este campo. A partir de la guerra de Argelia se fue diseñando la tortura científica, sistematizada con máxima racionalidad en el Cono Sur en los años 70. Fue introducida por Estados Unidos, principalmente desde la Escuela de Las Américas en la zona del Canal de Panamá. Perfeccionada por sus técnicos en la práctica y masificada a extremos sin precedentes, fue crucial en la represión del movimiento revolucionario y el dominio ejercido por los regímenes militares. El arte de Camnitzer ajusta para expresar esta tortura fría, sin sangre ni prisa, contrapuesta a la brutalidad emotiva de las viejas dictaduras latinoamericanas.

La serie escapa al sadomasoquismo y al testimonio de horror para concentrarse en la humanidad del torturado, en su supervivencia espiritual en una situación límite. Es la tortura vista desde dentro, pero sin sensiblería, con la conjunción de la frase objetiva, la metáfora y el subjetivismo. Es también quizás un ajuste de cuentas personal del autor con un complejo de culpa por no haber sufrido la dictadura, refugiado fuera del Uruguay: una manera simbólica de padecer la tortura. Esto contribuye a darle un sentido de intimidad a las piezas.

La obra de Camnitzer rompe las expectativas cliché hacia el arte latinoamericano. Un *idea art* latinoamericano parece una contradicción en los términos para quienes piensan la cultura del continente sólo como romanticismo, atmósfera, fantástico y memoria dulce del fuego. Muchos ignoran, por ejemplo, que América Latina fue un *foyer* del concretismo y el arte cinético. Pero ni todos los geométricos juntos alcanzarán los precios de Remedios Varo, porque lo que se compra es la otredad, para satisfacer una más sofisticada necesidad de exotismo, bajo el disfraz del relativismo cultural. El Occidente hegemónico es siempre el Yo, los demás somos el Otro.

Por suerte, la cultura del Sur se ha salido de esta división internacional del trabajo y ha ido dando sus propias respuestas a los problemas contemporáneos, quebrando "tradiciones" y "autenticidades". Obras como las de Camnitzer o Jaar no reaccionan ante "lo real maravilloso" latinoamericano, sino ante lo "real espantoso", como decía Saúl Yurkievich. Su latinoamericanismo está en lo social más que en lo cultural. Su autenticidad radica en una interiorización de problemas muy agudos y cotidianos para las sociedades del continente. Para las culturas periféricas—siempre

subordinadas a un centro—sería suicida encerrarse en tradiciones que no pueden desafiar la dominación. Estas devendrán más bien un sustrato desde donde actuar en el mundo de hoy en defensa de intereses y valores propios. No más exhibir las raíces: ponerlas a hacer hojas nuevas.

Pero lo etnocultural no queda excluido, y llega a dar un acento propio a poéticas donde no es determinante, como en Camnitzer o Alejandro Otero, quien diseñaba grandes torres cinéticas producidas industrialmente desde una mística de la grandiosidad del paisaje, no del interés maquinista. La obra de Camnitzer proviene del humor metafísico del Río de la Plata y su trato con el misterio de las cosas y del "revés de la trama" que teje la existencia. Pertenece a la tradición de Borges, Marechal y Cortázar. Responde a un *background* de inmigración europea tardía, a su tensión entre el desarraigo y el reconocimiento en una nueva autoconciencia étnica.

Por lo exiguo del desarrollo de una antropología de las sociedades no tribales, tendemos a relacionar lo étnico con lo "primitivo". Los WASP no son "étnicos", solo se considera "arte étnico" al de las "minorías" subalternas. Y por tanto se espera que sean al menos un poco "primitivos" para ser ellos mismos. Esto llegó a costarle a Borges el Premio Nobel, por parecer demasiado europeo. Pero él, como Camnitzer, son bien latinoamericanos aunque nada tengan de indios.

Estas complejidades brindan gran interés a la trayectoria de Camnitzer, más allá de su coherencia intrínseca y el valor de las obras. Su retrospectiva muestra a un artista vivo, lidiando con problemas de su tiempo. ■

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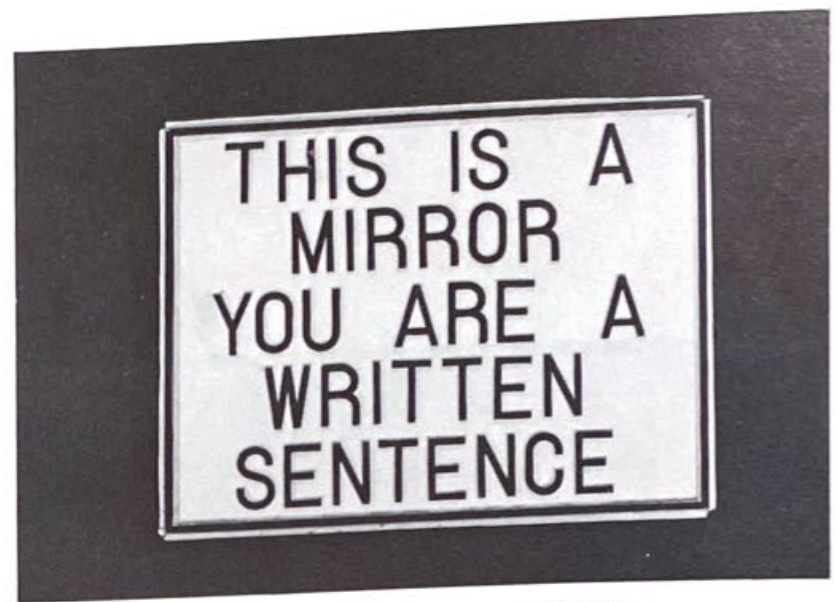
Gerardo Mosquera, escritor y crítico cubano, ha organizado varias exposiciones internacionales, incluyendo tres Bienales de la Habana. Miembro del Consejo de Artes Visuales en Cuba, Mosquera colabora regularmente en *Arte en Colombia* (Bogotá), *Brecha* (Montevideo, Uruguay) y muchas otras publicaciones.





