CONFRONTING VIOLENCE:
ARGENTINE CONCEPTUALISM FROM THE 1960S TO THE 1990S.

A thesis
Submitted by
Priscilla Bolaños-Salas

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts
In Art History

Department of Art History
TUFTS UNIVERSITY

May, 2012

ADVISER: Adriana Zavala

ABSTRACT

In the 20th century, Argentina went through successive periods of democracy and military dictatorships. The regime of Juan Carlos Onganía (1966-1970) and of the four Juntas that controlled the country after 1976 military coup (1976-1983) are remembered especially for their authoritarianism and their exertion of intense political and ideological repression. Human rights organizations estimate that at least thirty thousand people were disappeared and killed during the last military period, also known as the Dirty War. Focusing mainly on three case studies, this thesis explores the response of Argentine conceptual artists to political violence and state terrorism from the 1960s through 1990s. Through the analysis of the 1960s avant-garde collective Tucumán Arde, the 1983 conceptual event "El Siluetazo," and the 1990s memory art of the neoconceptual photographer Marcelo Brodsky, this research project maps out the network of connections and departures that exists between conceptual practices in Argentina.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the development of conceptualism in Argentine art from the 1960s through its practice in the 1990s as a means to understand how conceptual art has responded to political violence and state terrorism. Through the comparison of conceptual art from these four decades, this investigation will trace the continuity of the use of conceptual art as a strategy to oppose the establishment, counteract official discourse, and denounce the violation of human rights. Even though the form, methods, and aspirations of Argentinean conceptualism have changed significantly over time, adapting to the different political and social contexts, I will argue that there is a genealogy that connects these practices.

I undertook the study of Argentinean conceptualism because two interesting and complex themes converge in this specific topic. The first theme is the terrible violence and abuse carried out by the military dictatorships in Argentina. I became interested in understanding the political processes that led to the prevalence of authoritarianism and how Argentineans have coped, both as a nation and as individuals, with the trauma of a reality so gruesome and painful that it is almost indescribable. Over thirty thousand people were disappeared and killed between 1976 and 1983, and thousands more were left mourning the unjust and unreasonable loss of their loved ones. I encountered this history through the work of the conceptual photography of Marcelo Brodsky, whose brother was detained and assassinated by the military. I find the deeply personal character of

Brodsky's work and the complexity of his understanding of memory and trauma very engaging both intellectually and emotionally.

The other theme that led me to the study of conceptualism in Argentina was the historiography on Latin American conceptualism and the debates about how to classify these practices. During the 1970's and 1980's conceptual art was defined by mainstream art historians and critics as an American and British movement that carried out the dematerialization of the work of art.[1] Nevertheless, in the past decades, the history of conceptual art has been rewritten to include conceptual practices beyond the hegemonic cultural centers. As art from Latin America is compared to or becomes integrated into the canon, pressing issues within the field are raised: is Latin American art different from mainstream art? Or are there more commonalities than differences? Is it more effective to consider Latin American art as part of the West, or should it be studied independently? The history of Argentine conceptualism brings together the political history of the country and these contemporary art historical debates; therefore, I decided to engage in the investigation of this topic.

[1] Traditionally, conceptual art has been defined as a postwar movement that took place in Western Europe and the United States and originated as a reaction against the modernist conception of painting championed by critics such as Clement Greenberg. Following the legacy of Marcel Duchamp, American artists like Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt and the British group Art and Language rebelled against these formalist principles. These conceptualist artists questioned the nature of the work of art, negated its aesthetic content, and focused instead on non-visual ideas, especially on the relationship between art, language, and representation. Art became a cognitive rather than a contemplative exercise, as Sol LeWitt explains: "It is the objective of the artist who is concerned with conceptual art to make his work mentally interesting to the spectator." This shift from the object to the idea and the emphasis on the thinking process led to what the critics Lucy Lippard and John Chandler identified as the dematerialization of the work of art. Frances Colpitt et al., *Knowledge : Aspects of Conceptual Art* (Santa Barbara; Seattle: University Art Museum ; Distributed by the University of Washington Press, 1992), 11.

Literature Review

Widespread scholarly interest in Argentine conceptualism only began to flourish in the 1990s. The most important investigation of the Argentine avant-garde in the 1960s began as a discussion and archival research group called *Arte, cultura y política en los años `60*, coordinated by Enrique Oteiza and sponsored by the Gino Germani Institute of the Department of Social Sciences of the University of Buenos Aires.[2] The results of these investigations were analyzed, edited, and published by Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman on the book *Del Di Tella a Tucumán Arde: vanguardia artística y política en el '68 argentino*, a seminal work in the field not only for its analysis but also because it included an extensive compilation of primary sources and interviews.[3] This book explains in detail the development of the avant-garde giving especial attention to the relationship between art and politics in this period. Ana Longoni, along with Gustavo Bruzzone, was also responsible for the edition of the *El Siluetazo*,[4] a book that explores this 1980s conceptual artistic event in which protestors drew silhouettes of the disappeared and pasted them around Buenos Aires. This compilation of the most important essays, documents, and newspaper and journal articles is the only of its kind ever written on the subject. Andrea Giunta is another scholar who has written extensively on the 1960s and, more specifically, on the national institutional frameworks and the international forces that shaped

[2] Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman , *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: El Cielo por Asalto, 2000), 16.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ana Longoni and Gustavo A. Bruzzone, *El Siluetazo* (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2008). At the moment, both of Longoni's books are only available in Spanish.

the debates of the time.[5] Longoni and Giunta consider the art of the period mainly as part of Argentine art history; therefore, their projects do not engage in the study of regional or international contexts.