Approximately 0.5 Cubic Meters of Air Stretched into a Prism, 1967





This is a Mirror, You are a Written Sentence, 1966-68

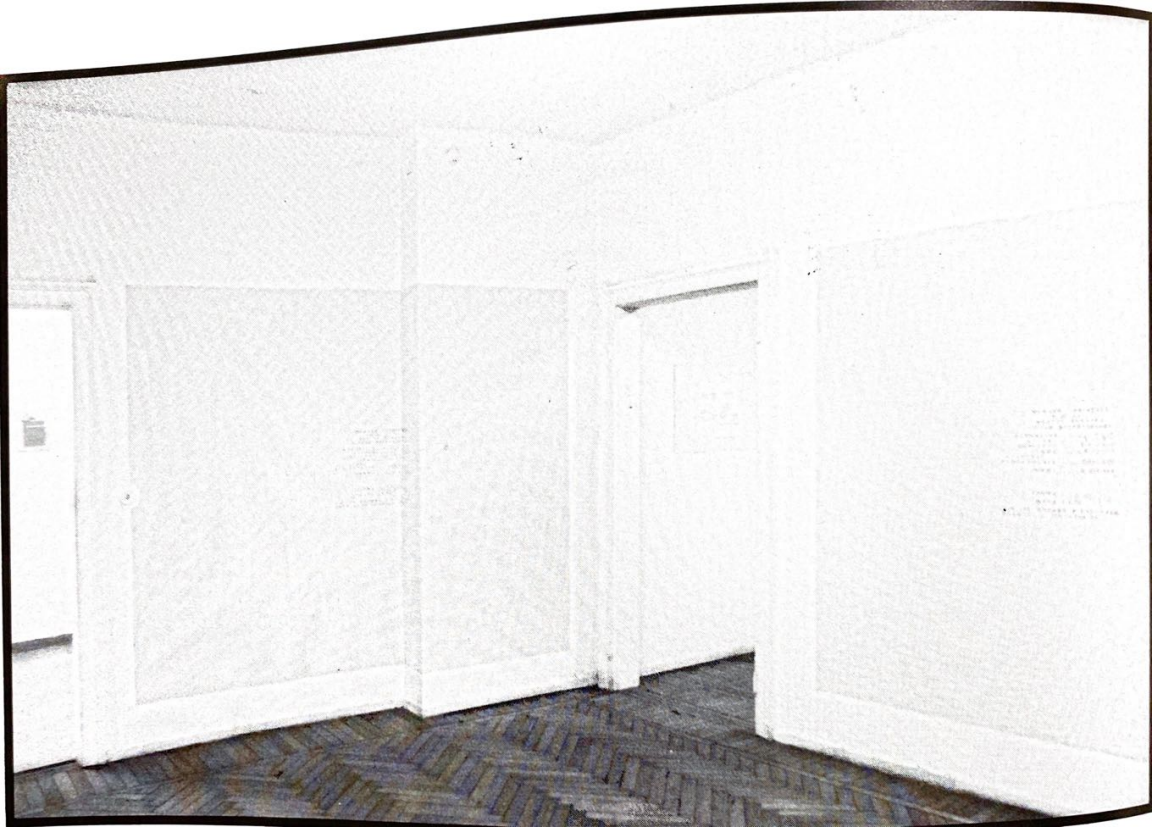


Telescope, 1967



Topological Change of a Word Sequence, 1969





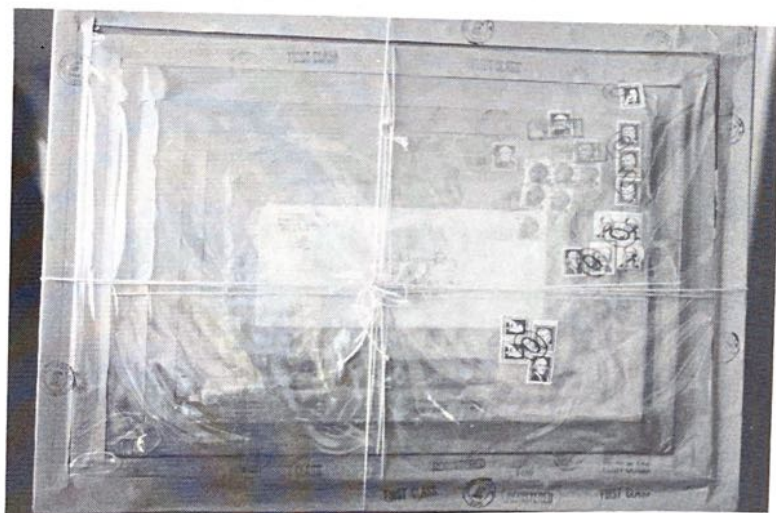




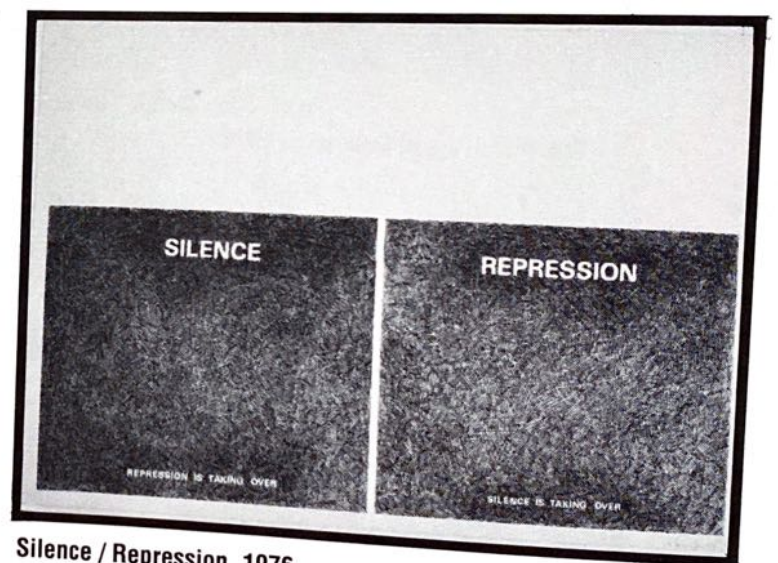
Execution, 1970



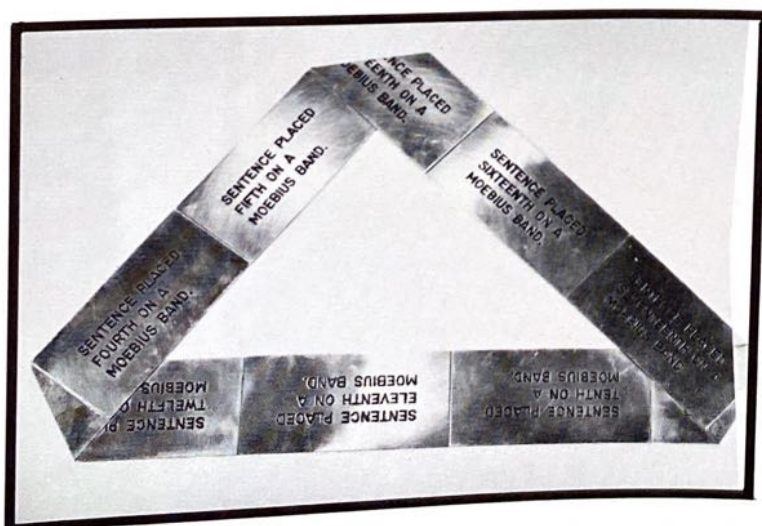
Painting with Titles, 1973



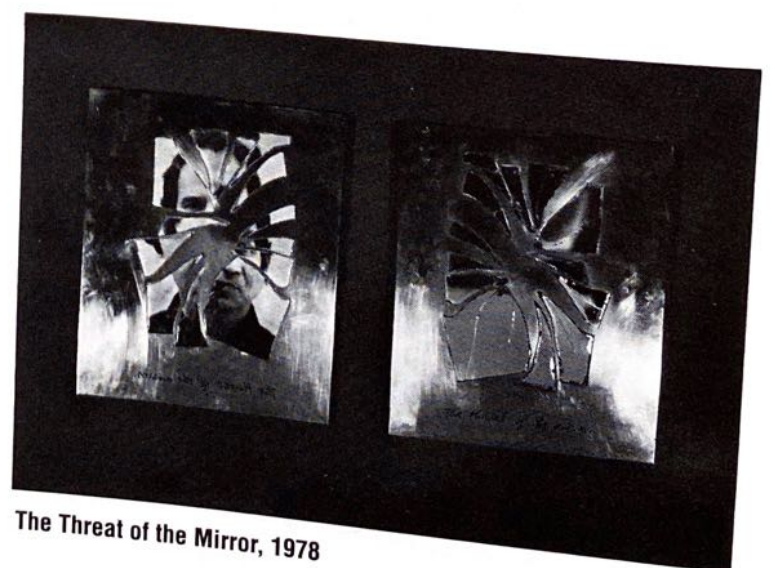
Mail Drawing, 1971



Silence / Repression, 1976



Moebius Strip, 1973

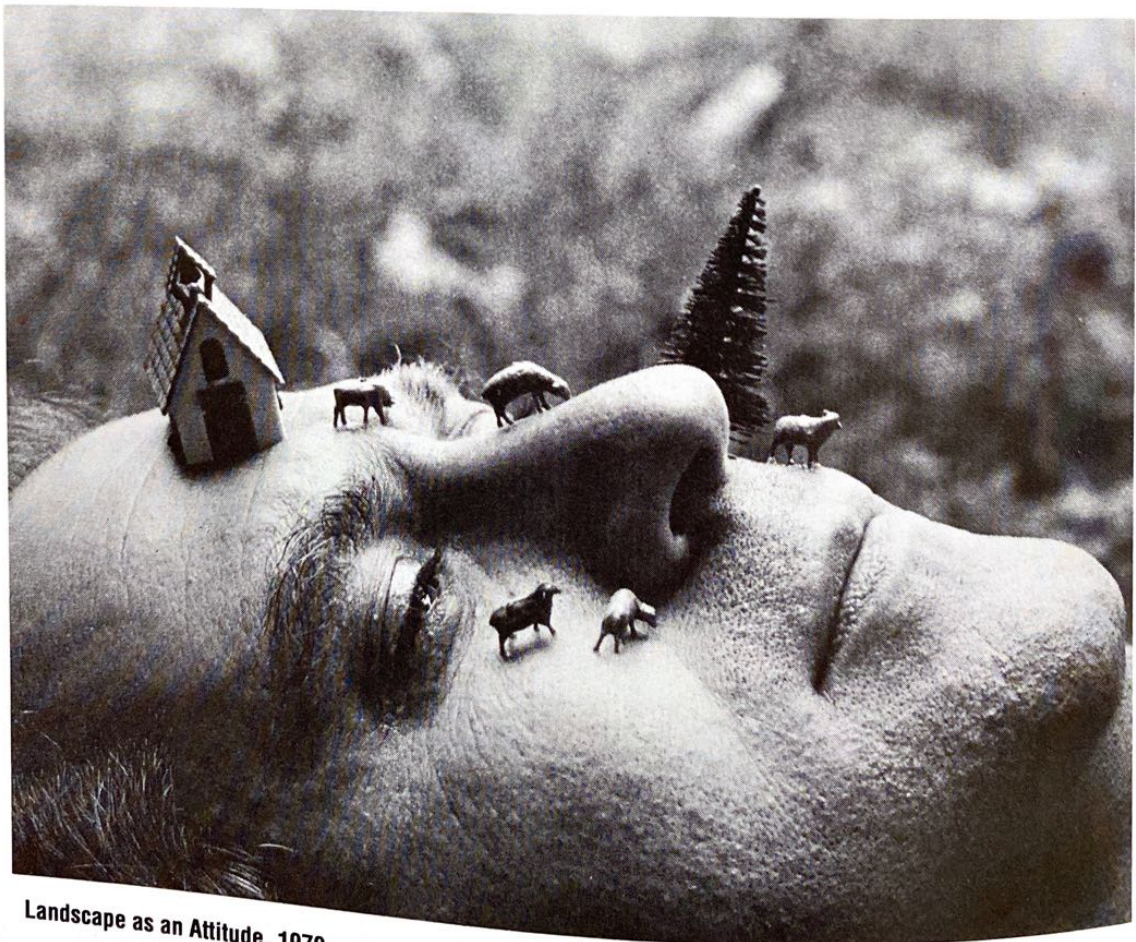


The Threat of the Mirror, 1978



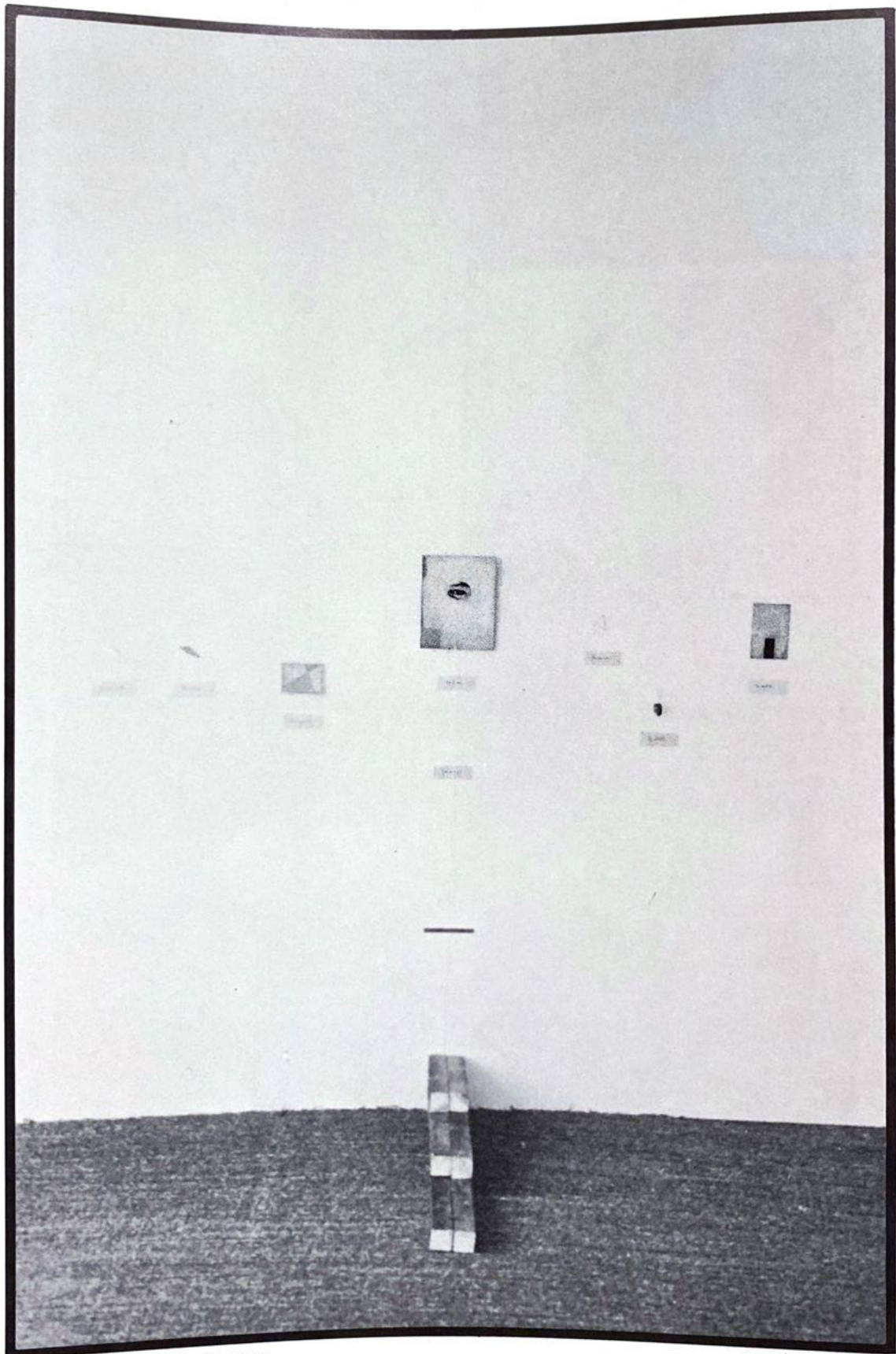


**The Discovery of Geometry, 1978**



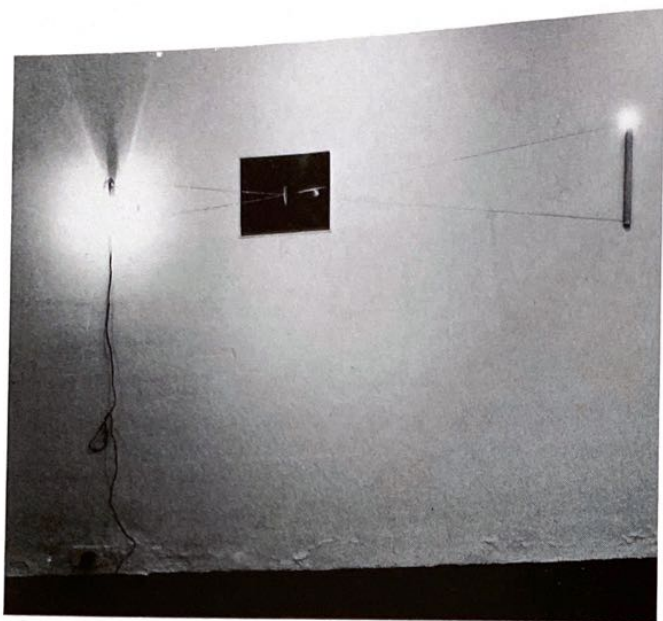
**Landscape as an Attitude, 1979**



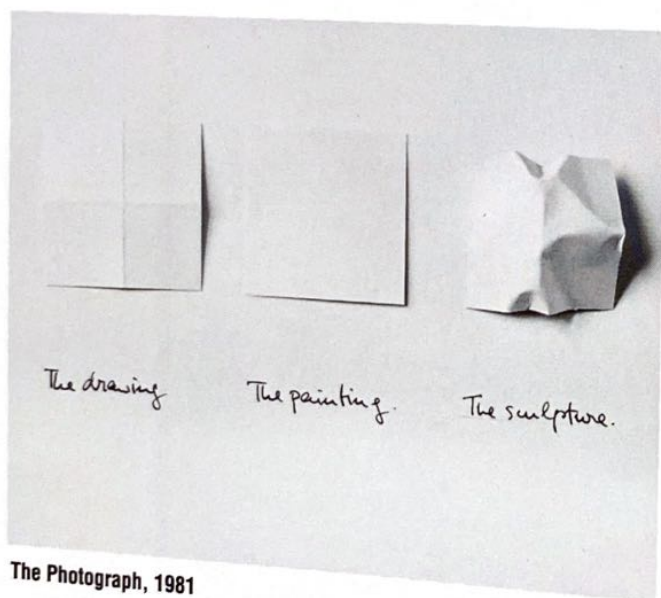


The Archaeology of a Spell, 1979

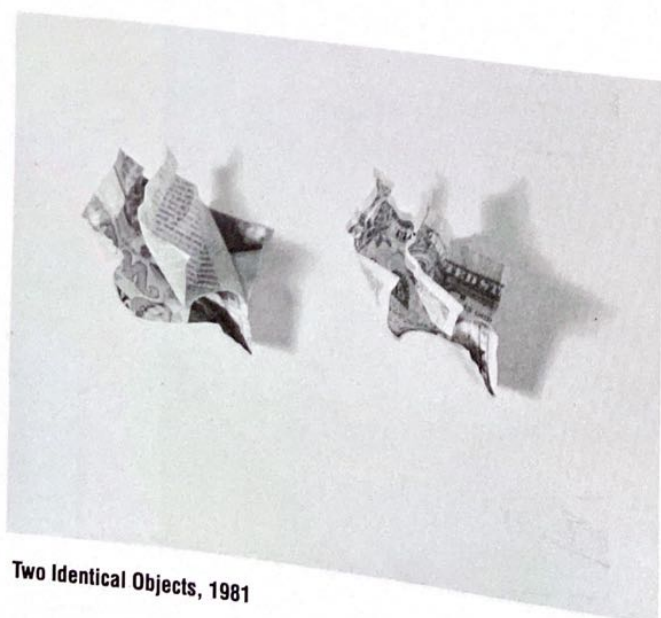




**The Optics Lesson, 1980**

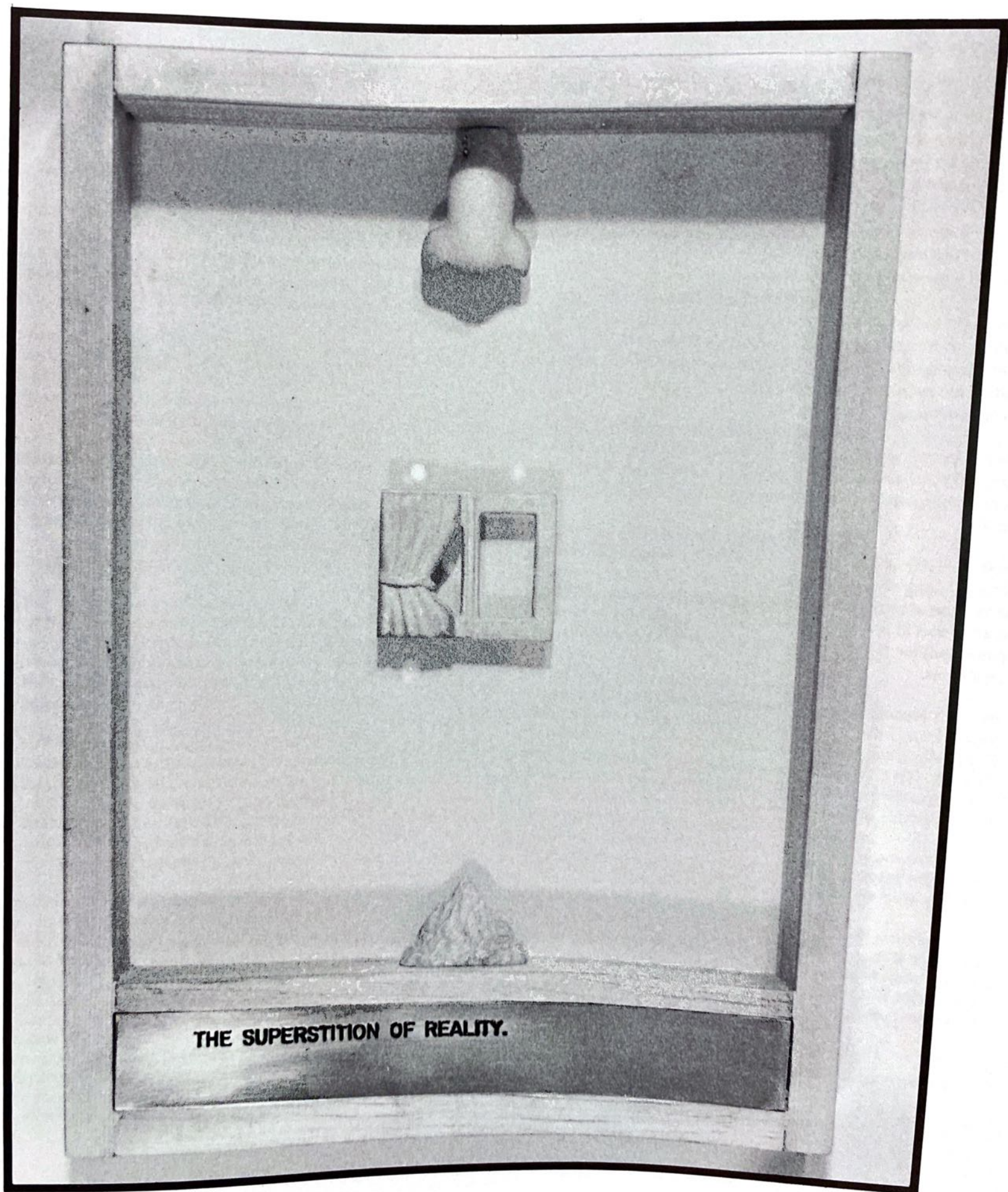


**The Photograph, 1981**



**Two Identical Objects, 1981**





The Superstition of Reality, 1980



## Manifiesto, 1982

I presume to be a revolutionary artist, with a vision for the world and with the mission of implementing it: to eradicate the exploitation of man by man, to implement the equitable distribution of goods and tasks, to achieve a free, just and classless society.

In order for my mission to succeed, I have to try to communicate with the highest possible percentage of the public, something only possible with a great amount of production and a good system of distribution for my products.

The production needed to reach the public who might be converted to my ideas cannot be realized through a limited, craftsman approach. I need means of production that are as efficient as possible and assistants who can perform those tasks that do not require my creative effort, but can be executed under my instructions.

Having limited funds to acquire equipment, I have to extend my ingenuity to find good buys, to profit from errors by the sellers, to bargain to my advantage; that is, to act with more intelligence than those who would exploit me if I weren't careful.

Having limited funds to employ assistants with the salaries they deserve, I have to try to pay as little as possible, prolong working hours for the same money, try to achieve a maximum of productivity with a minimum of expense. If this operation should leave some money left over, it should be invested in more equipment or in employing more people under the same conditions.

The biggest problem for the distribution of my work is competition. Other artists, sharing as well as opposing my ideas, interfere with my potential contact with the public. The public spends money on works that are not mine, money that would be useful to improve and increase my means of production, works that distract their attention from my revolutionary aims. I have to be able to establish my work over those obstacles.

I cannot physically eliminate the artists competing with me, but I can try to harm their image, spread rumors, create rifts between them and their dealers, and generally, try to sabotage their distribution systems.

With some luck and some manipulation I can then add these distribution networks to mine and ensure my pre-eminence in the public's view. Thus I will increase my sales which will allow me to acquire more and better means of production. I will be able to consider gaining access to other audiences, an international public.

The day when my revolutionary ideals will become a reality therefore could be near.

Luis Camnitzer, 1982

Presumo de ser un artista revolucionario. Tengo una visión del mundo y la misión de ponerla en efecto. Quiero eliminar la explotación del hombre por el hombre, lograr una distribución equitativa de tareas y bienes, construir una sociedad justa, libre y sin clases.

Para lograr mi ideal tengo que comunicarme con la mayor cantidad de público posible, algo que solamente puedo lograr con una gran producción y un buen sistema de distribución de mi obra. La obra no puede quedar reducida a unos pocos ejemplos artesanales exhibidos esporádicamente.

Para llegar al público que quiero convertir a mis ideas necesito medios de producción que hagan mi tarea lo más eficiente posible. Necesito, también, mano de obra contratada que pueda trabajar en aquellas partes que no requieren mi esfuerzo creativo y que se puedan ejecutar bajo mis instrucciones.

Con pocos medios económicos a mi alcance para la adquisición de equipo y maquinaria, me veo forzado a utilizar mi ingenio. Tengo que buscar ocasiones que me favorezcan, aprovecharme de errores ajenos, regatear precios. En otras palabras, tengo que actuar con más inteligencia que aquellos que seguramente se aprovecharían de mi en caso de un descuido.

La misma situación económica me impide contratar ayudantes al salario que se merecen. Tengo que pagar lo menos posible, alargar las horas de trabajo y lograr un máximo de productividad con un costo mínimo. Si en este proceso me llegara a sobrar dinero, lo debo invertir en más y mejor equipo, y en el empleo de más gente bajo las mismas condiciones.

El mayor obstáculo para la difusión de mi obra es la competencia. Hay otros artistas que con ideas parecidas a las mías y con otras, interfieren con mi posible contacto con el público. El público gasta dinero en obra que no es la mía. Con ello distrae su atención de las metas revolucionarias de mi obra y el dinero mal invertido no me permite mejorar mis condiciones de producción. Tengo que lograr imponer mi obra por encima de estos obstáculos.

Obviamente no puedo eliminar físicamente a los artistas que compiten conmigo. Pero sí puedo tratar de desprestigiarlos, de crear rumores, de enemistarlos con sus galeristas, y en general, de sabotear sus canales de difusión. Con algo de suerte y un poco de manipulación podré entonces incorporar esos canales de difusión de obra al mío, asegurando mi preeminencia en el público.

Mis ventas incrementarán, con lo cual podré adquirir más y mejores medios de producción y con- tratar más ayuda. Podré considerar la posibilidad de acceder a nuevos públicos, crear incluso un mercado internacional para mi arte. Con ello, el día que mis ideales revolucionarios se hagan realidad estará al alcance de mi mano.

Luis Camnitzer, 1982





**Fabrication Sustained Memory, 1985-86 (from installation at 1988 Venice Biennale)**





*They found that reality  
had intruded upon the image.*

They found Reality had Intruded upon the Image, 1986 (from installation at 1988 Venice Biennale)



# Access to the Mainstream

To address "access to the mainstream" in the arts is to address the topic of success in the market. For this reason, the subject has always elicited contradictory emotions — primarily desire and resentment — and these emotions have been particularly strong among those artists who do not belong to the social group that produces and supports what is considered "mainstream" art. Although the term "mainstream" carries democratic reverberations, suggesting an open and majority-supported institution, it is in fact a rather elitist arrangement reflecting a specific social and economic class. In reality, "mainstream" presumes a reduced group of cultural gatekeepers and represents a select nucleus of nations. It is a name for a power structure that promotes a self-appointed hegemonic culture. For this reason, the wish to belong to the "mainstream" and the wish to destroy it often arise simultaneously in the individuals who are or feel marginal to it. Depending on origin and background, individual access is more difficult for some than for others.

Discussion of the plights of different ethnic or national groups, anecdotes about their failures and successes in their attempts to gain access, does not illuminate the topic; it distracts from it. What does deserve attention are the elements common to the experience of all: for example, colonialism as a force affecting both internal and external colonies; values instilled by educational institutions that separate peoples from their identities; the market's fetishization of the success of the individual over the building of culture. These are the substantive issues. It is through these elements that the market becomes a tool for homogeneity, and "mainstream" turns out to be a euphemism for its actions.

This century has seen the introduction of some productive new methods for analyzing art processes and art problems. Some of the previous irrationality and obscurantism have been moved aside, and we now can see art more as a mode of cognition and a way of formulating and solving problems within that mode. This has brought some welcome clarity to the art field. It also has had less positive consequences when these analytical premises were taken to their extreme, the conclusion was drawn that art should be perceived in formalistic terms, and that these terms not unlike those of mathematics — should be homogenized into an "international style." In fact, the concept of an "international style" is one which can be seen as useful for political hegemony and cultural expansionism.

The Modernist movements developed in western cultural centers during this century — particularly the

By Luis Camnitzer

myth of abstractionism — were always associated with the promotion of an international style, and this style was eventually used as a cultural answer to "totalitarianism," itself a Cold War term created to put down Soviet autocracy by classifying it with the Nazi regime. Concurrent with these developments, nationalism became a word symbolizing cultural regression, thus minimizing the concept's use as an anti-colonial instrument. Since this cultural expansionism included a growth of the market, it was easy for these conditions to be accepted as guidelines by the market. As a consequence, ethnic and national artists belonging to subordinate cultures could only be successful in this market if they worked within an acceptable formal repertoire, while the expression of ethnicity and/or nationality had to remain confined to content. This residual ethnicity allowed their products to be perceived as slightly exotic, enough so as to maintain a satisfying self-image of openness and pluralism on the part of the market. The same residual ethnicity would signal the "roots" of the author in the artist's community of origin. Yet, the community's pride would turn on the fact that their artist "made it in the art world" rather than on the artist's cultural contribution to his or her community. Artists like Romare Bearden or Fernando Botero, for example, are more respected in their communities for the prices they command in the market than for any possible changes in vision they may have introduced to their national or ethnic constituents. A clear symptom of colonization is the tendency to see the shift from subordinate to hegemonic culture as a sign of progress and success.

In the recent years the eclecticism in vogue in the market — the Postmodernist "pastiche" — has allowed for the introduction of some short-lived cracks into this picture. German and Italian national identities, as projected by the Neo-expressionists and the Trans-avant-gardists, have been allowed a place, in spite of the fact that they do not totally conform to the notion of international homogeneity. Through feminist and graffiti art, the affirmation of distinctive group identity has achieved exhibition status, and kitsch has been allowed to challenge formalist purism. While the parties involved in this diversification of the mainstream have not fully assumed responsibility for the implied political ideologies of their work, clearly their contributions have tended to fit into two categories of Postmodernism, right-wing and left-wing. In right-wing Postmodernism — David Salle could be an example — we find past market products reintroduced, even regurgitated, with revitalized selling power. In left-wing Postmodernism — Kenny Scharf as an example for expression of identity. Hans Haacke for politics — some hitherto unacceptable elements have been introduced to the market and, as a result of their success, encourage the hope that the very definition of "mainstream" might be changed.

The hope has been followed by disappointment. A multinational gallery structure has re-internationalized these offerings. Until multinational galleries and prices caught



up, Germany and Italy were the artistic counterparts of what Taiwan and Korea are for industry. The edge of left-wing Post-modernism was dulled by chicness, to better fit the galleries. Diversity was fused into a market's expanded repertoire, and what could have been a cultural breakthrough was blunted into no more than an increase of merchandise supply. There is a store in Massachusetts which offers "authentic fast food." What possibly was intended as a satirical stab ended up providing an authenticating genealogy for an ersatz, being co-opted by the same institution it started attacking. The danger quickly disappeared and the balance was re-established.

To malign the market as an evil is very easy. Its distorting incentives, its self-congratulatory righteousness, its bulldozing cultural flattening and its deep-seated racism make it a vulnerable target. But most of this maligning assumes that under certain conditions the market can be corrected. If only there were minority curators or critics. If only there was easier access for minority artists. If only there were more galleries for minorities, or more room for minority artists in the mainstream galleries.

When criticism of the market follows this tack we lose sight of the fact that the market primarily serves itself and a specific socio-economic systems and will continue to do so regardless of any change in the race, gender, or nationality of those who play roles in it. Broadening the grip of active players will certainly help individuals to survive while they work. But this achievement should not be confused with a revolution against the market. Subordinate and peripheral cultures will continue to maintain their underprivileged status as long as their own and specific markets remain underprivileged. They will continue to suffer erosion as long as obsequious internationalization is perceived as a status symbol.

Access to the mainstream really means a mainstreaming of the artist. In the late '60s there was a push for something called "Black Capitalism." It was clearly more a promotion of capitalism than of blackness. The unexamined assumption was that capitalism is the best — if not the only — way of life, and that by granting an invitation and some aid to participate in it, critical problems would disappear. It was not, as was claimed, a matter of "integration," with the problems of two parties to be analyzed toward the creation of a third alternative. It was a matter of tolerating the access of one of the parties to a mainstream controlled by the other party. Capitalism wasn't supposed to change, it was to be expanded.

The time may now have arrived to focus our critical efforts on the colonial artist rather than on the market. Colonial artists are a schizoid and insecure group. On the one hand, we are dying to exhibit in a museum or in the best gallery. If we don't make it, we see ourselves as failures. On the other hand, if somebody else makes it we smell co-optation. If a white-Anglo commentator makes comments about a "minority issues," we perceive those comments as ignorant or patronizing, no matter how well-informed or well-intended. If the comments are made by a minority member within the context of the mar-

ket, we discount it as the calculated latitude permitted someone who is fulfilling a quota; we don't completely accept the statement as evidence that the mainstream has been truly redefined.