Other scholars such as Mari Carmen Ramirez, Luis Camnitzer, Alexander Alberro, and Blake Stimson have analyzed Argentine conceptualism as part of a larger regional movement.[6] In an effort to disrupt the hegemonic narratives imposed by traditional art history, these scholars have questioned the conventional definition of conceptual art and have argued that conceptualist strategies did not originate exclusively in the United States and the United Kingdom. Instead, they note that Latin American artists were also questioning the function and the meaning of art, exploring the relationships between art and linguistic and mass media theories, and developing similar artistic strategies to those created in mainstream centers such as New York and London in the `60s. These scholars agree on the relevance of Latin American avant-garde but they disagree on how to frame Latin American conceptualism. The debate is whether these practices are part of mainstream conceptualism or if they are independent developments.

Mari Carmen Ramirez and Luis Camnitzer focus mainly on the regional characteristics that set local conceptual practices apart from those developed in

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[5] Andrea Giunta, *Vanguardia, Internacionalismo y Política : Arte Argentino En Los Años Sesenta* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2001), 412.

[6] Mari Carmen Perón, "Tactics of Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America 1960-1990," *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950's-1980s*, eds. Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss (New York :Queens Museum of Art. Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art : Didactics of Liberation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007). Alexander Alberro, "Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1977" in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999). Blake Stimson, "The Promise of Conceptual Art" *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).

the United States and Europe, more specifically their explicit engagement with politics. On the other hand, Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson acknowledge the regional differences, but they consider Latin American conceptual art part of a pancontinental interest in the reformulations of ideas about the nature and function of art.

More recently, Miguel López and Jaime Vindel have analyzed how mainstream discourses have incorporated the Latin American avant-garde art to the canon of conceptualism in exhibitions like *Global Conceptualism* and *Documenta 12*.[7] They also criticize strongly the binary construction that opposes analytical Anglo-Saxon conceptualism to political or ideological Latin American conceptualism. These authors explain that, even though that approach gave a positive connotation to difference, it ended up simplifying and homogenizing the art of both regions. While Vindel proposes to do away completely with the label "conceptual," López indicates the need to trace a critical cartography that accentuates how discourse and representation create the subject that they pretend to describe.

As this brief literature review demonstrates, the question of how to situate Argentinean and Latin American art in relation to larger art historical discourses is extremely complex. In my opinion, Latin American conceptualism is in dialogue with American and European practices. Separating Latin American conceptual art or relegating it to a different category perpetuates the isolation of

[7] Miguel A. López and Josephine Watson, "How do we Know what Latin American Conceptualism Looks Like?" *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry*, no. 23 (Spring, 2010): 5-21. Jaime Vindel, "A Propósito [De La Memoria] Del Arte Político," *Ramona*, no. 98 (Marzo, 2010). Luis Camnitzer et al, *Global Conceptualism : Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s.* Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, *Documenta Kassel 12, 16/06 - 23/09, 2007 : [Katalog* (Köln: Taschen, 2007).

the region and, consequently, its secondary place within the canon. Classifying Latin American conceptualism as exclusively "political art" risks obscuring the theoretical and aesthetic questions that the artists were asking, which, at their core, are very similar to those of artists in other parts of the globe. The complete history of Argentinean conceptualism has not yet been written and more importantly, many of the texts and primary sources are only available in Spanish. Given this gap in scholarship and my interest in the response to political violence, I chose to focus my investigation on one specific region and its political and artistic processes. However, my deliberate use of the term "conceptualism" as it applies to Argentine art is a statement in favor of the inclusion of these practices in a transnational artistic discourse.[8]

This thesis will focus on three key historical moments in Argentina, in both political and art historical terms. The first chapter will analyze the early development of conceptualism and the collective Tucumán Arde, which at the end of the 1960s responded to the structural violence carried out by the dictatorship of Onganía. The second chapter will focus on the last year of the Dirty War and an artistic event that became known as "El Siluetazo." Finally, the last chapter will deal with the memory art of Marcelo Brodsky as an answer to Carlos Menem's discourse of reconciliation. The comparison of these three periods will allow me

[8] In fact, many artists, such as Juan Pablo Renze, openly rejected this label. He considered the connection to the American bourgeois movement of conceptual art to be an effort to strip the political dimension from his art. Again, I consider that these oppositions, not unlike the characterization of Latin American conceptual art as political, belong to a moment in time in which it was necessary for artists and critics to situate themselves in opposition to hegemonic cultural influences. Juan Pablo Renzi, "Panfleto: La Nueva Moda," in *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde": Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino*, eds. Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman (Buenos Aires: El Cielo por Asalto, 2000), 231.

to establish a genealogy that connects practices from the 1960s through the 1990s using the common thread of conceptualism.

Historical Context

Argentine conceptualism is intrinsically intertwined with the political history of the country. In the 20th century, Argentina went through successive periods of democracy and military dictatorships.[9] Even though there were six military coups during the past century (1930, 1943, 1955, 1962, 1966 and 1976), the last two dictatorships are remembered especially for their authoritarianism and their exertion of intense political and ideological repression. Influenced by fundamentalist Catholic ideologies, the government of Juan Carlos Onganía (1966-1970) took control on national universities, reduced their faculty body, stepped up censorship, and persecuted students under suspicion of communist sympathies. In addition to this intellectual censorship, he also banned all political parties and all political activities.[10] The crudest dictatorship spanned from 1976 to 1983. Four military juntas governed the nation during this period and instituted an oppressive regime characterized by systematic civil repression, torture, disappearances, and extreme violence. Acts of military repression started to become common in 1974 during the government of Isabel Perón, who had taken office after the death of her husband Juan Perón.[11] The paramilitary organization Triple A or Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance was created during Isabel

[9] Emilio A. Crenzel, *Memory of the Argentina Disappearances : The Political History of Nunca más* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 8.
[10] Ibid, 11.
[11] Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror : Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6.

Perón's rule in order to control political opposition. Triple A functioned as a death squad that would threaten or murder political opponents, intellectuals, trade unionists, and artists who had ties to the left.[12] Although military repression was initially meant to contain guerrilla movements, by 1975 the definitions of subversion were broadened and all acts of protest were seen as a threat to national security, whether carried out by political parties, the press, the universities, or the unions.[13] That same year General Rafael Videla, future leader of the military junta, declared that, "as many people as necessary must die in Argentina so that the country will again be secure."[14]

On March 24th 1976, the weak government of Isabel Perón was ousted in a military coup. Argentina was thereafter controlled by four successive military juntas composed of three senior officers, one from each section of the military: the army, the navy, and the air force. The first and most repressive of the four juntas was led by President General Rafael Videla, Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera, and Brigadier General Orlando R. Agosti.[15] The junta initiated the *Proceso Nacional de Reorganización.* This plan for the reactivation of the economy implemented neoliberal policies that were especially beneficial to foreign investment. The International Monetary Fund supported the change of government and economic policy by granting major loans.[16] The new military

[12] Emilio A. Crenzel and Diego Born, *Los Desaparecidos En La Argentina : Memorias, Representaciones e Ideas, 1983-2008* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2010), 14.
[13] David Rock , *Argentina, 1516-1982 : From Spanish Colonization to the Falklands War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 363.
[14] Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror : Argentina and the Legacies of Torture*, 6.
[15] Ibid., 8.
[16] Ibid., 7.

regime also had the approval of the United States whose anti-communist foreign policy supported authoritarian regimes throughout Latin America.[17]

An intense ideological program, framed as a war against subversion, was disseminated through the mass media and the school system. The military government wanted people to believe that oppression was imperative in order to preserve national security and traditional Catholic values.[18] These conservative political ideologies helped justify state terrorism and the systematic kidnappings and executions of people. In reality, the disappearances, or *desapariciones*, were not aimed at destroying opposition and subversion.[19] Even though the *desaparecidos* were sometimes affiliated with leftist organizations, this was not always the case. [20] In other words, there was not a strict correlation between militancy and state terrorism. Instead, the disappearances were a strategy to maintain the population in a constant state of fear and surveillance.

The most brutal years of repression were 1976 and 1977.[21] Human rights groups have reported that over thirty thousand people were killed during the seven years of dictatorship.[22] Moreover, as María Seoane notes, approximately three

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[17] Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela R. Montaldo, *The Argentina Reader : History, Culture, and Society* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 395.

[18] Felipe Pigna, "La Historia De Todos," in *Memoria En Construcción : El Debate Sobre La ESMA* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: La Marca, 2005), 59.

[19] Emilio Crenzel offers the following definition of the disappearances: "Disappearances involved the detention or abduction of individuals by military officers, police personnel, or security forces, either in uniform or dressed as civilian clothes. After they were picked up, these individuals were taken to illegal prisons –known as clandestine detention centers and located primarily in military or police facilities –where they were tortured and, for the most part, killed. Their bodies were then buried in unmarked graves, incinerated, or thrown into the sea." Crenzel, *Memory of the Argentina Disappearances : The Political History of Nunca más*, 8.

[20] David William Foster, *Urban Photography in Argentina: Nine Artists of the Post-Dictatorship Era* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2007), 12.

[21] Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror : Argentina and the Legacies of Torture*, 8.

[22] Crenzel, *Memory of the Argentina Disappearances : The Political History of Nunca más*, 2.

hundred thousand people went into exile to escape the violence.[23] The military established at least five hundred and twenty clandestine concentration camps throughout the whole country. Amongst the *desaparecidos* were three hundred teenagers and five hundred children born in prison, who were kidnapped and put up for adoption. In 1995, a former marine officer, Alfonso Scilingo, disclosed the details of the *vuelos de muerte* or death flights, one of the military strategies to exterminate people.[24] Scilingo described how the prisoners were anesthetized and, while they were still alive, they were thrown in the River Plate.[25]

By 1982, the military government had weakened. That same year, unions organized a national strike that paralyzed the country. The police and the army responded with brutality and the images of police violence circulated worldwide. Three days after these incidents, the military announced the invasion of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands. This was a last desperate attempt to salvage the image of the government and win the public's approval. The defeat by Great Britain hastened the fall of the dictatorship.[26] Elections were held, in October 1983, and Raúl Alfonsín (1983- 1989) of the *Unión Cívica Radical* was elected president.[27]