The cause for this ambivalent reaction is not based on the content of the remarks but on the context in which they are made, signaling a distrust which could be healthy if used well. It is our obsessive focusing on the market, colored by the frustration of accessibility in theory and factual inaccessibility in practice, which hinders us in the correct use of our instinct. Only when resigned to failure do we look away and criticize. While there is a chance for success we may criticize some, but our actions will contradict our words. While criticism gives us a feeling of connectedness with our original community, our goal remains the access to the mainstream in any way possible.

Art is whatever fits into the market, and what does not is treated as foreign to the field. This simplistic division overlooks the processes we have to undergo in our attempt to enter the market and the powerful distortions to which we are subjected. Coming from subordinate or peripheral cultures, the minority artist's drive to become a participant in the marketplace, to find a place in the center of the hegemonic culture is the product of colonization. In order to successfully acquire membership, we have to undergo a thorough process of assimilation. When we don't fully succeed in our mimesis, we are left in a very visible and pathetic state of affectation.

In all the cases of the mainstreamed minority — the foreign artist, the black capitalist who applies to the mainstream — the colonizing process leads to the internalization of the wish to assimilate. When colonization is successful assimilation becomes something "natural" and unavoidable. We are then allowed to enter the field of competition and free enterprise so that everyone becomes the happy and credulous owner of an equal opportunity. But on the way to this plateau, certain changes occur in the expression of the individual. Some of these changes become believable, others less so. If believable, assimilation has been completed successfully. If not, the only thing achieved is affectation. What is expressed is perceived as a sign of kitsch, nouveau-richness or "arrivism." A culture to be forgotten is partially covered up with a culture incompletely acquired, or a culture badly remembered is falsely reinterpreted for the eyes of a culture badly understood.

A recent review of a concert by the Peruvian singer Yma Sumac stated "Her stage show was a campy, sexy 'south of the border' stylization of grand opera, in which she portrayed a primitive diva mystically in tune with the forces of nature." And further on: "Positioned on either side of the stage were Styrofoam replicas of Incan deities, and the singer, costumed in a filmy purple gown, comported herself with theatrical hauteur." While it is unlikely that the reviewer expected Ms. Sumac to borrow original Incan statues from the Metropolitan Museum, nevertheless the account is a good inventory of the many ways she transgressed the good manners of hegemonic high culture. Even the possible originality of her transgressions



is second-rated by a later comparison with "the showmanship of Liberace." Totally absent from the review is an account of Ms. Sumac's transgressions against her own culture, the violations performed to fit Liberace's market and the feedback of this market into Peru.

Colonization, assimilation, and affectation are all steps belonging to the same staircase, only at different distances from what is considered the top. Most of us who have come from different cultures have walked on all three steps, partly because of personal decisions, but mostly because of unperceived social and cultural pressures. All three steps signify a substitution of cultural values, a loss of what we had. More important, we impair our ability to sift through our own reality and find the building blocks for our independence. We who are artists who have come from other countries were subject to art schools belatedly and incompletely patterned after those in the cultural centers. We who lived in the cultural centers were directly processed toward melting into the pot. In both cases a set of artificial needs was created in us, leading us to the belief that the cultural centers and their values do indeed define the top of the staircase and that our original cultures, the subaltern cultures, are invalid. Yet, somewhere, a link remains alive, pulling us back to those cultures and defining an anti-mainstream seed.

In our quest to the top we end up classified somewhere between two interesting examples, the one of Lang Shih-ning and the one of the upper-class Uruguayan ladies. Lang Shih-ning was the Chinese name of Giuseppe Castiglione, an Italian painter who lived between 1688 and 1766. He went to China, worked for the emperor Ch'ien Lung, and tried hard and unsuccessfully to erase his western art training for the sake of becoming a Chinese court painter. During the late '50s in Uruguay, it had become fashionable for ladies in idleness to take up Chinese watercolors as a creative activity. There were several exhibits per season, and the more "authentic" the work looked, the better it was rated. The first example is one of a mercenary assimilating to better perform his job. The second example is one of indulging in affectation. In their activities, neither Lang Shi-ning nor the Uruguayan ladies were directly led to their activities by colonization in the same way that we are. But all of us are led to a debatable cultural substitution, one which should not be allowed to happen casually and thoughtlessly through an unconscious mimetic drive.

We have been taught to view art as an apolitical act, devoid of political consequences, operating in a non-political space. When politics do seep into our work, it is confined to a level of residual content, placating somewhat our conscience, but not forcing us to review our strategies. We fail to see that politics are not just reduced to content, in a simplistic fashion. We live the alienating myth of primarily being artists. We are not. We are primarily ethical beings sifting right from wrong and just from unjust, not only in the realm of the individual, but in communal and regional contexts. In order to survive ethically we need a political awareness that helps us to understand our environment and develop strategies for our actions.

Art becomes the instrument of our choice to implement these strategies. Our choice to become artists is a political decision, independent of the content of our work. Our definition of art, of what culture we are serving, of what audience we are addressing, of what our work is to achieve, are all political decisions.

Thus the issue is not our access to the mainstream, but the mainstream's access to us. Only put this way can the mainstream act as a resonance box for our activities without eviscerating us. Whether the mainstream comes to us or bypasses us is of secondary importance. Of primary concern is that we remain in the trade of building a culture and know as precisely as possible what and whose culture we are building. Equally important is that we reduce our ego. The idea of us building a culture may leave the impression that we may do so singlehandedly. In fact, our role is equivalent to that of one more brick during the construction of a building. Under certain circumstances this attitude may sound like a separatist stance, but it is not. It does not imply a reversion to provincial nationalism or to parochialism. It is a position which stresses that what has selling power is not necessarily in our best interest, while stopping colonialism is. There is an important difference between cultural autonomy and chauvinism. Cultural autonomy is conducive to generating independent individuals. Chauvinism is only conducive to racism and, given the power, to imperialism. Imperialism is no more than provincialism with bullying power. What the stated position implies is in fact no more than a reordering of priorities in a moment in which a much-needed radical change of society still seems out of reach. ■

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'It is difficult to categorize ideologies in art because of the many possible levels of reading in its content, references, and uses of formal elements. There are examples outside of the realms of art which seem to offer clearer illustrations. Transformers, the polymorphous robot-toys, seem to provide a much more pristine example for right-wing pastiche aesthetics. Their aesthetic power relies not on the particular look of each stage of their transformation, but on the seamless transition from one appropriated image to another, always within a lethal militaristic context. Lip-synch singing, a new rage, is another example. The "artist" in this case is released from his or her responsibility to create, through blending into somebody else's voice. On the other hand, Markowitz, a character in the television series *LA Law*, becomes a symbol of left-wing Postmodernism. Challenging formalist beauty and canonic sex appeal, a short and pudgy personage to be overlooked in the street is elevated to a sex symbol because of sympathy, tenderness, and intelligence. The screen gods who effectively had been oppressing us have been dethroned for a short while.



# Wonderbread and Spanglish Art

In its short life, the U.S. has both adopted and developed a great variety of cultural paradigms and myths that give cohesion to its national identity. These constructs, by no means always a product of a conscious strategy, overshadow and help to reduce the diversities in population identity, a diversity which normally would tend to undermine a sense of unity. Some of the ideas are notorious and past their prime, like the "American dream" and the "melting pot". Some take their place in economics, like the "trickle down" theory. Sometimes a little military action furthers the cause, like the invasion of Grenada which was approved by 63% of the polled population.

"Wonder Bread" is one of these paradigms which operates on a cultural level. It is a product sold and consumed as bread. Additives and advertising provide its nutritional value without affecting any of the product's inherent qualities. Over the years, the confluence of economic dynamics and culturally conditioned taste buds has led to the establishment of "Wonder Bread" as a benchmark for other products. Any effort by these other products to resemble real bread is not so much seen as closing a gap but as an act of refinement and sophistication. The products become variations of what can be called "gourmet" Wonder Bread. Given the fact that even cultures which have perfected real bread over millennia are slowly adopting the same range of products, what normally would be no more than an example of anthropological curiosity becomes also a paradigm for intercultural relations. As an example of how values are shifted, the use of "Wonder Bread" as a reference illustrates the flow of pressure between the hegemonic center and the periphery.

The increasing pervasiveness of "Wonder Bread" outside of the U.S. is directly explained by its satisfying expediency and economy and, less directly, by the aura of status owned by those things imported from the hegemonic culture. While direct pressure allows for a conscious decision about why one should sacrifice one's taste buds, it is the indirect pressure which subverts and eventually substitutes taste, creating a new canon. "Wonder Bread" has become a symbol of modernity. Modernity has traditionally been associated with progress and, therefore, seen as a necessary tool for decolonization and independence. It is ironic that in this process values are subverted to a point that, in fact, a new colonization takes place. The reason to expand on this here is because, even if fraught with more complex issues, the same process applies to art.

The pressure to shift values in art is buttressed by the still underlying commonplace assumption that art

By Luis Camnitzer

historical processes are linear and develop progressively in the search for quality. It follows that art which fills the media with the latest news and achieves pervasiveness, becomes *ipso facto* the canon. The desirability of the canon is internalized, and following it comes to appear as a spontaneous, instinctive, indigenous and authentic activity, when, in fact, it is the product of an artificially created need. Taste acts as an acquired instinct. As an instinct, it bypasses rational thought. As an acquisition it is controlled like any other merchandise by, among others, values related to class status and property desires. In a colonially dependent situation the controls operate from the cultural and economic centers and shape these artificially created needs.

As with any colonizing process, the cultural pressure from the hegemonic center creates problems for those living and working on the periphery. A process of slow and organic development of cultural identities has been interrupted by the adoption of imports well beyond what would be a normal product of international contact and exchange.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that in Brazil, U.S. companies and their affiliates spend in advertising the equivalent of one third of the government's budget for education.<sup>2</sup> UNESCO estimates that between 50% and 70% of what is considered basic culture in the West comes from radio, television and film. In Latin America, the U.S. controls 75% of the TV programs, 65% of advertising, 55% of movie houses, 60% of records and cassettes, 65% of the news and 35% of the publishing.<sup>3</sup> One of the consequences is that a focus on art-making for one's community has given way to the notion of art-making for the international market, and in this process a new and alien concept of quality has had to be adopted. Quality is not defined anymore by the degrees of revelation and mastery of communication for and with one's people, but by how much leverage the products achieve in the context of an external, often unknown, public. Thus, the heroic scale and the aesthetics of spectacular superproduction developed in societies of wealth become the standard against which the artist of poverty is measured. Handicrafts connected with non-industrial or obsolete industrial traditions become a tool to stereotype this artist in his or her separation from the mainstream.

Western art since the Renaissance has developed an increasingly accelerated dynamic of establishing "colonial techniques" or "minor art forms" within the media covered by art history. Printmaking, for example, has become a colony of painting. Instead of contributing original imagery, printmaking primarily serves to translate and rehash imagery developed in painting. The division between "super-spectacle" art and "modestly handcrafted" art seems to be a political refinement of this dynamic since it helps to secure the place of the rich hegemonic centers by slowly restricting the definition of art to those products generated by them. This restricted definition eliminates any possibility of qualitative comparison between art from the center and art from the periphery. Whatever doesn't reflect a minimum investment of money won't qualify as serious art. It



also ignores ethical and political substrata often informing art on the periphery as consequence of the struggle for decolonization. From a hegemonic and formalist point of view, much of art on the periphery will be perceived as a form of a low-budget craft.<sup>4</sup>

It could be argued that successful penetration by the hegemonic concepts of quality could only occur if the values displaced were weak or obsolete. While many traditional values might indeed be obsolete (in Latin America they tend to have originated under previous colonizations and have often outlived their usefulness), the argument neglects a simple fact. New York values, or international art market values, are derived from an infrastructure that can afford them. Or, when they are derived, it is assumed that this infrastructure can afford them. The assumption is one paradigm more used in the attempt to achieve cultural unity. As a consequence of the mythical reality of this paradigm there is also a "periphery" within the "center", sometimes referred to as the Third World within the First World. It encompasses internal colonies and dependent cultures and, important for this paper, emigrees from the geographical periphery. The adoption of these values by a region where this infrastructure is absent (that is, absence of a market coordinated with the local needs, of a market for the acquisition of the produced work, of the possibility of survival through art-related jobs, or of jobs in general for survival), creates problems and absurdities which cannot be easily ignored. Professionalism in art, increasingly measured by expenditures, relegates artists on the periphery to the category of "Sunday painters". Participation in international events becomes an impossibility because of the lack of money, not only for shipping work, but often for even preparing slides and mailing documentation. In the absence of an infrastructure, art schools are primarily created for reasons of international status — a country is not considered "cultured" without them — and the students are educated to become foreign grant recipients. If successful, they emigrate and work in the hegemonic centers. The periphery invests in education and the hegemonic center receives the benefits.

Those artists not emigrating are subject to the influx of secondary information which, often, inhibits or masks the creation of local primary information and thus postpones culture instead of generating it. Art on the periphery stemming from these dynamics is more a post-cultural phenomenon. It is primarily the product of an adopted or an imposed culture, rather than a contributor to a culture in action. As a consequence, the periphery develops what could be called an eclecticism of despair in which elements are merged through appropriation. Subservient and fragmentary mimesis blends with a defensive syncretic use of resources and with recontextualization. The result is an aesthetic which long predates post-modernism<sup>5</sup>, but which often matches it in visual terms. Post-modernism, however, is considered to be a post-industrial aesthetic, an aesthetic which responds to the instantly available and omnipresent information distributed by super technology,

able to cancel out the possibility of distinct styles. The use of eclecticism on the periphery is, at least partially, a way of attempting to define an identity. Hegemonic post-modernism, on the other hand, absorbs all identities into an amorphous conglomerate. The misperception by the mainstream of the post-cultural eclecticism of the periphery as a rehashed product of post-modernism is a poor and self-serving simplification of much more dramatic process. A struggle for cultural survival is dismissed by means of a dishonest construction of history.

The periphery, when not resorting to an isolationist use of tradition, produces hybrid art, the product of being in one place and looking toward another place. Manfred Schneckenburger, organizer of the latest Documenta exhibit, summed up the consequences of this state of affairs in an unfriendly but cogent way. In an effort to justify the fact that only one Latin American artist (Alfredo Jaar, from Chile) was included in what purported to be an overview of the best art in the market of the last five years, he declared that "it is not possible to show the situation of countries where art is always trapped between a great tradition lost and a wish for contact with the modern world."<sup>6</sup>

Given the different pressures the artist on the periphery is faced with several choices. The artist can: actively disregard the colonizing values and focus on the local audience; produce for the international market in spite of the handicap; or emigrate to the cultural center.

In the first case, even when focusing on the local audience, the artist will tend to produce in reaction to colonization. A direct link to the past is broken, interrupted or deflected by the presence of a filter that factors in the values promoted by imperial culture. As Albert Memmi observes in his "Portrait of the Colonized", a loss of history takes place with the effect that "the colonized are kept out of the objective conditions of contemporary nationality". Gramsci was reflecting on the same condition when he noted that "remembering takes the place of thinking" in the production of culture. Identity, under these conditions, easily becomes confused with an artificial folklore. Fossil memories, bleached and dry, usurp reality. Much of indigenist art, from Sabogal in Peru to Rivera in Mexico, had this problem imbedded in the content of the work. A present generation of artists is contributing a more formal and sophisticated approach; Cesar Paternosto and Alejandro Puento, both from Argentina, and Esther Vainstein (Peru) connect pre-Columbian traditions with modern constructivism and minimalism.<sup>7</sup>

In the second case, in which the local artist focuses on the international market, the tendency is to produce makeshift works, intended to achieve the look of the international standard but affected by the material constraints that prevail locally. Equipped with craftsmanship, but confronted with scarcity of materials and resources, artists will try to compete with the "heroic" scale and the industrial finish of art produced in the cultural centers and will seek to disguise material shortfalls with affectation. Work under these conditions runs the risk of halfheartedness.



It is in the third case, in which the artist migrates to the cultural center, that there is, in theory, the greatest chance for success in the mainstream. Until the mid-fifties, that cultural center was provided by Europe, but then slowly shifted to the U.S.A. It is estimated that from 1945 to 1965 alone, at least 17,000 researchers and high level technicians emigrated from Latin America to the U.S.A. During 1986, 25% of Ph.D.s awarded in the sciences went to non-U.S. citizens, and according to a report published by the National Research Council in January 1988, in engineering Ph.D.s the figure reached 60%. In turn, 60% of this figure do not return to their countries of origin. Out of the 500,000 people who left Puerto Rico during 1980-85, 14% were professionals. Unfortunately there are no figures specific to this brain drain in art. Enormous amounts of money invested in the education of highly qualified personnel in Latin America have thus ended up, in effect, donated to the U.S.A., where migration on those levels was motivated primarily by economic considerations.<sup>8</sup> Political exile was the other major reason for resettlement during recent decades. A high percentage of these exiles, intellectuals fleeing dictatorships from the right, went to Europe and Australia, which provided a friendlier atmosphere for their dissenting ideologies than the U.S.A.

For the migrants themselves, however, the common unifying experience is that of uprootedness, an experience also familiar to second generation artists who underwent a non-assimilationist education. While uprootedness may have little direct effect on the professional output of intellectuals in the sciences, it becomes a major factor in the work of intellectuals engaged in the communicative arts. The artist is faced, consciously or unconsciously, with questions and choices: how much of the original background should be sacrificed for the sake of assimilation into the new context and acceptance into the hegemonic culture? How much change will be produced by osmosis and, therefore, how much of the original background should be consciously protected?

Some artists will attempt to erase their roots entirely, with the objective of blending completely into the new environment. This is an enterprise comparable to that of trying to speak a new language like a native. While not an impossible goal, it is clearly more difficult than for the aborigines with whom one is trying to merge.

Other artists, shocked by the new environment, will retreat toward their original culture with redoubled efforts, seeking protection. They will share the plight of those who remained at home addressing the local audience. But their problems will be even more severe; in their case, the audience addressed is absent and feedback from them is non-existent or, at best, sporadic. The audience becomes an abstraction, frozen in a past that is fogged by nostalgia and wishful mystification. The artist becomes doubly alienated, trapped in a fiction that looks real.<sup>9</sup>

Both attitudes thus produce a semblance of reality which hides the conflictual situation in which they are

immersed. While generating aesthetically viable products, they are haunted by a core of inauthenticity.

But some artists may try to strike a balance between the cultures of the center and the periphery and confront their reality without the recourse of escape. Avoiding denial of either the present or the past, they will attempt to produce a synthesis of experiences. They will produce what might be called "Spanglish" art.<sup>10</sup> Used in relation to speech, the term has negative connotations, implying the absence of a functional tool, and its substitution by a non-working hybrid of two languages. It is the confluence of a language incompletely remembered with a language incompletely acquired, forced to make do in their new integration. The negative interpretation obscures the origin and the need that it fulfills. Used in relation to art, "Spanglish" represents the merging of a deteriorating memory with the acquisition of a new reality distanced by foreignness.

"Spanglish" art is probably the most authentic alternative for the uprooted Latin artist. It is a natural and unaffected expression representing with fairness the fact that one came from one place and went to another and it functionally bridges the abyss left by that travel. It is an individualistic solution which allows for release of the tension caused by the clash of two cultures, and it permits the integration of both experiences into one iconography. Inspired by the immediacy of individual experience, this art will tend to distinguish itself from art that either reflects a programmatic attitude or evinces political awareness. The cultural significance inheres in the witnessing to a shared destiny, rather than in the activity of a shared aesthetic search, and quality is dependent on individual effort, rather than on group support or a community of interests.

It is difficult to find paradigmatic examples of "Spanglish" art. Since "Spanglish" does not constitute a consciously adopted platform seeded by programs, in most cases it remains as a component mixed with other art-making elements. When I first used the word in relation to art, I had the work of Ana Mendieta in mind. Artistically educated in the U.S.A. and interested in breaking into the mainstream, her memories and nostalgia prevented her successful assimilation. It was a fact which she first resented and, towards the end of her life, assumed. Pressed for examples, I would further use the work of Juan Sanchez and of Alfredo Jaar. Sanchez is probably the clearest example of sophisticated New York/Puerto Rican expression. He tries to get to his roots, but finds them layered under neighbourhood experiences and interpretations. The independence of Puerto Rico becomes a solution to all the levels of discrimination and humiliation, a way of leaving rather than staying. Jaar is, among these artists, the one who visually fits best into the mainstream. He shares the impeccability and the immaculateness of hegemonic presentations. In part this is the product of his own education and taste, but for him it also becomes a manipulatory device to get his points across and understood within the mainstream.

So, the notion of "Spanglish" art becomes more of a tool for understanding than a neat form of classifying.



It provides a helpful vantage point to re-consider art that has simplistically been lumped together under the ethnic label of "Hispanic."<sup>11</sup> The label puts the so classified people in a dilemma, even when they are unrelated to art. In my own college I am faced with the choice of being undeservedly classed as part of a "protected segment of the population" (the college's language) and therefore used to pad some quota, or with reneging on my own culture and background in order to free a slot for other people in need of protection.<sup>12</sup>

Lately, the designation "Hispanic artists" has been used to classify and neatly group together artists who have some connection with Latin America. It is a classification spun-off by the mainstream culture which, in effect, posits a distance between these artists and the mainstream.<sup>13</sup> At best, this ascribed distance reflects their poor fit within the parameters of the mainstream, their deviation from the hegemonic norm. At best because, while distance may mean economic disaster for the artist, it can also mean that at least some room is reserved for the development of an authentic and powerful identity. At worst, the ascribed distance serves to promote the devastating condescension of "look, they too can make good art." In economic terms this may create an opportunity for survival, but it can also lead to a precipitous assimilation into the mainstream in which a freedom not yet fully achieved, is lost. In both cases, the label provides no unifying idea beyond that of vague ethnicity or vague geography; the artist remains separate, on his or her own, distracted from fully exploring the construction of a larger cultural community.

Meanwhile, the viewer, influenced by mainstream values, will observe this art with interest. To the degree that viewers' values are shared by the artist, the presentation will be understood as belonging to some form of art, but at the same time, the distance ascribed to the artist will suggest the possibility of finding something "exotic," something belonging to the unshared culture that will explain and justify the ascription of distance. If, by mainstream standards, there is anything intriguingly exotic it will be applauded as a contribution to the mainstream audience and coopted. If, on the other hand, the artist has found something interesting in mainstream art and has adopted it for use in personal art, the results will run the risk of being condemned as derivative. It is interesting to see how the work of Wifredo Lam suffered from both pressures at the same time. He is accepted as both bringing mysterious rituals into Western art and as a derivative product of Picasso. As Cuban critic Gerardo Mosquera points out, the result of this ambiguity is that his "Jungle" decorates the coat room in the Museum of Modern Art.

Therefore, when coming from the periphery, success has a frontier. The artist can only be moderately successful by the standards of mainstream art. Moderate acceptance means that the artist is seen as competent, as one who developed some individuality in the work without seriously revolutionizing or shaking the parameters within which international art operates. This perception allows the peaceful use of the

work whenever the "Hispanic" quota has to be satisfied. If there is some ethnicity present, even better. In a twisted way, the "Hispanic" artist is then perceived as producing a form of artistic "gourmet Wonder Bread", a bland category which here exempts the viewer from having to deal with the artist's individual drama of surviving the pressure of two clashing benchmarks by trying to create a third one. From the point of view of the artist, "Spanglish art" as a category preserves and expresses this drama.

The uprooted artist lacks the possibility of a powerful dialogue with a correspondingly uprooted public. When it exists, that public is too small or too distant to provide an effective feedback. Therefore it is the "gourmet Wonder Bread" way of reading works of art which generates most of the pressure. The artist classified as "other" is, because of this pressure, led to abandon any effort to find an authentic integrative iconography for the sake of opportunistic blandness or, instead, one of two opposite modes. The artist tries to produce totally exotic work, that is, conforming to the stereotype prevailing in the mainstream about what the original culture of the artist is supposed to be. Or the artist tries to eradicate totally any evocation of difference with an effort to camouflage the work as an act of homage to the current canon of the hegemonic culture. The feedback from the mainstream audience thus serves, unintentionally, to complicate and retard the task of cultural synthesis and to exacerbate the tensions that vex, and sometimes torment, the uprooted artist.

The "gourmet Wonder Bread" appreciation of art therefore serves as a long range tool to achieve assimilation into the hegemonic culture. Not only is the artist sidetracked from the pursuit of a new integrative authenticity, but it is the creation of an audience fitting this work which is also hindered. The artist is led to address the wrong audience, while the intended audience can not develop to become a proper interlocutor. It is clearly a natural dynamic of any hegemonic culture to attempt to reduce phenomena such as "Spanglish" art to an expression of one first and passing generation. However, it is less clear if, given the conditions generating emigration towards the center, this reduction serves the interests of "Spanglish" artists and their real and potential audiences. ■

"Wonderbread and Spanglish Art" is an expanded version of "Latin American Art in the U.S.: Latin or American?," an essay written originally by Luis Camnitzer for the exhibition *Convergences/Convergencias*, organized by Jane Farver for The Lehman College Art Gallery, February 11-March 31, 1988.



# The Idea of The Moral Imperative in Contemporary Art

By Luis Camnitzer

viewer and what means do we employ to do so. I am using the word "manipulation" on purpose. In common usage it has negative connotations and we always avoid its use when we describe art processes. We prefer to use euphemisms like "composition" and "design," and to deal with decisions about media, colors and size as if they were imbued with divine purity. In both negative and positive interpretations we are acknowledging the presence of an ethical component which transcends the choice and values of the content. This is important, since usually morals are mostly attached to the story telling part of art and avoided in the rest. The word "manipulation" has an ethical (or unethical) aura. The word "composition" has only an aesthetic aura, which in artistic terms is positive.

The use of positive euphemisms for words with negative connotations is more often than not a sign of hypocrisy. In this case, the hypocrisy helps hide the fact that we are organizing and prioritizing information so that the consumer shares with us not what there is to share, but that which we want to be shared. The shift of the action from ethics into aesthetics, propitiates and confirms the delusion that it is only those decisions pertaining to content which have an ethical quality. Ethics thus become something literary, a quality frowned upon by visual aesthetics, which can be dismissed.

By speaking of manipulation we are forced to acknowledge the presence of a public. By speaking of composition, on the other hand, we can indulge in the belief that art primarily consists of an intimate dialogue with the materials. The public is supposed to relate to this dialogue only in an incidental way, through voyeurism. By speaking of composition we don't have to decide whom we want to address with our art, aside from wanting to make it in a big gallery. We thus neglect one of our first possible ethical decisions, the one that places us in the context of society. It is interesting to note that the vast majority of artists working on art projects for the light board on Times Square resort to written political messages, no matter what their "normal" art work is. Suddenly the public's voyeurism can't be ignored and the dangers of visual pollution, happily marketed by galleries, becomes unacceptable in a truly public arena.

By disguising and erasing ethical processes in and with aesthetic patinas, we ignore the fact that what we call aesthetics is no more than the formal packaging of our product. It is our personal form of packaging, a factor that defines our artistic individuality, something that therefore is sacred and worth money. We further compound the problem with an obscurantist mysticism still prevalent in art matters. This mysticism tries to make us rely on inspiration and taste to resolve artistic problems instead of using them as tools for adjustment to perfect whatever we really want to say. We thus are led to neglect both the clear formulation of communication problems and the emphasis on the visual feasibility of the package in relation to those problems.

I would like to start by quoting something I wrote some years ago. It applies to the subject under discussion, but my interest in it here goes beyond the content of the statement. The quote is "We live the alienating myth of primarily being artists. We are not. We are primarily ethical beings sifting right from wrong and just from unjust, not only in the realm of the individual, but in communal and regional contexts. In order to survive ethically we need a political awareness that helps us understand our environment and develop strategies for our actions. Art becomes the instrument of our choice to implement these strategies."

Though I believe it is a neat statement, I am not using it just to satisfy my own presumptuousness. I am interested in what happened to the statement. It appeared, at the time, on the cover of *The New Art Examiner*, with big white letters on a violently red background, looking like a piece by Barbara Kruger.

I was thrilled and flattered by the exposure, but it made me ponder the ethical implications of appearing within the aesthetics of the cover. A statement which I had written in the context of a larger article, and meant to be read as such, had been transformed into an appealing object. So very appealing, at least for me, that I framed it. But, the content of the statement had lost its original immediacy and surrounding atmosphere as designed by me. It became encapsulated and fetishized in the alien space of a magazine cover.

I am, of course, cynical and vain enough not to regret the event at all. However, it is clear that the manipulatory steps used to engage the consumer of a magazine cover are radically different from those manipulatory steps used by the writer of an article or by an artist in a piece to convey a message to the reader or to the viewer. While all these steps vaguely belong to the category of packaging, it is clear that each medium and product has its own code for how the manipulation shall proceed according to its destination. A thoughtless substitution can create the same havoc as when detergent is packaged as perfume.

The question is not *if* we manipulate the viewer, but what do we want to achieve by manipulating the



Commercial marketing procedures of consumer products are much more straightforward and honest. Their mercenary quality is upfront. A market is defined and a product developed (or vice-versa) and the packaging is developed accordingly. What, why, and for whom, are the leading questions, and only then comes the appearance. We may not agree with the motivation, but there is an ethical consistency. Any mistake in the answers to those questions ensures economic failure, so they had better be correct. The adoption of the same questions in art would help to place ourselves in our society and clarify when we are attempting to make a profit, affect society, or when we are limiting our work to act as self-therapy. It is a clarity we gingerly employ to dismiss (mostly the motivations of) schlock art and other marginalia, but we are more careful when we address other cohabitants in the space of our elite or — God forbid — ourselves.

Most of our art is socially muddled, even when it functions effectively in the market. The secret or explicit wish of most artists is to be able to live off their art production. At the same time, a profit motive in art is seen as unethical. We want it both ways, to be non-mercenary and pure and to be paid for our magic in a mercenary and non-magical society. In essence, we are dreaming of living in a monarchical court or in a Utopian socialist society, depending on what end of the political spectrum we belong to. But, few of us feel the urge to help society to develop in a corresponding direction. It is in this dissociation of the art produced and our implicit or explicit dreams, that we tend to become amoral.

By placing the ethical commitment solely on content, we may feel better, but fail to address the issue. We merely confirm the dissociation and hope to solve two different problems with one and the same solution. By relying on taste and inspiration to define the aesthetics of packaging that content, we place the responsibility for whatever happens on an unconscious and unchallenged ideological platform. Because of our inattention, this ideological platform, more often than not, escapes our control. We thus let decisions be made for us instead of by us.

Lately a link has been established between ethics and post-modernism. I do not see this moralist surge in post-modernism, at least not as compared to a presumed lack of morals in modernism. Modernism had its own moral imperative, a Utopian belief that art could better society. While the building of a language was attempted to express that construct, conservative tendencies were lurking in the background during all of its reign. Much of post-modernism uses these conservative tendencies as an illustrious and validating genealogy. With this genealogy, and because of it, post-modernism is not really an aesthetic developed as an answer to modernism. It is rather a parallel aesthetic picked up by the market to occupy modernism's place upon its exhaustion. Simultaneously, the post-modern label also served to coopt and unify some artistic expressions dealing with the consciousness and assertion of local identities. The potential challenge to the notion of an in-

ternational style thus was defused. To a certain extent, post-modernism can be seen as the demoralization of older, anti-formalist tendencies, and their placement into a conservative context, while re-internationalizing and unifying what threatened to become a nationalist fragmentation in art.

This is not to say that ethics have no role in art today. But when issues connected with ethics appear, unlike what happened in the past, they do so marked by the absence of an awareness of posterity. Speculation about art issues leaves out a previously existing aim at atemporality. Doomsday has abandoned the signs carried by the cartoon crackpots of *The New Yorker* and marked a potential and credible end of history. As a consequence much of the art being made has short term goals. Some art is produced to transform artists into commercial and self-profiting icons, rather than to create icons to serve cultural enrichment. Other art is produced to denounce the end of history, rather than to create an environment where that termination becomes an impossibility.

But, whatever the art historical interpretation of our present may be, our art tradition has always been far from being drenched in ethics, even in the cases where the concern is at present prone to catastrophe. As artists we are easily enchanted by effects which may appear during work and we do not have any scruples about pursuing them no matter how much the subsequent results may contradict our original intentions. We rarely challenge in depth the parameters which define art or the technical constraints offered by art history. Though there are occasional ruptures, for the majority of artists art has been an evolutionary process with much taken for granted. But in the specific case of ethics even Walt Disney had surpassed the notion of them being constrained to content. He forced symbolic values onto form. In his work, things drawn with curves are cute and good. Things angular are dangerous and evil.

It is the taking for granted of this superficial and frivolous approach to ethics which, understandably, helped disseminate the widespread National Rifle Association philosophy of art: Art is not ethical, only artists are. It is also what generated the commerce of art which attacks commerce, or the making of murals which present anti-fascist issues in a fascist manner.

It is undeniable that much of art escapes and even contradicts the personal ethics of the artist. Nolde was a good and early Nazi and never understood why his regime didn't allow him to be an official artist with the art he was making. Fortunately, and who knows for how long, it is accepted that his art was better than his politics. While it is conceivable that with a greater historical perspective his art and politics may be fit into a coherent continuum, any possible consistency still eludes us today. It would seem that he either didn't draw political conclusions from his art or that he was unable to express himself fully. No matter how interesting his "better" half may be for us, he had a problem. Had he been able to solve it (in the direction of our own values, of course) he might have been an even better artist and a less despicable person. By accepting the separation



of art and ethics as an unmovable fact, we would in fact condone split personality, intellectual laziness and inarticulateness as acceptable positive values. The resolution of the inconsistency should at least be taken up as a challenge, even if any neat solutions may appear to be unattainable.

If we really want to deal with ethics in art we will have to anchor all the questions pertaining to the art-making process — *what, why and for whom*, with a later *how?* — on a solid ethical foundation. In certain environments — for instance those urged by a political crisis — it is conceivable that the act of taking a brush into one's hand, to restrict production to accepted artistic techniques, may condemn all the decisions following to be spurious and invalid. Only with a total ethical inquiry covering every step of the art-making process, an inquiry not yet seriously addressed by artists or art educators, may we have a chance of developing a truly valid aesthetic for our time and environment.

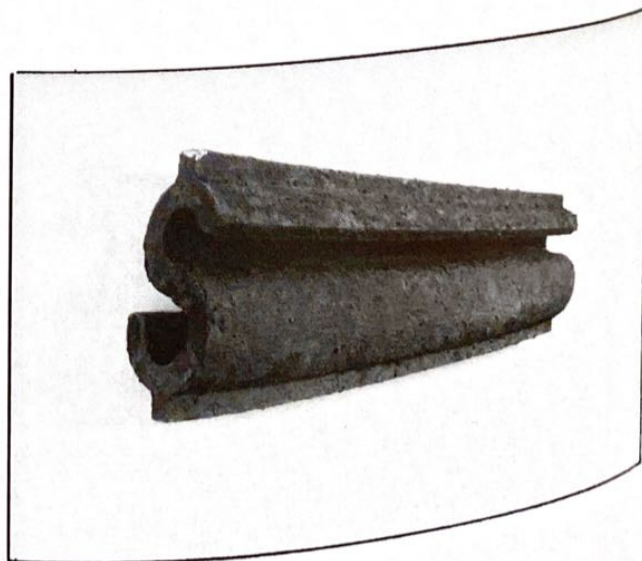
We do have clear opinions about the code of ethics of the members of all the other professions while we are not clear about our own. It is interesting to see how we can complain about artists not yet being accepted as full partners in society, without even attempting to sift through the complex mesh of painful ignorance, defensiveness and justified resentment which, together with selective elitarian success, produce our alienation. It is interesting too that as university art educators, in fact forming more future university art educators than future artists, we were never trained in teaching nor do we prepare our students for it. Not only do we seem to believe in shamanism, but it is one based on self-appointment, osmosis and self-service.

Maybe we should start by recognizing that a successful work of art is the meeting ground of two radically opposed dynamics. With the created object or situation the artist is trying to work his or her way out of a known ground and push the audience into the unknown. The manipulation by the artist is orchestrated to achieve the crossing of the border. The audience, on the other hand, tries desperately to push the disconcerting feeling of the unknown back into the context of everyday cultural commonplaces. The tension produced is not always a friendly one and leads to a despising condescension on the side of the artist, and to total rejection on the side of the audience. The split is tainted by ethical judgement. It resolves itself by name calling: crazies and elitists vs. philistines and ignorants. The creation of a strong common ethical ground seems to be more urgent than the development of new fashionable packaging codes. Once this ground is established, the more speculative, research oriented and — in terms of communication — more rarified art, will then also be freed of its own demagoguery. Our work with the unknown makes us researchers, not magicians. The mystification may sell well, but it is unbecoming. ■

"The Idea of the Moral Imperative in Contemporary Art" was delivered at a panel at the 1989 College Art Association Meeting held in San Francisco. Other panelists were Mel Perkarsky, Amy Baker Sandback, John Baldessari, Suzi Gablik, Jeff Koons and Robert Storr.

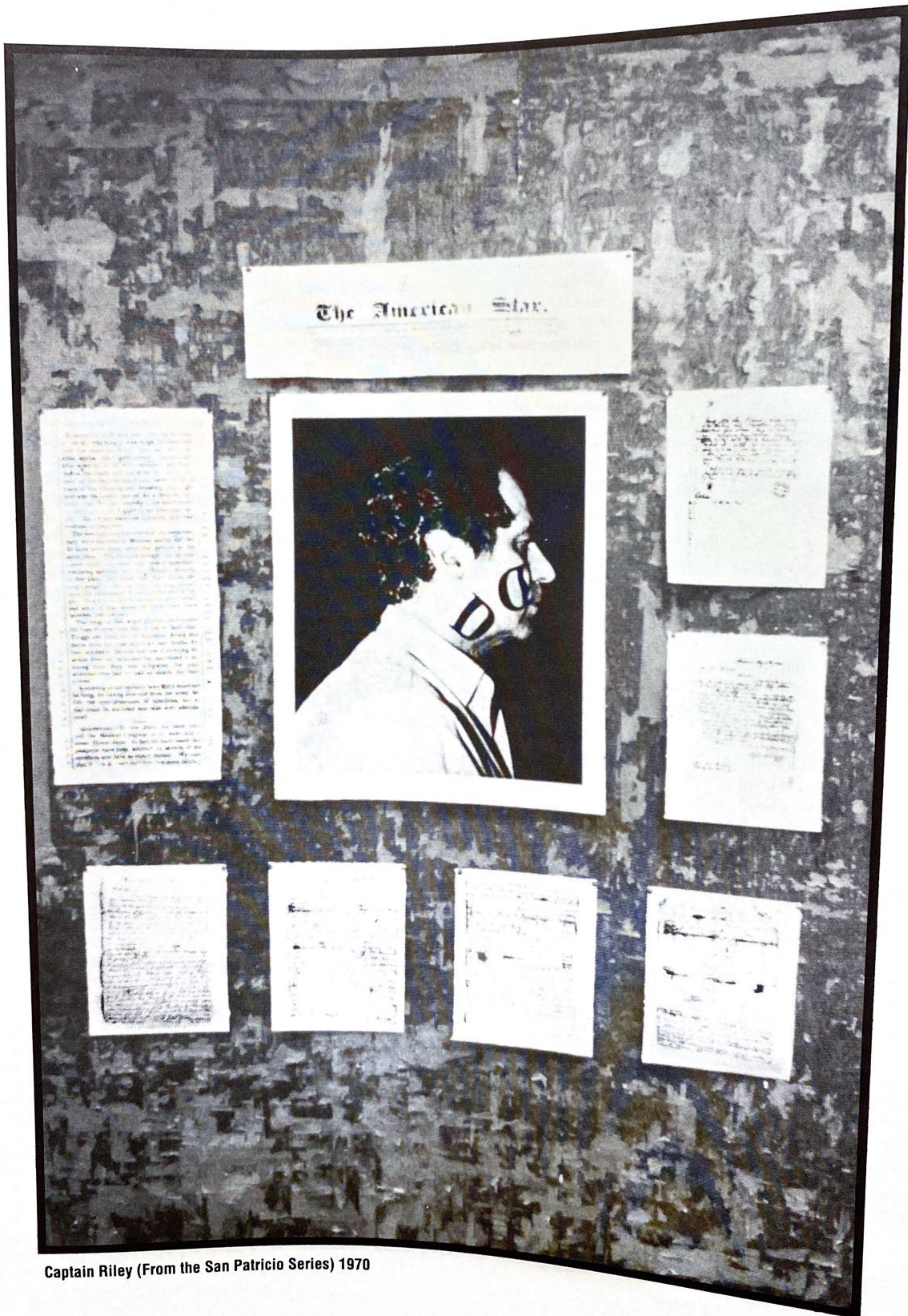


The Cake, 1988 (from the Zannobia Series)



Dollar Shelf, 1988





Captain Riley (From the San Patricio Series) 1970



## Chronology

I started making prints, about thirty years ago, as a consequence of my belief that art should be a common rather than a private good. The choice of the medium was a political one, even if it had aesthetic consequences. With this choice I committed two involuntary errors. The first error was to believe that art made in editions could democratize art. The second error was to allow the medium to stimulate my expressionist tendencies. It took me time to correct both.