The terrible history of horror and systematic violence from 1976 to 1983 was not properly addressed by the democratic governments that followed the dictatorship. In 1983, Raúl Alfonsín created the CONADEP, or National

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[23] María Seoane, "El Golpe Del 76," in *Memoria En Construcción: El Debate Sobre La ESMA* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: La Marca, 2005), 67.
[24] María Silvina Persino, "Memoriales, Museos, Monumentos: La Articulación De Una Memoria Pública En La Argentina Postdictatorial." *Revista Iberoamericana* LXXIV, no. 222 (January - March, 2008): 3.
[25] J. Patrice McSherry, "Strategic Alliance: Menem and the Military-Security Forces in Argentina," *Latin American Perspectives* 24, no. 6, Argentina Under Menem (Nov., 1997): 81.
[26] Nouzeilles and Montaldo, *The Argentina Reader : History, Culture, and Society*, 397.
[27] Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror : Argentina and the Legacies of Torture*, 8.

Commission of the Disappeared. This entity was in charge of investigating the disappearances and gathering information, testimonies, and other evidence.[28] All this information was compiled in the report called *Nunca Más* or *Never Again*. Alfonsín's government also charged and tried the nine commanders of the first three Military Juntas in a public trial, an unprecedented action in the Americas. However, given the unstable economic situation and military pressure, Alfonsín was compelled to decree a series of pardons that limited the prosecution of the responsible militaries.[29] Moreover, the following president, Carlos Saúl Menem (1989- 1999), despite his proposed discourse of "reconciliation," continued and expanded pardons to the military, including the senior officers that had been convicted under Alfonsín's government.[30] The lack of an adequate institutional response, especially during Menem's administration, affected the way Argentineans coped with this violent history and created a strong need to remember.

[28] "Informe de la Comisión Nacional Sobre la Desaparición de Personas," http://www.desaparecidos.org/arg/conadep/nuncamas/.

[29] Vikki Bell, "On Fernando's Photograph: The Biopolitics of Aparición in Contemporary Argentina," *Theory, Culture and Society*, no. 27 (July, 2010): 72.

[30] Vikki Bell explains that these measures were a conservative move to silence the families of victims and to appease the military. Ultimately these laws were abolished: "Before Nestor Kirchner's government took charge in 2003, the pardons and laws on these matters had been declared unconstitutional and, once in position, Kirchner set about preventing military personnel escaping prosecution. At the same time he revoked a decree impeding the extradition of Argentines to face charges abroad. Under Kirchner, and continuing under Christina Kirchner's presidency, prosecutions have begun once again." Ibid., 72.

CHAPTER 1

THE EXPERIMENTAL 60'S: THE BEGINNING OF CONCEPTUALISM IN ARGENTINA

The Argentine avant-garde in the 1960s went from being associated with a large network of cultural institutions that sought to modernize the art scene, to the complete rupture with what artists considered bourgeois establishments that promoted cultural imperialism. As the avant-garde became interested in the dematerialization of the work of art and the relationship between art and life, artists abandoned institutions and embraced radical politics. This chapter will analyze the development of conceptualism in the 1960s and how both the form and the content of the artistic production of those years became increasingly radical. It will also demonstrate how the experimental propositions of the mid-60s, namely media art, would be revisited at the end of the decade and crystallized in the collective Tucumán Arde.

The art scene in Argentina at the beginning of the 1960s was characterized by a strong network of art institutions that promoted avant-garde art. Perhaps the most relevant and influential of the art institutions of the time was the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella in Buenos Aires. The Di Tella Foundation was created in 1958 under the sponsorship of one of Argentina's wealthiest and most influential families, the Di Tella family, and their industrial manufacturing complex SIAM Di Tella. The Institute had a highly progressive program of interdisciplinary research in diverse fields like visual arts, music, theater, economics and

medicine.[31] The *Centro de Artes Visuales* of the Di Tella and its director, the art historian and critic Jorge Romero Brest, played a vital role in development of visual arts in Buenos Aires.[32]

Jorge Romero Brest was also responsible for bringing to Argentina another important art institution: the *Asociación Argentina de Críticos de Arte*. This entity, which was the Argentine chapter of the *Asociación Internacional de Críticos de Arte*, was founded in 1950. During the first decade, the AACA did not have a strong presence in the Argentine art world, but this would change radically in the 1960s when the institution began to sponsor conferences, awards for both critics and artists, and to participate and organize exhibitions and art salons.[33] These types of public events organized by both the Di Tella and the AACA would help create an institutional framework that functioned as the motor of an active artistic scene.

The Instituto Torcuato Di Tella and the AACA are only two of the main institutions that functioned during this decade. As Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman explain, a large modernizing institutional circuit operated in Buenos Aires.[34] The cultural project of these institutions was the modernization and internationalization of the artistic scene. These were the years following the so-called *Revolución Libertadora* after the overthrow of the Peronist government by

[31] Andrea Giunta, "Jorge Romero Brest and the Coordinates of Aesthetic Modernism in Latin America," *Art Journal* 64, no. 4 (2005), 89.
[32] Jorge López Anaya, *Historia Del Arte Argentino* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1997), 290.
[33] Horacio Safons, "La Crítica De Arte En La Argentina," in *Historia crítica Del Arte Argentino*, ed. Osvaldo Svanascini (Buenos Aires: TELECOM, 1995), 242.
[34] Some of the cultural actors that Longoni and Mestman mention are the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Museo de Arte Moderno, art galleries like Bonino, Lirolay, Arte Nuevo, Van Riel, and Guernica, and the Biennale of American Art organized by Kaiser Industries. Longoni and Mestman, *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino*, 36-39.

a coalition of military leaders.[35] Romero Brest considered the end goal to be the transformation of Buenos Aires into one of the art capitals of the world.[36]

As Andrea Giunta explains, this network of public and private art institutions sought to "internationalize" Argentine art, but the meaning of this term fluctuated throughout the decade. It stood for breaking of isolation, joining international artistic circles, elevating the quality of Argentine art, making it competitive enough for international circuits, attracting European and North American artists to Argentine competitions, bringing Argentine art to international centers. By the end of the decade, however, it would become synonymous with cultural imperialism.[37] However, during the first years of the 1960s, the cultural climate was one of optimism and faith in the possibility of internationalizing the Argentine art scene.

The idea of modernization was also part of the United States' cultural policies towards Latin America. In the Cold War context, North American artistic values functioned as an instrument for combating Communist ideas and the influence of the Cuban revolution.[38] Through programs like the Alliance for Progress, the United States government and foundations with capitalist interests, such as Ford and Rockefeller, subsidized modernizing cultural institutions in Buenos Aires.[39]

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[35] David Rock , *Argentina, 1516-1982 : From Spanish Colonization to the Falklands War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 266.
[36] López Anaya, *Historia Del Arte Argentino*, 290.
[37] Giunta, *Vanguardia, Internacionalismo y Política : Arte Argentino En Los Años Sesenta,* 9.
[38] Andrea Giunta, "Art of the Sixties in Buenos Aires: Words, Images, and Frontiers," in *Versions and Inversions : Perspectives on Avant-Garde Art in Latin America*, eds. Héctor Olea and Mari Carmen Ramírez (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2006), 55.
[39] Longoni and Mestman, *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino*, note 35.

By the middle of the 1960s, the Argentine avant-garde scene was dominated by New Figuration, pop art, and happenings.[40] In fact, the American artist Allan Kaprow referred to Argentina as a country of happenings.[41] In what López Anaya characterizes as the "apolitical aestheticism" of the Instituto Di Tella, figures like Marta Minujín, Delia Puzzovio, and Juan Stoppani became prominent artists.[42] The Instituto Di Tella had a relationship of patronage with these artists and provided not only a space for them to showcase their work, but also the financial and institutional support they needed to succeed internationally.[43]

Media Art: The dematerialization of the work of art

It was in this climate of internationalism that artistic experiments with revolutionary potential began to emerge. The significance of the experimental art of the mid 1960s lies both in the innovative and provocative nature of its propositions, but also on how they foreshadowed the political art of the end of the decade. One of these experiments was the *arte de los medios* or media art of Eduardo Costa, Raul Escari, and Roberto Jacoby.[44] The intention of these three artists was to publish information about happenings, artistic exhibitions or events that never actually occurred in newspapers. In one instance in 1966, they created a false report with theoretical data, details, and photographs of a happening called

[40] Safons, *La Crítica De Arte En La Argentina*, 160-163.
[41] Ibid., 162.
[42] López Anaya, *Historia Del Arte Argentino*,291.
[43] Roberto Jacoby, one of the most active artists of this period, referring to the patronage and support given to pop artists, mentions that Marta Minujin was like a goddaughter to Jorge Romero Brest. Roberto Jacoby, "Interview," in *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino*, eds. Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman (Buenos Aires: El Cielo por Asalto, 2000), 290.
[44] Media art is the translation offered by Alexander Alberro of the term "Arte de los medios." In this context, the term media refers mainly to newspapers.

Total Participation or *Happening for a Dead Boar* and sent it to the press.[45] The report falsely informed the media that a happening had taken place at a private house and that many celebrities had participated. (Figure 1)

After the news had been published by the media, the three artists wrote a manifesto where they declared the falsity of the previous report and made explicit their real intentions. Their manifesto declared that: "In a mass society, the public is not in direct contact with cultural activities but is informed of them through the media… Real artistic production stops having importance with its diffusion since it can only reach a diminished public."[46] The artists denounced how mass media disconnected the public from actual events, and personal interaction with art objects and allowed them to simply access cultural products through the imaginary realm of published information after the fact. The falseness of the information and the fact that the happening never took place demonstrated that real access to art works or cultural activities was not occurring. The happening pointed towards the communication gap between the object and the receiver when a third party, in this case the printed media, functioned as a mediator. It revealed how mass media used information from various sources to create a reality that was then consumed by a spectator and perceived as truthful.

In a conventional happening, the object is replaced by an event or situation. However, in this case, as the artists explained, the work consisted of a triple creation:

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[45] López Anaya, *Ritos De Fin De Siglo : Arte Argentino y Vanguardia Internacional*, 168.
[46] Eduardo Costa, Raul Escari and Roberto Jacoby, "A Media Art (Manifesto)," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 2.