My first editions were "infinite" in size. Eventually I realized that "infinite" is a relative concept. In my particular situation it signified a variable number placed somewhere between five and ten. In the art market, however, it meant well over one thousand. Translated into the realm of economics, I found myself selling my work at one percent or less of a fair market price. The difference was my subsidy to the buyer, a buyer which, in spite of my fantasies, was not a derelict bypassed by cultural processes and possibilities of income. On the way to my disappointment I also realized that with my prints I wasn't creating a body of common goods. I was organizing buyers as a group of stockholders of my work.

The second error, about expressionism, was a more personal one. About 1965 I had lost any sense of risk when making prints. To compensate for boredom I had let the work grow to absurd dimensions, woodcuts beyond four square meters, and still I was unable to capture the unpredictable. Making prints had become a form of self-therapy. After a small crisis I decided that I preferred to be an intellectual exhibitionist rather than an emotional one. To work with ideas would allow me to approach mystery in a more lucid and transmittable manner, with results which might be both less authoritarian and less narcissistic. Instead of delivering results to the viewer, I could deliver processes. I could allow the viewer to become the producer of the results. Borderlines between creation and pedagogy would be erased. Material possession of art would lose its meaning since possession would take place through reading. The ideal was the newspaper headline: a simple reading allowed appropriation which then unleashed imagery within the viewer.

Consistent with this utopia I began to work on texts without images like *This is a mirror. You are a written sentence.* (1966). Having some difficulty in exhibiting these pieces, I started to make mail exhibits and to affix stickers in elevators and bathrooms. (1967). The work with words made me look at their relation to their meanings. A scientist friend led me to hypnosis. My visual descriptions could be illustrated under a state of heightened concentration ruling out spurious associations. With a statistical quantity of illus-

trations, deviations from the text would become apparent and allow me a more precise rewrite of my text. I could achieve a perfect text, an equivalent of a photographic record of an idea. In 1966 a dentist in New Jersey, who used hypnosis for anesthesia, offered his services and a twelve year old patient as the illustrator. My subsequent move to New York unfortunately aborted the project.

The research of words took me into many predictable directions. One was *Envelope* (1967), a constant image which by means of the change of titles alters its dimensions and the relative position of the viewer ("envelope" vs. "tunnel" vs. "chimney"). The arbitrariness of meanings became obvious and, with it, the right and ability to see things any way one pleases.

In 1968 I constructed a model of a living/dining room solely using the words needed for the nomenclature of the parts. The following year I exhibited it in full size in the Museum of Fine Arts in Caracas. I was proud that, without instructions, people walked over the words describing the rug, but walked around the ones designating the fully set dining table.

I discovered that logic carried to the extreme of its possibilities could lead to something akin to magic. To inhabit an architectural floor plan could provide a deeper experience than to inhabit architecture. The Caracas environment led to a recreation of the *Massacre of Puerto Montt* in the Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago. The massacre consisted of the killing of peasants who occupied unworked land. They first had been gathered by the army in a central place for "negotiations". It took place early 1969 under the government of Frei in Chile. Words were used to place port-holes, information about soldiers manning them, arms used in the operation and dotted lines marking the trajectory of the bullets.

A subsequent exhibit in New York (Paula Cooper Gallery, 1970), expanded the subject to repression in Latin America. Inventories of weapons were added to a wall constructed with numbered boxes wrapped in bloody gauze. Form became a pure and secondary product of content, inevitably existing for presentation, but without really influencing it.

At the same time, under the fashionable influence of semiology and structuralism, I was also interested in tautological, self-referential, metaphoric statements and other grammatical issues. I produced descriptive and evocative phrases and sentences which by some were seen as invading the, for me, alien field of poetry. The categorization never preoccupied me too much. I am more concerned with what I do than with how I do it. The "how" is the technique and, as such, it always reduces intentions

and ideas to a partial and fictitious semblance. Technical virtuosity consists of convincing the viewer that the work of art is the perfect incarnation of an intention. This is so even when in fact the work of art is no more than an approximation formed by an accumulation of errors wisely administered.

I stopped being a "printmaker", a "sculptor" or a "technician," to become an "artist" or a "cultural worker." It is sad that these new answers to the question: "What do you do?" sound more pedantic and presumptuous than the technical ones. Regardless, it became clear that I was working with ideas. Ideas allowed me, with a modest investment of energy, to change and reorganize the universe according to my own wishes and design. The true answer to "What do you do?" really was: "I am omnipotent and I do whatever I fancy.", though I never dared to use it. I discovered (1971) that if I made a minimal mark on a piece of paper, I irrevocably altered the order of the universe. Any new order would have to include my mark. My action conditioned any new definition of order. Thus, to change the universe wasn't that difficult and anybody could do it. It was more difficult to convince the art market of the fact that the alteration had taken place.

A mixture of omnipotence, politics and philosophy led me to sell my signature by the inch (\$2.73 per centimeter, in 1971). The same mixture also gave me the insight that any future buyer of my art was working with my money during the time lapsed between the dates of production and of purchase. I therefore proceeded to add accumulated interest to the price of those pieces.

The story of the sale of my signature invariably elicited smiles. Later, in 1978, this reaction made me return to hypnosis. This time I became the subject. I wanted to find out if my signature pieces were truly art or if I had, unconsciously, designed them as some kind of a joke. The hypnotist (this time a psychiatrist) projected me into important ages in my life (six, fourteen, twenty-three, thirty-four, forty-one, sixty-five and seventy-five). Except for the age of fourteen, where the question of my signature taking the place of a work of art seemed incomprehensible, my answer was consistently positive in regard to the seriousness of the enterprise. There were more works of mine, indecisive between revelation and banality, but I didn't pursue the search for their truth.

Politically explicit work became secondary for a while. This was not because of any lack of interest on my part, but due to frustration. I felt unable to produce a big enough body of ideas combining both artistic and political weight to make me feel like a productive artist. In 1973, however, I became aware that my work was extremely disorganized and, if



there was any common thread uniting it, it was beyond my grasp. My pieces were like loose pages which belonged to different books and the solution to the problem was not to be found in bookbinding. I needed a general matrix, a grid into which work could be organized and where irrelevant pieces would automatically be excluded. I found the answer in works from 1967 and 1968, a series of dictionary pages. They belonged to an image-language dictionary, where any image could accept all the meanings attributed by myself or by the public.

The newly found matrix allowed me to design a format for the work before dealing with the particular pieces. Once the relation between image and text was laid out, the content of either one became unimportant. Any room for aesthetic speculation was eliminated for myself and for the viewer. Communication became immediate. It was resolved in a form of packaging.

The matrix functioned for many years and is probably still guiding me today. The most elegant and disconcerting example (1979) was a random combination of twenty objects with twenty titles written in advance which, together, produced an apparently coherent narrative totality. While I was offering chaos, a planned story was received thanks to the viewer's power of organization. I had discovered evocation.

The following piece, also in 1979, was *The Archaeology of a Spell*. The evoking process was organized around a tenuous argument line, only known to myself and inaccessible to the viewer. *Fragments of a Novel* (1980) carried the same principle through thirteen sequential pieces, again having a story narrated in the viewer's mind. Once it became clear that it was possible to convey the conditions for an argument without defining the argument itself, I was ready to reintroduce politics into my work. I now could bypass both pamphlet and description. The pamphlet alienates and description is banal. Through controlled ambiguity I could try to generate the terror of things. The spectator then could take authorship of that terror instead of just remaining a consumer. Hopefully this would produce a perceptual and political awakening of the viewer and, some day, release me from art to do other things.

All this now seems relatively clear. That is all right since art should be demystified so that it can be understood as art instead of being believed as obscurantism. However, if explanations exhausted my work, it would die and stop being art. The explanation would suffice and there wouldn't be any need for the art work. The art work would be no more than a redundant illustration of a theory. It is possible that much of my work is no more than that. But if there is any part of it that survives beyond the reading of this text, it does so because of its inexplicability. Only this inexpli-

cability is capable of an expansion of knowledge. Therefore, we find ourselves again in the realms of magic, of a surprised credulity, of passing mysteries as a validating condition for art. The creative process is lighted by theory, but true art stalks from shadows incompletely evanesced. ■

Luis Camnitzer, 1986.

This chronology was written for the catalogue of a retrospective exhibition organized by the Museo de Artes Plásticas of Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1986.

## Cronología

Fue hace casi 30 años que la idea de que la obra de arte tiene que ser un bien común y no propiedad privada me llevó a hacer grabado. La elección de la técnica fue por lo tanto una elección política, aunque con consecuencias estéticas. Cometí así dos errores involuntarios. Primero pensar que el arte en ediciones democratiza al arte. Segundo, permitir que la técnica estimulara mis tendencias expresionistas. Me llevó tiempo corregir ambos. Mis primeras ediciones eran "infinitas". Demoré en darme cuenta que infinito es un concepto relativo que en mi situación personal significaba una cifra variable ubicada entre el 5 y el 10, mientras que en el mercado artístico es una cifra definitivamente mayor que 1000. En términos económicos se traducía en que vendía un décimo de una obra a un milésimo o menos del precio del mercado. La diferencia, 100 por décimo, se convertía en mi subsidio al comprador, donde éste no era el indigente abandonado por la cultura que yo me había imaginado inicialmente. Me di cuenta también, que con el grabado no estaba creando un bien común, sino que el resultado era una sociedad anónima con acciones de mi obra.

El segundo error, el del expresionismo, era más personal. Hacia 1965 el hacer grabado había perdido la sensación de riesgo. Para compensar el aburrimiento, las obras habían crecido a tamaños absurdos más allá de los 4 metros cuadrados, pero todavía sin poder capturar lo imprevisible. Se habían convertido en una forma de auto-terapia. Después de una pequeña crisis decidí que prefería ser un exhibicionista intelectual en lugar de uno emocional. Trabajar con ideas me permitiría acercarme al misterio en forma más lúcida y más transmitible, con resultados menos autoritarios y narcisistas. En lugar de entregar un resultado al espectador, podía

entregar un proceso, donde el espectador se convertiría en el productor del resultado. Los límites entre la creación y la pedagogía se borrarían. La posesión material de la obra no tendría sentido ya que se efectuaría por la lectura. El ideal sería el titular de periódico, una simple lectura permite su apropiación, para después desencadenar las imágenes en el lector.

Coherentemente con esta utopía, empecé a trabajar con textos, sin imágenes. Con serias dificultades para exponer mi obra, comencé a hacer exposiciones por correo. (1967).

"Esto es un espejo, Ud. es una frase escrita" fué la primer obra de este tipo y posteriormente diseminada postalmente y a través de etiquetas adhesivas en baños y ascensores. El trabajo con palabras me llevó a detenerme en su relación con sus significados. Por sugerencia de un amigo científico me interesé en el hipnotismo como instrumento para mi investigación. La idea consistía en hacer ilustrar mis frases bajo hipnosis. Gracias a una concentración aumentada del sujeto, se eliminaban las asociaciones desenfocadas con respecto al significado evitando interferencias. A través del uso de cantidades estadísticas de sujetos y de sus ilustraciones, aparecerían claramente las desviaciones de la comprensión del lector con respecto al texto por mi ofrecido. Teniendo en cuenta las desviaciones podría reescribir las frases hasta lograr la desaparición de las discrepancias, logrando un texto perfecto, casi fotográfico de las ideas. Un dentista que usaba hipnosis como anestesia sirvió de hipnotizador. Un paciente, niño de doce años, fué el primer sujeto. (1966). Mi posterior mudanza desgraciadamente abortó el proyecto.

La investigación de las palabras fué hacia varios lados, todos en realidad bastante previsible. Uno fue la utilización de una imagen constante (1967) a la cual le cambiaba el título para ver como la asociación de significado le varía las dimensiones. La misma imagen titulada "sobre" y por tanto chata, es percibida como tridimensional una vez que lleva el título "túnel". Y no solamente eso, sino que también cambia la posición relativa del espectador. La arbitrariedad de los significados se hizo patente, y con ella, la posible libertad de ver las cosas como a uno se le antoja.

En 1968, (antes de leer "100 años de soledad") decidí hacer un living-comedor solamente utilizando palabras. La instalación fué hecha al año siguiente en el Museo de Caracas y funcionó muy bien. Tanto la alfombra como la mesa habían sido descritas en el suelo, y el público pisó la primera y caminó alrededor de la segunda.

Descubrí que la lógica llevada al extremo de lo posible conduce a algo parecido a la magia. Habitar un plano arquitectónico resultó algo mucho más conmove-



dor que habitar una arquitectura. El ambiente de Caracas se transformó en una recreación de la masacre de Puerto Montt que en 1969 ocurriera bajo el gobierno de Frei. En una instalación en el museo de Santiago de Chile ese mismo año utilicé palabras para anotar troneras, soldados y armamentos empleados en la operación, y líneas punteadas señalando la trayectoria de los proyectiles. Una exposición subsiguiente en la galería Paula Cooper en Nueva York (1970), amplió el tema a la represión en Latino América. Inventarios de armamentos se sumaron a una pared de cajas envueltas en gasa ensangrentada ordenadas numéricamente. La forma pasó a ser consecuencia pura y secundaria del contenido. Un envoltorio casual del producto, existiendo inevitablemente para la presentación, pero sin determinarlo.

Simultáneamente, influido por la semiología y el estructuralismo de moda, me interesé en las declaraciones tautológicas, auto referenciales, metafóricas y demás asuntos gramaticales. Surgen frases descriptivas y evocativas que, de acuerdo a algunos, cruzan la frontera del idioma extranjero de la poesía, abandonando las artes plásticas conocidas. La categorización nunca me angustió demasiado. Es más importante que es lo que hago, y no como lo hago. El como es la técnica, y ésta siempre reduce las intenciones y las ideas a una semblanza parcial y ficticia. El virtuosismo en la técnica consiste en convencer al espectador que la obra es la perfecta encarnación de la intención, aún cuando en realidad ésta es solamente una aproximación formada por una acumulación de errores más o menos sábiamente administrada.

Dejé de ser "grabador", "escultor" y demás, para convertirme en "artista", "trabajador cultural" o equivalente. Lástima que estas nuevas respuestas al "¿Y Ud. que hace?" suenen tanto más pedantes y presuntuosas que las anteriores y conduzcan al balbuceo en lugar de la aclaración. Pero era claro que estaba trabajando con ideas y que éstas me permitían, con una inversión relativamente modesta de energía, cambiar y reorganizar el universo de acuerdo a mi gusto e intención. La respuesta a la pregunta era en realidad: "Soy omnipotente y hago lo que se me da la gana", aunque nunca me animé a decirlo así. Por otro lado, sin embargo, descubrí que si hacía una mínima marca con un lápiz en un papel, ya estaba alterando el orden universal. Un nuevo orden universal tendría que incluir mi marca y mi acto condicionaba la definición de ese nuevo orden. Por lo tanto, cambiar el universo no era difícil y cualquiera podía hacerlo. Más difícil era convencer al mercado del arte de que la alteración había sido hecha.

Una mezcla de omnipotencia, política, y filosofía (que por un tiempo invadió mi obra) me llevó a vender mi firma por centímetro (2 dólares con 73 en 1971). La

misma mezcla me hizo ver también que el futuro comprador de mi obra, mientras no hiciera efectiva la compra, estaba trabajando con mi dinero. El comprador me adeudaría entonces, en el momento del pago, no solamente el precio de la obra, sino también los intereses acumulados desde el momento en que la obra fue producida.

La narración de esta obra siempre tiende a provocar risa y como consecuencia volví, en 1978, al hipnotismo. Esta vez el sujeto fui yo mismo. Quería averiguar si en el fondo de la obra había una intención de broma, o si cuando la concebí lo había hecho en serio. El hipnotizador me proyectó hacia varias edades (6, 14, 23, 34, 41, 65 y 75 años de edad) correspondientes a jalones biográficos (entrada a primaria, escuela de bellas artes, primer exposición, etc.) para averiguar mis reacciones frente a la idea en cada uno de esos momentos. En todos los trances, salvo el de los 14 años (donde la idea me parecía inconcebible) mis respuestas fueron positivas con respecto a mi seriedad original. Hubieron muchas obras que parecían indecisas entre ubicarse como gran revelación o como chiste banal, pero no me esforcé en investigar la verdad.

Por un tiempo las obras políticamente explícitas pasaron a un segundo plano, no por falta de interés sino por frustración. Me sentí incapaz de producir una suficiente cantidad de ideas que combinaran elementos de peso artístico y político al mismo tiempo, y que me permitieran sentirme como un artista decentemente fértil. Lo que si sucedió, hacia 1973, fue la súbita conciencia de que mi trabajo era desorganizado, de que si había algún denominador común que hilara las ideas entre sí, yo al menos no lo conocía. Las obras, en la medida que me interesaban, lo eran como cosas aisladas. No había un discurso completo o con vistas a completarse. Eran páginas sueltas de libros distintos y la solución al problema no era la encuadernación. Hacía falta una matriz general, una cuadrícula en donde las piezas necesarias se ordenaran, y las innecesarias no pudieran entrar. La respuesta estaba en obras pasadas (1967,68), la idea del diccionario: un diccionario imagen-idioma. La imagen podía ser cualquiera y podía aceptar todas las acepciones que se me ocurrieran a mi o al público.

La claridad dada por esta matriz permitió que pudiera diseñar formatos para mi obra antes de crearla. Una vez establecida la relación entre imagen y texto ya no importaba cual era la imagen o cual era el texto. La especulación estética quedaba eliminada de la obra tanto para mi como para el espectador, y la comunicación se facilitaba.

La matriz funcionó por varios años y todavía no está descartada. El ejemplo más elegante y desconcertante fue una obra de 1979 en donde al azar junté 20 objetos encontrados con 20 títulos escritos previamente,

produciendo un todo coherente y aparentemente narrativo. El secreto del funcionamiento estaba en mantener cierta ambigüedad en los títulos. El poder de simbolización del espectador hacía el resto. Cuando explicaba el procedimiento de creación de la obra, nadie me creía. La proyección narrativa del espectador era tan fuerte que la posibilidad de que yo estuviera ofreciendo algo emparentado con el caos en lugar de un historia planeada se convertía en una imposibilidad. Descubrí así el proceso de evocación.

La obra siguiente, ese mismo año, se llamó "La arqueología del hechizo". El proceso evocativo estaba organizado alrededor de una línea argumental muy tenue y solamente conocida por mi, inaccesible para el espectador. Con el mismo proceso, un año después, hice "Fragmentos de una novela", esta vez llevando el argumento a través de 13 obras secuenciales. Una vez que logré que las historias fueran narradas en la mente del espectador, que yo solamente diera las condiciones del argumento sin definir el argumento mismo, me encontré en situación de reincorporar el elemento político en mi obra. Podía esquivar el panfleto y la descripción. El panfleto es enajenante y la descripción se limita a transferir información. A través de la ambigüedad controlada podía tratar de generar el terror de las cosas en lugar de limitarme a describirlo. El espectador se convierte en el autor de ese terror en lugar de limitarse a consumirlo, y se despierta política y perceptualmente. O por lo menos me gustaría que así fuera algún día, así puedo dedicarme a otra cosa.

Todo esto parece muy claro y explicado, cosa que esta muy bien porque al arte hay que desmitificarlo para entenderlo como arte y no como cosa obscurantista. Sin embargo, si las explicaciones agotaran las obras, estas morirían y dejarían de ser arte. Alcanzaría la explicación sin necesidad de la obra, la cual no sería mas que una ilustración redundante de la teoría. Mucha obra quizás no sea mas que eso. Pero si hay alguna que sobrevive mas allá de la lectura de este texto, lo hace por la parte inexplicable. Esa es, en el fondo, la única capaz de expandir el conocimiento. Nos volvemos a encontrar en la magia, en la credulidad sorprendente, en el misterio mas o menos pasajero como condición para la validez de una obra. La teoría ilumina el proceso creativo, pero la obra verdadera atisba desde las sombras que no lograron ser desvanecidas. ■

Esta cronología fue escrita para el catálogo de la muestra retrospectiva organizada por el Museo de Artes Plásticas de Montevideo, Uruguay, en 1986.



## Exhibition Checklist

Height precedes width precedes depth.

### 1966

6 sentences describing visual situations, chromed steel, 2 x 2 x 2 inches. (250 meters of thick chain; four bridges; a straight thick line; a ten story building; a prismatic beam; a surrounded space...)

### 1966-67

Series of six drawings made by a child under hypnosis, illustrating descriptions of visual situations. Ink on paper, 10 x 10 inches.

Adhesive labels for mail exhibition of The New York Graphic Workshop.

*Rubber Stamps*, aluminum on wood and rubber stamps, 18 x 24 inches. (remade in 1990).

### 1966-68

*This is a mirror, you are a written sentence.* Vacuum formed styrene, 18 x 24 inches.

### 1967

*Telescope*, engraved glass, 4 x 16 x 2 1/4 inches. (remade in 1990).

*Envelope*, portfolio of ten etchings and rubber stamp titles, 17 x 14 inches. Edition 100, The New York Graphic Workshop.