> "the formation of the false report, the transmission of the report through the existing channels of information, and the reception by the spectator who constructs –based on the information received and depending on the manner that information signifies for him –the substance of a nonexistent reality which he would imagine as truthful."[47]

In theoretical terms, neither the audience nor the mass media was conscious of its participation in the artistic event, and this is precisely what allowed the artists, once the significance of the events was finally revealed, to comment on the inner workings of contemporary society. The work of art was no longer part of the separate realm of the art world; instead it was directly related to everyday life. Media art was the first approximation to a problem that became highly relevant to the avant-garde at the end of the decade in a more politicized context: the relationship between art and life.

Costa, Escari, and Jacoby were also responding to pop art and other contemporary artistic trends that appropriated characteristics or the visual language of mass media. As they explained in their manifesto, pop art used mass media elements and techniques but they "divorced them from their natural context."[48] In other words, they used the language of mass media but translated it into the realm of the fine arts. Media art went beyond this utilization of techniques and, instead, it employed the "qualities fundamental" to the medium, "thematizing the media as media."[49] Media art sought the manipulation of the qualities of the medium within the circuits of the medium itself, allowing the artists to create a work of art that was fully incorporated into one of society's most influential industries.

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[47] Ibid., 3.
[48] Ibid., 2.
[49] Ibid., 2-3.

By the time the Media art anti-happening took place, happenings had become so popular that they had lost their critical potential. As Longoni and Mestman explain, the press had turned happenings into fashionable events, transforming them into myths that lacked the original utopian avant-garde quality that they initially had.[50] Given this context of appropriation of the avant-garde by mass media, the *Happening for a Dead Boar* also became a criticism of how mass media emptied the work of art of its revolutionary meanings and how the avant-garde itself participated in this media theater by providing the fashionable artistic products it demanded.

Media art evidenced the development of two important processes that would radically change the art making of the period: the dematerialization of the work of art, and an interest in cultural and sociological theory that, consequently, expanded the scope of the field of art, blurring the line between art and life. Referring to a previous project that led him to the theoretical propositions of media art, Jacoby explains that around 1966 he understood that the object was not the work of art, but rather just a stimulus that allowed the spectator to reconstruct the art work. Following this process, the object started to "dissolve" and lose its significance. Consequently, he realized that the object did not interest him at all anymore and he began to dedicate all his time to media art. [51]

Of course, many other artists were reaching similar conclusions around the same time, but what made Jacoby and his group more successful in creating an innovative artistic product was their interest in combining the possibilities opened

[50] Longoni and Mestman, *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino*, 55.
[51] Jacoby, *Interview*, 291.

by the dematerialization of the work of art with the analysis of cultural and sociological theory. Jacoby asserts that his main reading material at the time was not art magazines, but rather the theoretical writings of authors such as Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, Antonio Gramsci, Stuart Hall, Roman Jakobson, Claude Levi Strauss, Marshall McLuhan, and Susan Sontag.[52] This reading list demonstrates the strong influence that semiotics and theories of communication had on the group. It is perhaps this confluence of artistic and sociological theory that inspired the artists to create a piece that was radical both in its form and content.

The other crucial influence for the group was the work of the art critic Oscar Masotta, who, as Jacoby claims, did not only read all this theory but also created his own theoretical frameworks for contemporary art.[53] Masotta's writings and engagement with art theory, politics, and psychoanalysis were key for both the politicization of the avant-garde and the advancement of conceptualism. Conferences like *Después del Pop nos desmaterializamos* and the introduction to the book *Happenings* by Jorge Álvarez demonstrate that, as early as 1967, Masotta was already theorizing about the *dematerialized* nature of avant-garde art, a fundamental idea for conceptual art.[54]

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[52] Ibid., 289.

[53] Jacoby claims that he, Escari, and Costa were part of the "grupo masottiano." They traveled to New York together and worked together on art projects related to communicational perspectives. Jacoby also recognizes that some of the theory he was applying to his art was not directly accessed by him but predigested by Masotta.

[54] There has been a lot of discussion about Masotta's early use of the term *dematerialization* which mainstream accounts attribute to the American critic Lucy R. Lippard. As Jacoby himself writes in a short article about this problem, probably both critics came to the same conclusions around the same time. Roberto Jacoby, "Despues De Todo Nos Desmaterializamos," *Ramona* 9, no. 10 (2000): 34.

The insight brought about by media art, its interest in the dematerialized art object, the use of the structures of mass media, the sociological critique, and the creation of art works outside of the traditional field of art that push the limits between art and life, are characteristics that would be revisited by the avant-garde throughout the rest of the decade.

Experiencias 1968: Anti-institutionalism and the Radicalization of the Avant-Garde

As Longoni and Mestman have noted, the exhibition *Experiencias 1968* at the Di Tella Institute was a key moment for the avant-garde because it constituted the definitive rupture between artists and art institutions.[55] Thirteen artists were invited by Jorge Romero Brest to participate in the show. The exhibition showcased several works of art that protested against the cultural imperialism exerted by the United States through the Di Tella Institute. Nevertheless, the most significant events unfolded when Roberto Plate's piece *The Bathroom* was censored by government authorities and the artists, in a symbolic act of protest against military repression, sabotaged the exhibition and publicly burned their own work.

All the work presented in the exhibition was conceptual or made use of unconventional mediums. Also, some of the art openly criticized the art institutions or had explicit political content. Pablo Suárez and Roberto Jacoby submitted the most explicitly anti-institutional pieces. Suárez initially thought of

[55] Longoni and Mestman, *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino*, 81.

creating an "information office" within the exhibition that would function as a space for putting forth criticism about *Experiencias*. However, he decided instead to write a letter explaining his decision to withdraw his participation and he distributed it at the exhibition and in the newspaper stands on the street outside the Institute.[56]

In the letter, which he addressed to Jorge Romero Brest, Suárez explained his belief in the imminent end of an institution dominated art scene: "I asked myself if it is important to do something within the institution even if it collaborates in its destruction? Things die when there are other things to replace them."[57] Suárez predicted in his letter the triumph of the dematerialized work of art, in which the public was no longer the elite or the intellectuals and the field of action was greater than the artistic scene. This anti-institutional, anti-elitist, action-based art that Suárez was foreshadowing became a reality at the end of that year with the experimental collective Tucumán Arde.

Suárez also addressed in his letter the potential of art to produce social change and the relationship between art and life. Referring to the art object confined within the institutional setting, Suárez explained, "[I]n a shop window it utterly lacks danger."[58] The artist also added that the new work of art is the "design of forms of life", which probably was a reference to political revolution and radical changes in economic and social systems. Finally, Suárez concluded his letter with a statement that referred back to the dematerialization of the work

[56] Ibid., 83.
[57] Pablo Suarez, "Letter to Jorge Romero Brest," in *Beginning with a Bang! : From Confrontation to Intimacy : An Exhibition of Argentine Contemporary Artists, 1960-2007*, ed. Victoria Noorthoorn (New York: Americas Society, 2007), 85.
[58] Ibid., 86.

of art and the replacement of objects by actions: he ironically asserted that this letter withdrawing his participation from the show was his contribution to the exhibition.

Roberto Jacoby also submitted a work in the form of a written text, but unlike Suárez' his was actually hung as part of the exhibition. Jacoby's letter did not focus on the crippling effects of the art institutions, but rather on the merging of art, life, and politics. Jacoby affirmed that "art and life have become inseparable… 'Art' has no importance; it is life that counts." Moreover, he envisioned political revolution as the future of artistic production: "The future of art is not linked to the creation of works, but rather to the definition of new concepts of life... It is the creation of the greatest collective work in history: the conquest of earth, the freedom for man."[59]

Whereas the media art that Jacoby had produced two years earlier focused on the effects of mass media in the art world and how the press mediated the relationship between the public and cultural products, this message focused on the relation between art and politics. He argued that the present commitment of the avant-garde should be the involvement with the "necessary, bloody, and beautiful" struggle for a new world.[60] This change illustrates clearly the process of radicalization and politicization that avant-garde artists were going through.

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[59]Roberto Jacoby, "Message at the Di Tella," in *Beginning with a Bang! : From Confrontation to Intimacy : An Exhibition of Argentine Contemporary Artists, 1960-2007*, ed. Victoria Noorthoorn (New York: Americas, 2007), 87.

[60] In an interview, Jacoby explains that at this point he had realized the limitations of media art: "Media art was not walking in the sense that you could not produce a lot with it. It was only enough for one or two pieces, it had no action, you could not activate anything, it could not enter, you stayed there." Roberto Jacoby, "Interview," in Longoni, *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino,* 292.

Jacoby linked his work to international political issues by complementing the message, which was written on a blackboard on the wall, with a photograph of an African American man holding a sign against racism and the Vietnam War and a teletypewriter that constantly received news from the agency France Press, updating the viewers about student protests in Paris. Jacoby characterized his work as "*mediático-político-utópico*."[61]

Roberto Plate presented a piece entitled *The Bathroom* which consisted of two white empty cubicles with a restroom sign on the door. People spontaneously started to write messages on the empty walls as often seen in public restrooms. Neither the artist nor the piece itself explicitly incited people to write political messages. However, the white walls invited the viewers to express their ideas and emotions, and inevitably, the discontent with the authoritarian government became evident in messages that criticized Onganía's regime. As might be expected, there was also graffiti with obscene or sexual content. Even though the artist was not directly responsible for the graffiti, the military censored the "The Bathroom" and closed the piece to the public.[62] In order to protest the censorship, artists withdrew their work from the exhibition, and some of them even burned it on the street in protest against both the regime and the cultural institution.[63]

As both Longoni and Giunta have pointed out, the radicalization of the avant-garde emerged at a moment of great political tension in Argentina. Onganía's military coup of 1966 had established an authoritarian regime

[61] Ibid.
[62] López Anaya, *Ritos De Fin De Siglo : Arte Argentino y Vanguardia Internacional*, 192.
[63] Longoni and Mestman, *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino*, 94.

influenced by Catholic fundamentalism and characterized by censorship and ideological repression.[64] Furthermore, as Jacoby's piece demonstrates, international political events such as the U.S. invasion of Vietnam and the May 1968 events in Paris contributed to the increasingly contestatory tone of the artistic debates in Argentina. In this repressive national and international climate, it was impossible for the avant-garde to ignore the sponsorship from capitalist industrialists such as the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations that the Di Tella received.