*Fragment of a Cloud*, stencil on cotton wool, 13 1/2 x 19 1/2 inches. Edition 100, Pratt Graphics Center.

### 1968

*Horizon*, etching, 26 x 25 inches, ed. 50.

*Che*, etching, 26 x 25 inches, ed. 50.

*Landscape/Portrait*, etching, 26 x 25 inches, ed. 50.

*Petition*, etching and pencil, 26 x 25 inches, ed. 50.

*Selfportrait*, etching, 26 x 25 inches, ed. 50.

*Living Room*, maquette for an installation, offset, 5 1/2 x 11 x 14. Edition 100, The New York Graphic Workshop.

*Bricks*, maquette for an installation, photographs, 5 1/2 x 11 x 14.

*Leftovers*, adhesive labels placed at random to change the context of everyday objects.

### 1968-69

*Third Degree Burn*, stenciled burn on paper, 26 x 25 inches, ed. 50.

### 1969

*Dictionary, Page 1*, etching, 26 x 25 inches, ed. 50.

*Dictionary, Page 2*, etching, 26 x 25 inches, ed. 50.

*Topological Change of a Word Sequence*, ball

point and acrylic on stacked index cards, 6 x 10 x 9 inches. (remade in 1990).

Four mail exhibits from the Instituto Di Tella, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

*Isoword Lines*, ink on paper, 11 x 14 inches. (remade in 1990).

### 1969-70

*Constellations*, 8 silkscreen prints, 20 x 22 inches. Edition 10, The New York Graphic Workshop.

### 1969-90

*Living Room*, fragment of an installation originally exhibited in the Museo de Bellas Artes of Caracas, Venezuela, photocopied words.

*Massacre of Puerto Montt*, fragment of an installation originally exhibited in the Museo de Bellas Artes of Santiago de Chile, photocopied words.

### 1970

*Leftovers*, installation of 80 bandaged boxes, (200 were originally exhibited in the Paula Cooper Gallery.) Loaned by the Yeshiva University Museum Collection New York. Cardboard boxes, surgical bandage and dye, 12 x 24 x 12 inches each.

*Execution*, broken mirror with engraved text and epoxy, 14 inches diameter, ed. 10.

*Common Grave*, engraved aluminum, 24 x 28 inches. Loaned by the Yeshiva University Museum Collection, New York.

*Content, 2 Clouds*, etching, 26 x 25 inches, ed. 50.

*Content, 1 Jeep*, etching, 26 x 25 inches, ed. 50.

*Content, 1 Wall*, etching, 26 x 25 inches, ed. 50.

*Cambodia*, silkscreen, 22 x 30 inches, ed. 10.

### 1971

*Three Heads*, silkscreen, 22 x 30 inches, ed. 10.

*Mail Drawing*, package remailed to describe a trajectory, 16 x 20 x 1 1/2 inches.

*Original Rubbing and Its Copies*, 11 x 16 inches, pencil rubbing on paper.

*Signature by the Inch*, silkscreen and pencil, 22 x 30 inches, full signature on English form.

### 1971-73

*Signature by the Inch*, silkscreen and pencil, 22 x 30 inches, fragment on Spanish form.

### 1972

*A Text Printed Twice On Canvas*, silkscreen and cut out on canvas, 20 x 40 inches, ed. 2.

*The Socialization of a Work of Art*, series of laminated photographs, 8 x 10 inches, of an installation originally done in Piazza San

Michele, Lucca, Italy.  
*Bottle*, pencil rubbing on paper, 11 x 14 inches.

### 1972-74

*Perimeter*, brass, glass and wood, 14 x 10 x 2 inches.

### 1972-90

*Original Mural*, acrylic and pencil on wall. Fragment of an installation originally exhibited in Galleria Diagramma, Milan, Italy.

### 1973

*Moebius Strip*, engraved aluminum plates, 28 x 28 inches.

*Crushed Coca-Cola Bottle*, glass in glass bottle.

*Time-Distance*, brass, glass, wood and compass, 14 x 10 x 2 inches.

*The Invasion of the Days in the Days*, 16 calendar pages, collage, 2 7/8 x 40 inches.

*Three Objects*, aluminum and brass, 10 x 24 inches.

*A ... that Covers the Word that Names it*, five engraved brass plates, 8 x 10 inches each.

*Painting with Titles*, acrylic on canvas, 36 x 40 inches.

### 1973-74

*Branch of an Oak Tree*, brass, glass, wood and molded pine sawdust with plastic resin, 14 x 10 x 2 inches.

### 1974

*Dottie Attie*, collaboration with Ray Johnson, brass, glass, wood and laminated drawing, 14 x 10 x 2 inches.

*Piece of Glass or Plastic...*, brass, glass or plastic and wood, 14 x 10 x 2 inches.

*Borderline*, brass, etched glass and wood, 15 1/2 x 10 x 2 inches.

### 1975

*Drawing by Picasso in a Single Line*, brass, glass, wood and thread, 14 x 10 x 2 inches.

*The Book of Wishful Thoughts and Realities*, brass, glass, wood and laminated photograph, 14 x 10 x 2 inches.

### 1975-78

*Sifter*, (a mechanism for killing undesirable spectators) floor and wall installation, brass, wooden base with carpet and electric cable, 13 x 10 inches and 2 x 20 x 13 inches. (remade in 1990)

*The Infinite Rays of the Sun*, photoetched brass, 8 x 10 inches.

### 1976

*Transmutation of Paint into Aluminum*, brass,



glass, wood and cut out aluminum, 14 x 10 x 2 inches.

*Two Parallel Lines*, installation originally exhibited in the Alternative Center for International Arts (now Alternative Museum) in N.Y.

*The Tool and its Work*, pencil and pencil drawing on wall.

*Silence/Repression*, ink on paper, 22 x 30 inches.

## 1977

*Stamp*, brass and silkscreen, 1 x 2 inches.

## 1977-78

*The Craftsmanship of Landscape*, etching, 30 x 22 inches, ed. 50.

## 1978

*The Discovery of Geometry*, etching, 30 x 22 inches, ed. 50.

*The Threat of the Mirror*, two facing plaques, brass, photograph and mirror, 10 x 8 inches.

*Victim's View*, brass, glass, wood and laminated photograph, 14 x 10 x 2 inches.

*The Form Generating the Content*, brass, glass and wood, 7 x 10 x 2 inches.

*Italian Rivers*, epoxy and photoetched brass, 10 x 8 inches.

## 1979

*Landscape as an Attitude*, laminated photograph, 11 x 14 inches.

*Twelve Pages*, installation with candle, lamp-black and pencil, 38 x 36 x 1 inches, originally exhibited in Galeria San Diego, Bogotá, Colombia. Collection John Crawley, Bogotá.

*Arbitrary Objects and their Titles*, wall installation with found objects and pencil, 30 x 50 inches.

*The Path*, tiles and pencil, 180 x 36 inches.

*The Archaeology of a Spell*, installation with mixed materials, 72 x 100 x 48 inches.

*The Reenactment of an Inquiry*, photoetching, 30 x 22 inches, ed. 50.

## 1980

*The Superstition of Reality*, brass, glass and wood, 14 x 10 x 2 inches.

*Fragments of a Novel*, installation of 13 pieces in mixed materials and media, ca. 20 x 100 x 2 inches.

*The Optics Lesson*, wall installation with laminated photograph, bulb, candle and pencil drawing, 30 x 80 inches.

*Painting under Hypnosis*, 16 laminated sheets with photographs and text of the process, 11 x 8 1/2 inches and one 11 x 14 inches.

*Questions and Answers under Hypnosis*, 10 laminated photographs, 14 x 11 inches.

## 1981

*German Signature Street Sign*, enamel on metal, 6 x 24 inches.

*Two Identical Objects*, dollar and newsprint, 3 x 8 x 2 inches.

*The Photograph*, laminated photograph, 11 x 14 inches.

## 1982

*The Reflection of Blasphemy*, four color photo-etching, 30 x 22 inches, ed. 15.

*The Shadow of the Horizon*, four color photo-etching, 30 x 22 inches, ed. 15.

## 1983

*Lego Architecture*, set of eight photomontages, 8 x 12 inches.

## 1983-84

*From the Uruguayan Torture*, four etchings from a set of 35 four color photoetchings, 30 x 22 inches, ed. 15.

## 1984

*From the Uruguayan Torture*, wall installation with mixed objects, 12 x 90 inches.

## 1984-86

*Agent Orange Series*, four etchings from a set of 50 four color photoetchings, 30 x 22 inches, ed. 15.

## 1985-86

*Fabrication Sustained Memory*, (1988 Venice Biennale), aluminum, glass, plastic flowers and wood, 72 x 30 x 8 inches.

## 1986

*He Organized Things as He Saw Them* (1988 Venice Biennale), dish and resin, 25 x 15 x 15 inches.

*Any Image Was to Be Cherished Under the Circumstances*, (1988 Venice Biennale) bronze chair, frame and bulb, 80 x 36 x 36 inches.

*They Found That Reality Had Intruded Upon the Image*, (1988 Venice Biennale), poster and wood, 1 x 22 x 30 inches.

*The House Was a Fiction...*, (1988 Venice Biennale), framed five color photoetching, mezzotint and softground, 36 x 28 inches.

*Objects Were Covered by Their Own Image*, (1988 Venice Biennale), wood and paper, 30 x 20 x 20 inches.

## 1987

*Reflections Ocurred Selectively*, (1988 Venice Biennale), frame, glass and bulb, 12 x 12 x 5 inches.

*Untitled*, (1988 Venice Biennale), marble, brass, astroturf and photoemulsion on newsprint, fragment of a 200 x 240 inch installation.

## 1988

*Dollar Shelf*, wood and mud, 8 x 30 x 5 inches. Collection of Jeanette Ingberman, N.Y.

*The Cake* (from the *Zanoobia Series*), styro-foam and shaving instruments, 4 x 8 x 8 inches.

*The Souvenirs* (from the *Zanoobia Series*), soap dish, sheepskin and objects, 5 x 4 x 4 inches.

*The Coffee Cup*, (from the *Zanoobia Series*), cup and dried coffee.

## 1989

*Reality as a Temporary Setup*, wall installation with etched glass and hinges, 120 x 80 x 10 inches.

*Knock Knock, Who Is There*, fax machine, brass, wood, mud, glass and toy receiver, 18 x 24 x 18 inches.

## 1990

*The Laments of Exile*, laminated photograph and astroturf, 18 x 24 inches.

*Tienanmen*, brass and epoxy, 5 x 8 inches.

*Captain Riley* (from the *San Patricio Series*), graphic wall installation, photoetchings, 45 x 38 inches. Edition 15, University of Texas at Austin.

*Art and Politics*, photograph, 12 1/2 x 11 inches.



## Biography

Born in Germany, 1937, emigrated to Uruguay, citizen of Uruguay. Living in USA since 1964. Professor of Art at the State University of New York, College at Old Westbury, from 1969 to the present.

### Education

Graduated in sculpture, School of Fine Arts, University of Uruguay. Studied architecture in the same university. Sculpture and printmaking, Academy of Munich.

### Fellowships

**1957** German government to study sculpture, Academy of Munich

**1961** Guggenheim fellowship for creative printmaking

**1962** Pratt Graphic Arts Center

**1965/66** Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture — to illustrate "The Tales of the Hassidim" by Martin Buber

**1968** University of Pennsylvania, postgraduate fellowship/artist in residence

**1978** Creative Arts Program Services (CAPS) for sculpture

**1982** Guggenheim fellowship for visual art

**1988** "Messages to the Public," Time Square Spectacolor lightboard, Public Art Fund

**1990** Art Matters, Inc.

### Awards

**1958** Annual Printmaking Prize, Academy of Munich

**1961** Arcobaleno Printmaking Prize, Uruguay

**1963** Honorable Mention, Biennial of Chile

**1965** Second Prize, Xylon, International Woodcutters Exhibition, Switzerland  
Honorary Member of the Academy of Florence

**1968** Purchase Prize, Museum of Trenton, New Jersey

Honorable Mention, Biennial of Chile  
**1970** Prize, Biennial of Puerto Rico

**1973** Honorable Mention, Biennial of Ljubljana

**1974** Prize, British International Print Biennial, Bradford.

**1978** Faculty Exchange Scholar of the State University of New York

### Teaching

**1960-64** School of Fine Arts, University of Uruguay

**1965-67** Lecturer, Fairleigh Dickinson University, Madison, New Jersey

**1966** Guest instructor, Pratt Graphic Arts Center, N.Y.

**1967-68** Instructor, Fairleigh Dickinson University, Madison, New Jersey

**1969-present** Professor (1978), State University of New York, College at Old Westbury

**1983-86** Guest instructor, Pratt Graphics Center, Summer Program in Italy

### One Person Exhibitions

**1991** Parque Lussich (with Mario Sagradini), Punta del Este, Uruguay  
Lehman College Art Gallery, retrospective exhibition, Bronx, N.Y.

Museo Blanes, Montevideo, Uruguay  
Galleria Il Bisonte, Florence, Italy

**1990** Carla Stellweg Gallery (with David Lamelas), N.Y.

**1989** Museo Universidad Nacional, Bogotá, Colombia  
Centro Municipal Miraflores, Lima, Peru

**1988** Pavillion of Uruguay at the Biennale of Venice, Italy

Museo Histórico, Santa Clara, Cuba  
Centro Municipal Miraflores, Lima, Peru

**1987** Galerie Stampa, Basel, Switzerland  
Artworks, Berlin, Maryland  
Fundación San Telmo, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Fototeca, Havana, Cuba

**1986** The Graphic Eye Gallery, Port Washington, N.Y.

Artworks, Berlin, Maryland  
Retrospective exhibition, Museo de Artes Plásticas, Montevideo, Uruguay  
Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, Mass.

**1985** Permanent installation, Horton Memorial Hospital, Middletown, N.Y.

**1984** The Alternative Museum, New York  
Galerie Stampa, Basel, Switzerland  
Isis Gallery, Notre Dame University, South Bend, Indiana

**1983** Museo de Gráfica y Dibujo Latinoamericano, Roldanillo, Colombia  
Casa de las Americas, Havana, Cuba

**1982** Galeria San Diego, Bogotá, Colombia  
Galeria Partes, Medellin, Colombia

**1981** Cinemateca, Montevideo, Uruguay

**1980** Museum Wiesbaden, Germany  
Galerie Stampa, Basel, Switzerland  
Galerie 31, Strasburg, France  
Cinemateca, Montevideo, Uruguay

**1979** Galeria San Diego, Bogotá, Colombia  
Cámara de Comercio, Medellin, Colombia  
Galeria La Oficina, Medellin, Colombia

**1978** Museo La Tertulia, Cali, Colombia

C-Space Gallery, New York  
Marian Goodman Gallery, New York

**1977** Museo de Arte Moderno, Bogotá, Colombia

Museo de Arte Moderno, Cartagena, Colombia

Commune di Adro, Brescia, Italy  
Galleria for New Concepts, University of Iowa, Iowa City

**1976** Galerie Stampa, Basel, Switzerland  
Villa Schifanoia, Florence, Italy  
Galerie Space, Wiesbaden, Germany  
Galleria Ariete Grafica, Milan, Italy

**1975** Stadt Bibliothek, Mainz, Germany

**1974** Galerie Stampa, Basel, Switzerland

**1973** Galeria Colibri, San Juan de Puerto Rico  
Galleria Conz, Venice, Italy  
Galleria Banco, Brescia, Italy

**1972** Galleria Diagramma, Milan, Italy  
Libreria Einaudi, Milan, Italy  
Printshop, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

**1971** C.L.I.P. Documents, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

**1970** Bienville Gallery, New Orleans  
Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

**1969** Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas, Venezuela

Associated American Artists, New York  
Museo de Bellas Artes, Santiago de Chile  
Mail Exhibition, Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, Buenos Aires, Argentina

**1967** Mail Exhibition, New York Graphic Workshop

**1966** Galeria Lirolay, Buenos Aires, Argentina  
Amigos del Arte, Montevideo, Uruguay

**1964** Van Bovenkamp Gallery, New York

**1963** Galeria Sudamericana, New York  
Semanario Marcha, Montevideo, Uruguay

**1962** Galeria Galatea, Buenos Aires, Argentina

**1960/61** Centro de Artes y Letras, Montevideo, Uruguay

### Group Exhibitions

**1990** "China, June 4," P.S.1, Long Island City, N.Y.

"The Power of Words: An Aspect of Recent Documentary Photography," P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York

"Signs of the Self: Changing Perceptions," Woodstock Artists Association, Woodstock, N.Y.

**1989** "Out of Bounds: Contemporary Long Island Photographers." Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, New York

"A Different War," Whatcom Museum, Belingham, Washington



**1988** "Estampes et livres d'artistes du XXe siecle: Enrichissements du Cabinet des Estampes 1978-1986." Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, France

"Committed to Print," Museum of Modern Art, New York

"The Debt," Exit Art Gallery, New York

"The Rosenberg Era," travelling exhibition Group Material, "Project Democracy" (Politics and Elections), Dia Foundation, New York  
Group Material, "Project Democracy" (Culture and Participation), Dia Foundation, New York

"The Jewish Museum Collects," Jewish Museum, New York

"The Latin American Spirit," The Bronx Museum, New York

"Affinities" (with Alfredo Jaar, Mel Edwards, Willie Birch, Carmen Lomas and Jenny Lee), Jamaica Art Center, New York

**1987** "Latin American Artists in New York since 1970," University of Texas, Austin

"Drawings as Drawings," North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, N.C.

**1986** Biennial of the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, New York

"Imagining Antarctica," Museum of Linz/Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.  
II Biennial of Havana, honor guest section, Havana, Cuba

**1986/83** "Intergrafik," Berlin, Germany

**1986/83/81/70** Biennial of Puerto Rico

**1986/81/76/74/72/70** Biennial of Cali, Colombia

**1985** "Aqui," Fisher Gallery, University of Southern California, Los Angeles

"Disinformation," The Alternative Museum, New York

"The Writing on the Wall," Islip Museum, Islip, New York

**1984** "The Verbally Charged Image," Queens Museum, New York

First Biennial of Havana, Cuba  
"Latin American Visual Thinking," Art Awareness Gallery, Lexington, New York

**1983** "World Print IV," San Francisco

**1982** "Documenta Urbana," Kassel, Germany

**1982/76** Norwegian International Print Biennial

**1981** Biennial of Art, Medellin, Colombia

"Further Furniture," Marian Goodman Gallery, New York

CAPS at the State Museum, Albany, N.Y.

**1980** "Buch Objekte," University of Freiburg, Germany

Third-World Biennial of Graphic Art, London, England

Print Biennial of Biella, Italy

**1979** "Group Show with a Smile," Marian Goodman Gallery New York

"International Drawing Exhibition," Christ

Church, New Zealand

**1979/76/74** British International Print Biennial, Bradford, England

**1979/74/62** Biennial of Tokyo, Japan

**1978** "Objects," Marian Goodman Gallery, New York

**1978/77** Group June, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia

**1978/76/74** Biennial of Drawings, Rijeka, Yugoslavia

**1978/75/74/73** Kunst Messe, Basel, Switzerland

**1978/72** Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, France

**1977** Biennial of Maracaibo, Venezuela  
Galleria Zona, Florence, Italy

**1977/73** Museu de Arte Contemporaneo, Sao Paulo, Brazil

**1976** "Printmaking, New Forms," Whitney Museum, New York

Alternative Center for International Arts, New York

**1975** Yeshiva University, New York

**1975/73/65/63** Biennial of Ljubljana, Yugoslavia

**1974** Print Biennial, Segovia, Spain

**1973** "Books by Artists," Tyler College, Philadelphia

"Etching, Etc.," Museum of Modern Art, New York

"Latin American Prints from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art," Circulating Exhibition, New York

**1971** Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas, Venezuela

**1970** Galeria Colibri, San Juan, Puerto Rico  
Biennial of Krakow, Poland

"Information," Museum of Modern Art, New York

**1969** "Printmaking in America," I.C.A., London, England

Paula Cooper Gallery, New York  
"Language Show," Dwan Gallery, New York

Museum of Seattle, Washington  
Museum of Vancouver, Canada

**1968** "Art in Editions: New Approaches," New York University, Loeb Center, New York  
Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.

**1968/65/63** Biennial of Chile

**1967** "Toward f.a.n.d.s.o.," (with Liliana Porter and Jose Guillermo Castillo) Pratt Graphic Art Center, New York

New York University, Loeb Center, New York

Galerie Latour, Geneva, Switzerland

**1965** Contemporary Erotica, Van Bovenkamp Gallery, New York

"Artists from Monocle Magazine," Van Bovenkamp Gallery, New York

**1964** Magnet, Galeria Bonino, New York.  
"100 Contemporary Prints," Jewish Museum, New York

**1958** Eighth Centennial Exhibition, Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany

## Permanent Collections

Museum of Modern Art, New York

Metropolitan Museum, New York

Whitney Museum, New York

The Public Library, New York

Fairleigh Dickinson University, New Jersey

Museo de Arte Moderno, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Museo del Grabado, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Museo de Bellas Artes, Santiago de Chile, Chile

Museo Universitario, Mexico

Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas, Venezuela

Museu de Arte Contemporaneo, Sao Paulo, Brazil

Museum of Malmo, Sweden

Museum of Trenton, New Jersey

Yeshiva University, New York

Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, France

Biblioteca Communale, Milan, Italy

Library of Jerusalem, Israel

R.C.A. Corporation, New York

A.R.C.O. Corporation, New York

Wagstaff Collection, Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ca.

Museo de Arte Moderno, Bogotá, Colombia

Museo de Arte Moderno, Cartagena, Colombia

Museo La Tertulia, Cali, Colombia

Museum Wiesbaden, Germany

National Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad, Iraq

Museo de Grafica y Dibujo Latinoamericano, Roldanillo, Colombia

College at Old Westbury, New York

Casa de las Américas, Havana, Cuba

Museum Skopje, Yugoslavia

Centro Wifredo Lam, Havana, Cuba

Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, Cuba

The Jewish Museum, New York

Museum Lodz, Poland

Snite Museum, Notre Dame University, South Bend, Indiana

Museo de Artes Plásticas, Montevideo, Uruguay

Museum of Contemporary Graphic Art, Fredrikstad, Norway

Museo El Barrio, New York



## Bibliography

### Articles and Essays

#### 1990

*NAAO Bulletin*, Washington DC.

Letter exchange with Julianne Ross Davis, General Counsel for the N.E.A., December issue, p. 7.

*NAAO Bulletin*, Washington DC.

Letter to Lehman College Art Gallery recommending refusal of approved \$15,000 N.E.A. grant for Camnitzer retrospective exhibit. October 1990, p. 4.

*Art Spiral*, New York.

"Cultural Policy in Latin America," Fall issue, pp. 4-5.

*Brecha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.

"La idea Ferrari," October 23, p. 23.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

XLIV Bienal de Venecia. Cursi por excelencia," #45, October, pp. 79-84.

*Polarities Inc.*, Brookline, Ma.

*The nearest edge of the world, art in Cuba now.*, catalogue for an exhibit circulated by the New England Foundation for the Arts. "The Eclecticism of Survival: Cuban Art Today," pp. 18-23.

*New Art Examiner*, Chicago.

"An art of secular mysticism. The legacy of Juan Francisco Elso Padilla," November, pp. 28-30.

*Museo Carrillo Gil*, Mexico City, Mexico.

Text for the catalogue for the retrospective of Elso Padilla.

*S.U.N.Y. Old Westbury*, New York.

Introduction for "Telarte, Fabrics by Cuban Artists," catalogue for the exhibit with same title, April.

*Pori Museum of Fine Arts*, Pori, Finland.

Catalogue for "Young Cuban Art," reprint of the essay on Elso Padilla, pp. 61-64.

*Third Text*, London, England.

"The Third Biennial of Havana," #10, pp. 79-92.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Picasso y Braque," #44, pp. 72-75.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Un laboratorio vivo," report on the III Biennial of Havana. #43, February, pp. 61-68.

*Rethinking Marxism*, Newton Center, Massachusetts.

Reproductions of the one-man exhibit at the 1988 Biennial of Venice. Vol.2, #4, pp. 107-117.

#### 1989

*Jimmie Durham*, Exit Art, New York.

Catalogue for a retrospective of Jimmie Durham, "Jimmie Durham: Dancing Serious Dances," pp. 6-10.

*Third Text*, London, England.

"Ana Mendieta," #7, pp.47-52.

*Brecha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.

"La linea de la vida," p. 27, June 30.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Artschwager y los muebles muertos," pp. 88-89, #40, May.

*Cuba Update*, New York.

"Juan Francisco Elso Padilla (1956-1988): An Appreciation," pp. 20-21, Winter 1989.

*Plástica*, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

"La 43a. Bienal de Venecia," pp. 21-25, #18, March.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"La Computadora y el Arte," pp. 52-55, #39, February.

#### 1988

*Opción*, Editorial Arte y Letras, Havana, Cuba.

"Cinco Textos," 1987/2, pp. 238-269.

*Brecha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.

"La Computadora y el Arte," November 11.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"La XLIII Bienal de Venecia en sus 93 años" pp. 53-57, #38, December.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Ana Mendieta," pp. 44-49, #38, December.

*New Art Examiner*, Chicago.

"A Spectacle of Nationalism (The 43rd Biennial of Venice)," pp. 32-34, November.

*New Art Examiner*, Chicago.

"Speakeasy," pp. 13-14, summer issue.

*Revista de Casa de las Americas*, Havana, Cuba.

"Arte Inmaculado?," pp.20-27, # 168.

*Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art*, N.Y.

Introductory essay for the catalogue of the exhibit "Signs of Transition: '80's Art from Cuba."

*Brecha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.

"Impacto y Acostumbramiento," Stella and Dibets in New York, January 15, p. 23.

*Museo de Artes Plásticas*, Montevideo, Uruguay.

Catalogue for the one-person exhibition in the Biennial of Venice, representing Uruguay; June, 34 pp.

#### 1987

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Acceso a la Corriente Principal," December, #35, pp. 88-93.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Los Transformadores," September, #34, pp. 53-55.

*New Art Examiner*, Chicago.

"Access to the Mainstream," cover story, July, pp. 20-23.

*Brecha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.

"Para leer a Paul Klee," May 8, p. 28.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"James Rosenquist en el Museo Whitney," May, #33, pp. 47-49.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"La Segunda Bienal de La Habana," cover story, May, #33, pp. 79-85

*Art in America*, New York

"Report from Havana," a conversation on the II Bienal of Havana including Rudolf Baranik, Eva Cockroft, Douglas Crimp and Lucy Lip-pard, March, pp. 21-29.

*Gramma*, international edition, Havana, Cuba.

"Havana: a Magnet our Art needs," a report on the II Biennial, February 15, p. 7.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Schwitters en el MOMA," February, #32, pp. 50-53.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Exposicion de Arte Povera: El Nudo," February, #32, pp.53-56.

*Brecha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.

"Un Imán que Nuestro Arte Necesita," report on the II Biennial of Havana, January 23.

*Brecha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.

"Obsesion y Misticismo en el Museo Guggenheim," article on the work by Richard Long, February 6.

#### 1986

*La Jaula Invisible*, by Orlando Suárez Suárez, Editorial Ciencias Sociales, Havana, Cuba.

"Anexo VI, Testimonio de Luis Camnitzer," reprint from catalogue of Casa de las Américas, 1983, pp. 184-195.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Arte e Ideologia II," October, #31, pp. 42-47.

*Arte Plural*, Caracas, Venezuela.

"Salvatore Ferragamo," October issue.

*Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art*, N.Y.

Introduction to the catalogue of the "Latin American Biennial of Prints," pp. 4-6.



*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.  
"Obituario para Ana Mendieta," February, #29,  
p. 75.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.  
"Diseno Norteamericano del siglo XX," May,  
#30, pp. 53-57.

*Plasticá*, San Juan, Puerto Rico.  
"Proyecciones de la ensenanza del arte," March,  
#14, pp. 29-30.

*New Art Examiner*, Chicago.  
"Art Education in Latin America," September,  
Vol. 14, #1, pp. 30-33.

*Brecha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"Schwitters, personal, independiente, casi per-  
fecto," February 14.

*Brecha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"Figari entre rascacielos," May 30.

*Brecha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"Futurismo en Venecia," September 12.

*Museo de Artes Plásticas*, Montevideo,  
Uruguay.  
Catalogue on occasion of a retrospective exhibi-  
tion, with text and reproductions of work,  
August, 34 pp.

### 1985

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.  
"La Bienal de Venecia," February, #26, pp.  
56-58.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.  
"Arte primitivo en el M.O.M.A.," May, #27, pp.  
21-25.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.  
"Leon Golub," September, #28, pp. 28-32.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.  
"Arte en el espejo," September, #28, pp. 73-75.  
*S.U.N.Y. College at Old Westbury*, N.Y.  
"New Art from Cuba," Prologue (p. VII) and  
Epilogue (pp. 47-48) for the catalogue of the  
exhibit.

### 1984

*The Alternative Museum*, N.Y.  
"From the Uruguayan Torture," catalogue for  
the exhibit, with introductions by Madeleine  
Burnside and Robert Browning, January, 16 pp.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.  
"Balthus," January, N. 24, pp. 18-20.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.  
"Willem de Kooning en el Whitney," January,  
N. 24, pp. 54-57.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.  
"Es posible la ensenanza del arte?," May, #25,  
pp. 58-68.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Argentino rediseña el M.O.M.A. de Nueva  
York," May, #25, pp. 22-24.

*Art in America*, New York.

"Report from Havana, the First Biennial of  
Latin American Art," December, pp. 41-49.

### 1983

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Visiones del norte," February, #20, pp. 54-56.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Ideologia y estetica: arte nazi de los anos  
treinta," May, N.21, pp. 40-53.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Yves Klein," September, N.22, pp. 61-63.

*Casa de las Americas*, Havana, Cuba.

Catalogue for a retrospective exhibition, April,  
24 pp.

### 1982

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Roy Lichtenstein en el Whitney Museum,"  
March, #18, pp. 57-60.

### 1981

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Robert Smithson estuvo aqui," October, #19,  
pp. 44-47.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"La Bienal de Venecia de 1980," March, #14,  
pp. 37-39.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Picasso en el M.O.M.A.," March, #14, pp.  
62-67.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Joseph Cornell en el M.O.M.A.," June, #15,  
pp. 66-68.

### 1980

*Museum Wiesbaden*, Germany.

Catalogue with text and reproduction of work,  
February, 24 pp.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Joseph Beuys en el Museo Guggenheim," May,  
#12, pp. 48-51.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Francis Bacon," October, #13, pp. 72-73.

*Gnome Baker Magazine*, New York

"Selected Work," Spring, N. VI, pp. 20-35.

### 1979

*Chamber of Commerce Galería La Oficina*,  
Medellin, Colombia.

Catalogue with text and reproductions of work,  
January, 18 pp.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Exhibiciones recientes: algunas considera-

ciones," April, N. 9, pp. 30-33.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Retrospectiva de Rothko," September, #10,  
pp. 66-68.

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"R. B. Kitaj en la Malborough Gallery,"  
December, #11, pp. 32-33.

*Journal*, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary  
Art, Los Angeles

"Answers to Five Questions," Issue on Latin  
American Art, November/December, #25, pp.  
43-47.

### 1978

*Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia.

"Conceptuales vs. Hiperrealistas," July, #8,  
pp. 63-66.

### 1977

*Museo de Arte Moderno*, Bogotá, Colombia.

Catalogue with text and reproductions of work,  
January, 40 pp.

*Point of Contact*, New York.

Selected Work, July, N. 4, pp. 40-46.

### 1973

*Galería Colibri*, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Catalogue with text and reproduction of work,  
January, 24 pp.

### 1972

*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.

"Tres muestras europeas," October 20.

### 1971

*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.

"Arte negro en Nueva York," June 4.

### 1970

*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.

"Museos, Calles y Banquetes," January 9.

*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.

"El grabado latinoamericano," March 3.

*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.

"Arte Colonial Contemporáneo," July 3, (par-  
tially reprinted in Lucy Lippard: "Six Years,"  
Praeger, N.Y. 1973, pp. 168-169).

*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.

"Torres Garcíá en Nueva York," December 24.

### 1969

*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.

"El Living Theatre y el Grupo Tse,"  
January 10.

*Museo de Bellas Artes*, Caracas, Venezuela.  
"Texto," essay for the catalogue of the New



York Graphic Workshop, January, pp. 1-10.

## 1968

*Pratt Graphics Center/New York University*, New York.

"Art in Editions: New Approaches," essay for the catalogue of the exhibit under the same title in the Loeb Student Center, January pp. 1-7. (Reprinted in the "Prints/Multiples" catalogue of the Henry Gallery, University of Washington at Seattle, November, 1969.)

*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"Teatro social hippy," January 19.

## 1967

*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"Peter Weiss investiga el nazismo," February 3.  
*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"El resto es auto-bombo," May 5.  
*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"Interview con José Luis Cuevas," September 8.

## 1966

*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"Móviles en New York," February 4.  
*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"Tres Argentinos en Nueva York," March 25.  
*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"Interview con Siqueiros," June 24.  
*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"Arte Latinoamericano en Nueva York," October 13.  
*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"Exposiciones en Nueva York," November 4.  
*Artist's Proof, A Journal of Printmaking*, New York.  
"A Redefinition of the Print," Vol. VI, N. 9-10, pp. 103-105.

## 1965

*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"El Pop listo para el entierro?," January 22.  
*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"Miguel Angel ha muerto, viva la escultura," February 1965.  
*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"Mas Pop: Entre el tedio y la nada," April 23.  
*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"Y ahora, OP," May 7.  
*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"Interview con Claes Oldenburg," May 19.  
*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"La simpatía de los objetos," August 13.  
*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.

"El monstruo persigue a Sylvia," August 27.

*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"Larry Rivers, un historiador pictórico," October 22.

*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"Interview con Ernst Trova," December 17.

## 1964

*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"Interview con Salvador Dali," June 8.  
*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"La Magia de una ciudad Pop," July 10.  
*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"El hombre de la manzana y los otros," August 28.  
*Marcha*, Montevideo, Uruguay.  
"De repente un Happening," December 18.



Sifter (A Mechanism for Killing Undesirable Spectators) 1975-78. Remade in 1990.



## "Moral Imperatives: Politics as Art In Luis Camnitzer" by Mari Carmen Ramírez

<sup>1</sup>Luis Camnitzer, "Access to the mainstream," *New Art Examiner*, June 1987, 20.

<sup>2</sup>I am referring here to Frederic Jameson's characterization of Post-Modernism in the following terms: "as a designation of a whole set of aesthetic and cultural features and procedures, but also as the name for that specific mutation of the socio-economic organization of our society commonly called late capitalism (this third stage of capitalism has also been called "consumer capitalism," "multinational capitalism," and even, "post-industrial society"). Frederic Jameson, "Hans Haacke and the Cultural Logic of Postmodernism," in *Hans Haacke, Unfinished Business*, Ed. by Brian Wallis, (New York and Cambridge: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and M.I.T. Press, 1986), 38-9. See also, Jameson, "Post-Modernism and Consumer Society," in Hal Foster, ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Post-Modern Culture*, (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), 111-125.

<sup>3</sup>Jameson, "Hans Haacke," 42.

<sup>4</sup>See Jameson, "Hans Haacke," 42-43.

<sup>5</sup>Hal Foster, "The Future of an Illusion or the Contemporary Artist as Cargo Cultist," in *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture*, (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1986), 102-03.

<sup>6</sup>Jameson, "Hans Haacke," 43.

<sup>7</sup>The most complete framework for dealing with the Modernism/Post-Modernism issue in Latin America is provided by Néstor Garcia Canclini, *Culturas Híbridas. Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (Mexico: Grijalva y consejo Nacional de Cultura y las Artes, 1970) See also, Nelly Richard, *La estratificación de los márgenes. Sobre arte, cultura y políticas*, (Santiago de Chile: Francisco Zegers Editor, 1989).

<sup>8</sup>Among the Latin American artists working in this vein we can cite the late Ana Mendieta (Cuba), Alfredo Jaar (Chile), Juan Sanchez (Puerto Rico), Cesar Paterosto (Argentina), Catalina Parra (Chile), Leandro Katz (Argentina) and many others.

<sup>9</sup>Camnitzer has recently observed, "After all these years I am still grateful that my intellectual heritage comes from the south and not from the north. I think that because of this, ethics — and politics in an ethical sense — may have played a bigger role in my upbringing." Camnitzer, "Screaming in a Room Full of Jello," paper presented by Mountain Lake Symposium, 1990, 1.

<sup>10</sup>The following statement by Camnitzer is relevant to understand the full implications of the point I am trying to make: "I was raised and educated in Uruguay. It is something I am repeating more and more lately, to myself and others, because I am afraid of forgetting it. This month I am approaching the critical moment after which I will have spent more time in the U.S. than in my original cultural milieu. During this time I have tried to fend off contaminations as much as possible, but I have not been able to fully continue the same evolution as that of my generation-mates in Uruguay all these years. In that sense I once described myself as a citizen of memory, which doesn't have laws, passports or inhabitants — only distortions. So, I am now a little awkwardly placed in both worlds." Camnitzer, "Screaming in a Room Full of Jello," 1.

<sup>11</sup>Camnitzer himself has coined this term to describe the conditions of artistic practice available to uprooted Latin American artists in the U.S. He has observed: "Used in relation to art, 'Spanglish' represents the merging of a deteriorating memory with the acquisition of a new reality distanced by foreignness. 'Spanglish' art is probably the most authentic alternative for the uprooted Latin artist." Camnitzer, "Wonderbread and Spanglish Art," typescript, 14-16. Forthcoming publication in *Sur-Text*, 1991.

<sup>12</sup>The philosophical distinctions between Camnitzer's conceptualism and that of the leading Wittgenstein inspired school have been analyzed by Gerardo Mosquera, "El conceptualismo de Luis Camnitzer," *Casa de las Américas*, no. 139, 1983, 148-152.

<sup>13</sup>"Todo acto estético es un acto ético... En cuanto hago algo en el universo, aunque mas no sea un punto, estoy haciendo uso de poder. Puede ser que eso le de la aureola política a mi obra... política en el sentido de querer cambiar la sociedad." Cited in, "A veces es una locura quedarse; a veces es una locura irse. Un reportaje de Carlo Stellweg a Luis Camnitzer," *Arte en Colombia*, October 1980, 50-55.

<sup>14</sup>Camnitzer, Interview.

<sup>15</sup>Luis Camnitzer, "Contemporary Colonial Art," paper presented at the Annual International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Washington, D.C., 1970.

<sup>16</sup>The Spanish art historian Simon Marchan Fiz has distinguished between three modes of conceptualism: the *tautological*, exemplified in the work of Kosuth and the Art-Language group; the *empirical-medial*, represented by Sol Le Witt which re-

cuperates both the image and the act of perception as means of knowledge and apprehension of the real; and a third category of *ideological conceptual* this last one developed mainly in peripheral societies like Spain and Latin America, which extends the self-referential strategies of conceptual art to the analysis of social processes. Camnitzer's work falls within third categories elaborated by Marchan Fiz, although it incorporates elements of the first and second categories. See Simon Marchan Fiz, *Del arte objetual al arte de concepto* (1960-1974), first edition 1972, reprint ed. 1986, (Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 1988), 249-271.

<sup>17</sup>Latin American conceptual art can be said to have coalesced in New York as a result of the activities of a young group of Latin American artists who coincided in this city in the mid to late 60s. Most of these artists shared an interest in establishing a rupture with previous forms of Latin American art, actively engaging in a search and experimentation with non-traditional media and artforms. This group included in addition to Camnitzer, Dittborn and Meireles, Felipe Ehrenberg, Lilianna Porter, Luis Felipe Noe, Rubens Gerschman, Leandro Katz and many others. For an analysis of this phenomenon see, Jacqueline Barnitz, *Latin American Artists in New York* (Austin: Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, 1987); and also, Carla Stellweg, "Magnet, New York," in *The Latin American Spirit: Latin American Artists in the United States, 1920-1970* (New York: Harry N. Abrams and The Bronx Museum for the Arts, 1988) 284-311.

<sup>18</sup>The New York Graphic Workshop was founded with the support of amateur artist Dr. Firestone. It functioned during the second half of the sixties as an experimental print workshop and school and continued to produce collective work until 1970, when it contributed a mail art piece to the Museum of Modern Art *Information Show*. Camnitzer, Interview.

<sup>19</sup>Camnitzer studied printmaking and sculpture at the very conservative School of Fine Arts of the University of Uruguay. He later spent a year at the Munich Academy perfecting his technique in these two media.

<sup>20</sup>*Art In Editions: New Approaches*, text by Luis Camnitzer, sponsored by Pratt Graphic Center for Contemporary Printmaking, New York: New York University, 1968.

<sup>21</sup>Camnitzer, Interview.

<sup>22</sup>Camnitzer, Chronology, 3.

<sup>23</sup>Camnitzer, "Chronology," 1.

<sup>24</sup>Camnitzer, "Chronology," 1986.

<sup>25</sup>*New York Graphic Workshop*, n.p.

<sup>26</sup>Camnitzer, Chronology, 4.

<sup>27</sup>Camnitzer, Interview.

<sup>28</sup>Joseph Beuys, cited in Eleanor Heartney, "The New Social Sculpture," *Sculpture*, July/August 1989, 26.

<sup>29</sup>This work was preceded by another work of 1968 which consisted of self-adhesive labels with the word "Leftovers" printed onto them which Camnitzer pasted to walls. Both works bear the same title.

<sup>30</sup>Camnitzer, Interview.

<sup>31</sup>One significant exception is a two-sided drawing of 1976 titled *Science*, which alluded to the theme of repression taking over in Latin America.

<sup>32</sup>Cited in Suzi Gablik, *Magritte*, 3d printing (New York: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1972), 11.

<sup>33</sup>Camnitzer, Interview.

<sup>34</sup>*New York Graphic Workshop*, n.p.

<sup>35</sup>*New York Graphic Workshop*, n.p.

<sup>36</sup>Camnitzer, Interview.

<sup>37</sup>For details about these two series see Suzi Gablik, *Magritte*, 126-144.

<sup>38</sup>*New York Graphic Workshop*. Luis Camnitzer, Jose Guillermo Castillo, Lilianna Porter, Instituto Nacional de Cultura y Bellas Artes, Museo de Bellas Artes de Caracas, Enero de 1969, texts by Luis Camnitzer, n.p.

<sup>39</sup>Gablik, 102-04.

<sup>40</sup>Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, cited in Martin Jay "In the Empire of the Gaze: Foucault and the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought." In David Couzens Hoy, ed. Foucault. *A Critical Reader* (New York and Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 185, 201.

<sup>41</sup>Camnitzer, Chronology, 8.

<sup>42</sup>Charles Merewether, "Writing on the Wall," 1990, forthcoming publication in *Arte en Colombia*.

<sup>43</sup>Camnitzer's technique consisted of a translation of the industrial process of four-color separation into a low-cost, 'household' technique accessible to artist with limited equipment and resources. Camnitzer, Interview.

<sup>44</sup>Selby Hickey, Camnitzer's wife since 1979, has been instrumental throughout this period in helping to adjust the texts that accompany the images of these series as well as suggesting ideas for possible text and image combinations. Camnitzer.



Interview.

<sup>45</sup>Camnitzer, Interview.

<sup>46</sup>Camnitzer, Interview.

<sup>47</sup>Merewether, 56.

<sup>48</sup>Camnitzer, Interview.

<sup>49</sup>Merewether, 40.

<sup>50</sup>Merewether, 40.

<sup>51</sup>Alicia Haber has identified the following sources for some of the citations in this installation: the pipe is a reference to Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*; the piece of sky on a board is also a reference to Magritte (*La Cour d'Amour, Le Beau Monde, La Grande Famille*) while the broken mirror recalls Duchamp's *La grande Verre*. See Alicia Haber, "Luis Camnitzer: Analisis, lirismo, compromiso," *Plastica*, (San Juan, Puerto Rico), no. 15, 1989, 38-39. We can also point to a piece by Broodthaers, *La Malediction de Magritte* (1966) which embodies many of the concepts of reality, vs. illusion, citation of artists' sources, etc. embodied in the Venice Installation.

<sup>52</sup>Eduardo Galeano, "Introduction," *Luis Camnitzer*, XLIII Venice Biennale, 1988, n.p.

<sup>53</sup>The San Patricios was a brigade of Irish soldiers active during the Mexican American War who, having fought originally on the American side, deserted the Americans and went to fight on the side of the Mexicans. As a result they were put to trial, tortured and killed.

<sup>54</sup>I refer again here to Frederic Jameson's discussion of post-modernism in "Post-Modernism and Consumer Society," 125.

### Imperativos Morales: La Política como Arte en la Obra de Luis Camnitzer by Mari Carmen Ramírez.

<sup>1</sup>Luis Camnitzer, "Access to the Mainstream," *New Art Examiner*, June 1987, 20.

<sup>2</sup>Me refiero aquí a la caracterización del Post-Modernismo que hiciera Frederic Jameson, en los términos siguientes: "... para designar todo un conjunto de atributos y procedimientos culturales y estéticos, pero también para designar aquella mutación específica de la organización socioeconómica de nuestra sociedad, conocida comúnmente como capitalismo tardío (esta etapa tercera del capitalismo también ha sido llamada "capitalismo de consumidor," "capitalismo multinacional" y hasta "sociedad post-industrial"). Frederic Jameson, "Hans Haacke and the Cultural Logic of Postmodernism," en *Hans Haacke, Unfinished Business*, Ed. Brian Wallis, (New York y Cambridge: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and M.I.T. Press, 1986), 38-9. Véase también Jameson, "Post-Modernism and Consumer Society," en Hal Foster, ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Post-Modern Culture*, (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), 111-125.

<sup>3</sup>Jameson, "Hans Haacke," 43.

<sup>4</sup>Véase Jameson, "Hans Haacke," 42-43.

<sup>5</sup>Hal Foster. "The Future of an Illusion or the Contemporary Artist as Cargo Cultist," en *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture*, (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1986), 102-103.

<sup>6</sup>Jameson, "Hans Haacke," 43.

<sup>7</sup>Néstor García Canclini, en su publicación más reciente, *Culturas híbridas. Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*, (Mexico: Grijalva y Consejo Nacional de Cultura y las Artes, 1990), presenta la orientación más completa para tratar la cuestión del Modernismo/Post-Modernismo en América Latina. Véase también Nelly Richard, *La estratificación de los márgenes. Sobre arte, cultura y políticas*, (Santiago de Chile: Francisco Zegers, Editor, 1989).

<sup>8</sup>Entre los artistas Latinoamericanos que trabajan en esta modalidad podemos citar a la fallecida Ana Mendieta (Cuba), Alfredo Jaar (Chile), Juan Sánchez (Puerto Rico), César Paternosto (Argentina), Catalina Parra (Chile), Leandro Katz (Argentina) y muchos más.

<sup>9</sup>Camnitzer hizo las siguientes observaciones recientemente: "Después de tantos años, sigo agradecido porque mi legado intelectual proviene del sur y no del norte. Creo que quizá por eso es que la ética - y la política en función de lo ético - ha jugado un papel más importante en mi formación. Camnitzer, "Screaming in a Room Full of Jello," ponencia presentado en el simposio de Mountain Lake, 1990, 1.

<sup>10</sup>La siguiente declaración, hecha por Camnitzer, es útil para captar completamente las implicaciones de mi argumento: "Me crié y eduqué en el Uruguay. Es algo que últimamente he venido repitiéndome a mí y a otros, porque temo que se me olvide. Este mes llevo al momento crítico después del cual habré vivido más tiempo en los EE.UU. que en mi ambiente cultural materno. Durante éste tiempo he tratado de esquivar las contaminaciones, pero no he podido seguir de lleno la misma trayectoria que mis coetáneos en el Uruguay. En ese sentido, una vez me describí a mí mismo como ciudadano de la memoria, que no posee ni leyes, ni pasaportes ni habitantes - solamente distorsiones. De modo que ahora me encuentro situado, algo torpemente, en dos mundos diferentes." Camnitzer,

"Screaming in a Room Full of Jello," 1.

<sup>11</sup>El mismo Camnitzer ha inventado este término para describir las condiciones de la práctica artística disponibles para los artista latinoamericanos transplantados a los EE.UU. Comentó: "Usado para referirse al arte, el término 'Spanglish' representa la fusión de una memoria en deterioro con la adquisición de una realidad nueva distanciada por ser poco familiar. El arte 'Spanglish' probablemente sea la alternativa más auténtica para el artista Latino transplantado." Camnitzer, "Wonderbread and Spanglish Art," manuscrito. 14-16. Edición próxima en *Third Text*, 1991.

<sup>12</sup>Las distinciones filosóficas entre el conceptualismo de Camnitzer y el de la más prominente de las escuelas inspiradas en el pensamiento de Wittgenstein han sido analizadas por Gerado Mosquera, "El Conceptualismo de Luis Camnitzer," *Casa de las Américas*, no. 139, 1983, 148-152.

<sup>13</sup>"Every aesthetic act is an ethical act, . . . As soon as I do something in the universe, even if nothing else than a mark, I am exercising power. That may give my work a political aura . . . political in the sense of wanting to change society." Citado en "A veces es una locura quedarse; a veces es una locura irse. Un reportaje de Carla Stellweg a Luis Camnitzer," *Arte en Colombia*, octubre de 1980, 50-55.

<sup>14</sup>Camnitzer, Entrevista.

<sup>15</sup>Luis Camnitzer, "Contemporary Colonial Art," ponencia presentado en el International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Washington, DC, 1970.

<sup>16</sup>El historiador de arte español Simón Marchán Fiz identifica las tres modalidades del conceptualismo: *el tautológico*, representado por la obra de Kosuth y el grupo Art and Language; *el empírico-medial*, representado por Sol Le Witt y que rescata la concepción de la imagen y el acto de percibir como medios para captar y conocer lo real; y una categoría tercera de *lo conceptual-ideológico*, elaborado dentro de sociedades periféricas como España y América Latina, que extiende las estrategias auto-referenciales de arte conceptual hasta los análisis de procesos sociales. La obra de Camnitzer cae dentro de la tercera categoría elaborada por Marchán Fiz, aunque también incorpora elementos de la primera y la segunda categoría. Véase Simón Marchán Fiz, *Del arte objetual al arte de concepto (1960-1974)*, primera edición 1972; reimpresión 1986 (Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 1988), 249-271.

<sup>17</sup>El arte conceptual Latinoamericano se podría decir que cuajó en Nueva York, como resultado de las actividades de un grupo de jóvenes artistas Latinoamericanos que coincidieron en dicha ciudad a mediados de los 60 y hasta fines de la década. La mayoría compartían el interés de establecer una ruptura con las formas previas del arte Latinoamericano, de afanarse por buscar y experimentar con medios y procedimientos no tradicionales. Este grupo incluía, además de Camnitzer, Dittborn y Meireles, a Felipe Ehrenberg, Liliana Porter, Luis Felipe Noé, Rubens Gerschman, Leandro Katz y muchos más. Para un análisis de este fenómeno, véase Jacqueline Barnitz, *Latin American Artists in New York* (Austin: Archer J. Huntington Art Gallery, 1987); y también, Carla Stellweg, "Magnet, New York," en *The Latin American Spirit: Latin American Artists in the United States, 1920-1970* (New York: Harry N. Abrams and the Bronx Museum for the Arts, 1988) 284-311.

<sup>18</sup>El New York Graphic Workshop fue fundado con el apoyo del artista afincado Dr. Firestone. Funcionó durante la segunda mitad de la década del 60 como taller experimental de gráfica y siguió produciendo obras colectivas hasta 1970, cuando contribuyó una pieza de arte postal a la exhibición llamada *Information* del Museo de Arte Moderno. Camnitzer, Entrevista.

<sup>19</sup>Camnitzer estudió técnicas de grabado y escultura en la muy conservadora Escuela de Bellas Artes de la Universidad de Uruguay. Más tarde, pasó un año en la Academia de Munich con el propósito de perfeccionar su técnica en los dos medios.

<sup>20</sup>*Art in Editions: New Approaches*, texto por Luis Camnitzer, auspiciado por Pratt Graphic Center for Contemporary Printmaking, New York: New York University, 1968.

<sup>21</sup>Camnitzer, Entrevista.

<sup>22</sup>Camnitzer, "Chronology," 3.

<sup>23</sup>Camnitzer, "Chronology," 2.

<sup>24</sup>Camnitzer, "Chronology," 1986.

<sup>25</sup>*New York Graphic Workshop*, n.p.

<sup>26</sup>Camnitzer, "Chronology," 4.

<sup>27</sup>Camnitzer, Entrevista.

<sup>28</sup>Joseph Beuys, citado en Eleanor Heartney, "The New Social Sculpture," *Sculpture*, julio/agosto de 1989, 26.

<sup>29</sup>Esta obra fue precedida por otra obra realizada en 1968, que consistía de etiquetas adhesivas impresas con la palabra "Leftovers," que Camnitzer pegaba en las paredes. Ambas obras llevan el mismo título.

<sup>30</sup>Camnitzer, Entrevista.

<sup>31</sup>Una excepción es un dibujo de dos caras de 1976 entitulado *Silence*



(Silencio), que aludía al tema de la represión que iba cobrando territorio en Latinoamérica.

<sup>32</sup>Citado en Suzi Gablik, *Magritte*, 3a edición (New York: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1972), 11.

<sup>33</sup>Camnitzer, Entrevista.

<sup>34</sup>New York Graphic Workshop, n.p.

<sup>35</sup>New York Graphic Workshop, n.p.

<sup>36</sup>Camnitzer, Entrevista.

<sup>37</sup>Para más detalles sobre estas dos series, véase Suzi Gablik, *Magritte*, 126-44.

<sup>38</sup>New York Graphic Workshop. Luis Camnitzer, José Guillermo Castillo, Lilianna Porter, Instituto Nacional de Cultura y Bellas Artes. Museo de Bellas Artes de Caracas, enero de 1969, textos por Luis Camnitzer.

<sup>39</sup>Gablik, 102-04.

<sup>40</sup>Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, citado en Martin Jay, "In the Empire of the Gaze: Foucault and the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought," in David Couzens Hoy, Ed. Foucault. *A Critical Reader* (New York and Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 185, 201.

<sup>41</sup>Camnitzer, Chronology, 8.

<sup>42</sup>Charles Merewether, "Writing on the Wall," 1990, edición próxima a salir en *Arte en Colombia*.

<sup>43</sup>La técnica de Camnitzer consiste en traducir el proceso industrial de la separación de cuatro colores a una técnica 'casera' accesible a los artistas de escasos recursos. Camnitzer, Entrevista.

<sup>44</sup>Selby Hickey, la esposa de Camnitzer desde 1979, ha sido instrumental en todo este periodo, ayudando a ajustar los textos que acompañan a las imágenes en estas series y ofreciendo sugerencias para la posible combinación de textos e imágenes. Camnitzer, Entrevista.

<sup>45</sup>Camnitzer, Entrevista.

<sup>46</sup>Camnitzer, Entrevista.

<sup>47</sup>Merewether, 56.

<sup>48</sup>Camnitzer, Entrevista.

<sup>49</sup>Merewether, 40.

<sup>50</sup>Merewether, 40.

<sup>51</sup>Alicia Haber ha identificado las siguientes como las fuentes de las citas que se hacen en esta instalación: la pipa alude a *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* de Magritte; el pedazo de firmamento impreso sobre una tabla también alude a Magritte (*La Cour D'Amour, Le Beau Monde, la Grande Famille*) mientras que el espejo roto alude a *La Grande Verre* de Duchamp. Véase Alicia Haber, "Luis Camnitzer: Análisis, lirismo, compromiso," *Plástica*, (San Juan, Puerto Rico), no. 15, 1989, 38-39. Podríamos también señalar una pieza de Broodthaers, *La Malediction de Magritte* (1966) que tipifica muchos de los conceptos de realidad vs. ilusión, alusiones a otros artistas, etc. contenidos en la Instalación de Venecia.

<sup>52</sup>Eduardo Galeano, "Introducción," *Luis Camnitzer*, XLIII Venice Biennale, 1988, n.p.

<sup>53</sup>La brigada de los San Patricios fue una brigada de soldados irlandeses activos durante la Guerra entre Estado Unidos y México quienes, habiendo peleado originalmente del lado de los norteamericanos, desertaron y fueron a pelear al lado de los mexicanos. Consecuentemente fueron enjuiciados, torturados y ejecutados.

<sup>54</sup>Me refiero una vez más a la discusión del post modernismo que realiza Frederic Jameson en "Post-Modernism and Consumer Society," 125.

### "Wonderbread and Spanglish Art" by Luis Camnitzer

The New York Times of October 25, 1987, under the title "Furor in Calcutta over Dress Code" published a news item which begins: "A prominent musician has been ousted from an exclusive club in Calcutta after he insisted on wearing Indian-style clothes and refused to follow the club's dress code which favors casual or formal Western attire."

<sup>1</sup>L.S. Stavrianos, *Global Rift: The Third World Comes of Age*, William Morrow and Co., New York, 1981.

<sup>2</sup>Miguel Barnet, "Identidad Cultural y Liberación Nacional," paper presented at the First Meeting of Intellectuals for the Sovereignty of our America, Havana, 1981.

<sup>3</sup>Geeta Kapur points out that: "In societies like India, modernization in the capitalist style has produced the commercialization of not only the traditions themselves, but also of the traditional forms and artifacts, to serve both the state and the market." (*Tradition and Contemporaneity in the Fine Arts of the Third World*, paper presented at the III Biennial of Havana, November 1989)

<sup>4</sup>Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade, for example, published an "Anthropophagite Manifesto" in 1928, in which he wrote of the "absorption of the sacred enemy".

<sup>5</sup>Le Monde, Paris, January 27, 1987, quoted by Alvaro Medina in "Las nuevas y viejas estrategias", *Arte en Colombia* #34. Schneckenburger was referring to a lack of the funds needed to reasonably present the context and the particular conditions he describes.

<sup>7</sup>The concern has been present previously in artists such as Torres-Garcia (Uruguay), Eduardo Ramirez Villamizar (Colombia) and many others. Paternosto recently published a book on the subject: *Piedra Abstracta*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Buenos Aires-Mexico, 1989.

<sup>8</sup>Even when generous grants are given, they only provide a miniscule fraction of the cost of the total education of a qualified individual. While needed and welcomed by the recipient for his or her individual development, a grant acts primarily as a talent tagging device. It is interesting to note that a prestigious institution like the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation has lately resorted to asking its fellows for donations in order to insure the preservation of regional programs, using the alumni psychology. The example given for a threat of possible cuts is the Latin American program. The Guggenheim also has accepted \$100,000 from the Lampadia Foundation in Buenos Aires in support of Fellows from Argentina and Chile (to be chosen by the Guggenheim). Money is exported from the periphery to the U.S. and then re-imported to the periphery under the aegis of a U.S. foundation. The U.S. foundation appears as having an increased philanthropic scope, while the Argentinian money presumably reenters with its prestige enhanced. But with this move the talent-tagging process — usually coveted because of its broad regional competition — becomes debased to become an event more provincial in character and with "second class" fellows.

<sup>9</sup>Remembering the feelings I had in 1965-66 about myself and my work, in 1977 I wrote: "[...] I thought that the verbal description of a visual situation could elicit the creativity of the spectator in a better way than the visual situation itself. A text also had the advantage of being cheaper and less totalitarian. Again I thought in Uruguayan terms, about an aesthetic of poverty which could affect the contexts in which people live. At the same time that I was doing this, hundreds of artists all over the world, except (to my knowledge) in Uruguay, were working on the same basis. That, and the fact that in Uruguay nobody identified with my work, gave food for thought... There was the megalomaniac and optimist version: I was working for Uruguay, in advance of my own time; someday I will achieve the changes in the perceptual mechanisms of my country; the fact that I live outside the country does not matter. There was the negative and depressing version: I had assimilated the aesthetics that surround me without even being aware of it; I am working in the U.S.A. and for that environment, even if I don't like it and I don't identify with it; Uruguay is lost for me. Working with words made the problem more acute. In what language do I write, in Spanish or English? Am I working for the people I want to work for, but who cannot see my work: Am I working for the people I do not care to work for, but who do see my work? Should I make two versions of my work? And while I write this I realize that, without giving a thought, I wrote everything in Spanish and that, maybe, I will have to translate the whole thing into English.[...] I perceived that I remained floating between two cultures: one that is being alien although I don't want it to; the other that is alien because I want it to be and because I do not conceive of it not being alien; I am an alien resident.[...] My country does not exist anymore, except in my memory. I am a citizen of my memory, which does not have laws, passports or inhabitants; it only has distortions.

<sup>10</sup>I used these ideas for the first time in an essay, "Latin American Art in the U.S.: Latin or American?" (which served as a starter for this one) for "Convergences/Convergencias," an exhibit at The Lehman College Art Gallery, N.Y.C., in 1988.

<sup>11</sup>In "Homogenizing Hispanic Art in Houston," *The New Art Examiner*, September, 1987, Shifra Goldman cites Rodolfo Acuna who attributes to the Nixon Administration the initiation of the practice of "consolidating Latin Americans into a national minority called 'Hispanic' in order to manage them more easily" (Rodolfo Acuna, "A Community Under Siege," Chicano Research Center, UCLA, 1984.)

<sup>12</sup>For a detailed discussion of the topic see: Martha E. Gimenez, "Latino/Hispanic" — Who needs a Name?, *The Case Against a Standardized Terminology*, *International Journal of Health Services*, Volume 19, Number 3, pp.557-571, 1989.

<sup>13</sup>It is not just a distance in the realms of art. Pat Robertson's call for increasing procreation in the U.S. (during his 1988 presidential campaign) is implicitly a call to anglo-middle class procreation and explicitly to ensure the survival of U.S. mainstream values. ■