Even though these national and international political events were a decisive factor in the politicization of these artists, as Andrea Giunta explains, this "was not a decision that arose from a unique circumstance originating in the political arena." Instead, she proposes that factors such as, "the inherent conditions that constituted the field and its degree of institutionalization" also need to be taken into account.[65] In other words, these artists are able to attack the system because there *was* a system; in fact, an extremely dynamic and influential circuit of cultural institutions operating in Argentina against which to rebel. Moreover, the mere emergence of the avant-garde might be attributed to the existence of these institutions. Therefore, it is important to take into account the artistic panorama of the early 1960s and the prominent role of the Instituto Di Tella in order to understand both the existence of a vigorous avant-garde scene and its desire to break away from artistic institutions.

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[64] Ibid., 23, 28-29; Giunta, *Vanguardia, Internacionalismo y Política : Arte Argentino En Los Años Sesenta*, 247- 248.
[65] Giunta, *Art of the Sixties in Buenos Aires: Words, Images, and Frontiers*, 245.

Assault on the Conference of Romero Brest and the Braque Award

Even though Romero Brest had a moderate attitude towards the avant-garde and supported the opening of experimental artistic spaces like *Experiencias 1968*, as the representative of the Di Tella Institute, he was the target of the artists' anti-institutional campaign.[66] He responded to the government censorship of Roberto Plate with a letter in which he tried to explain the experimental character of the work and, with a temperate tone, he defended artistic freedom, and the highly ethical intentionality of the artists.[67] Nevertheless, in July, while Romero Brest gave a conference in the city of Rosario, a group of ten artists from that city took over the lecture hall, turned off the lights, and read a manifesto against art institutions. Juan Pablo Renzi, Norberto Púzzolo, and Rodolfo Elizalde read the message which was directed to Romero Brest as the representative of the "bourgeois mechanism that absorbs, distorts, and aborts all creative work." The next day the artists made their resignation from the institution official when they went to the hotel where Romero Brest was staying and returned the funds that the Di Tella had granted them for the organization of the exhibition *Ciclo de Arte Experimental*.

That same month, another rupture took place between the avant-garde and the art institutions, this time at the Museum of Fine Arts during the ceremony of

[66] Even though Romero Brest was a key figure in the promotion of the avant-garde up to 1968, he also participated on its censorship. For example, in 1965, he ordered to withdraw Ferrari's "Western-Christian Civilization" from the Di Tella Award exhibition due to its offensive religious content. López Anaya, *Historia Del Arte Argentino*López Anaya, *Ritos De Fin De Siglo : Arte Argentino y Vanguardia Internacional*, 302.

[67] Romero Brest, "Romero Brest on the Closure of "the Bathroom"," in *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino*, eds. Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman (Buenos Aires, Argentina: El Cielo por Asalto, 2000), 93.

the Braque Awards.[68] The call for submissions for the award, which was sponsored by the French Embassy, indicated that the organizers reserved the right to make changes to the art work presented. Artists like Margarita Paksa, Roberto Plate, and the group Avant-Garde Artists of Rosario protested through letters and statements. The artists also carried out a similar disturbance to that of the Romero Brest conference. The disturbance ended with police intervention and the arrest for thirty days of five artists: Margarita Paksa, Pablo Suárez, Roberto Jacoby, Ricardo Carreira, and Eduardo Favario.

The anti-institutional work of Suárez and Jacoby, the censorship of Roberto Plate's work, the subsequent destruction of their own art by the participants of *Experiencias*, and the disturbances at the Romero Brest conference and the Braque Awards marked the radicalization of a significant and influential sector of the avant-garde and the definitive rupture with the art institutions. In this atmosphere of revolution and renovation, an innovative project was conceived: Tucumán Arde.

Tucumán Arde: Challenging the division between Art and Life

In this climate of intense anti-institutionalism, politicization, and in the context of a repressive military regime, a group of artists from Rosario and Buenos Aires decided to free themselves from the limits of art institutions and tried to create an art form that challenged the division between art and political and social life. Tucumán Arde has a very prominent place in the history of

[68] Longoni and Mestman, *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino*, 99.

Argentine art because it was the largest collective endeavor of the avant-garde in the 1960s.[69] Because of this prominence and the utopian promise of its propositions, Tucumán Arde has become a myth and acquired multiple, even contradictory significance.[70]

In August 1968, artists from Buenos Aires and Rosario participated in the First National Congress of Avant-Garde Art in Rosario.[71] It was in this forum that the artists began to theorize about the possibilities of new artistic actions. The Congress also helped bring together artists from Buenos Aires and Rosario, a city located in the province of Santa Fé in Central Argentina. The alliance of these two groups would later create an important collective group called Tucumán Arde.

One of the speakers at the Conference was Juan Pablo Renzi, an avant-garde leader from Rosario and one of the organizers of the assault on the Romero Brest conference. In his presentation, Renzi explained that aesthetic political actions such as those performed at *Experiencias 1968*, at Romero Brest's conference, and the Braque Awards, already exhibited the characteristics of the new avant-garde. Renzi proposed five fundamental characteristics for a new aesthetic program.[72] First, he mentioned that the art work had to be created outside of the bourgeois institutional circuit. This new anti-institutional setting implied a new context for the art work and a close relationship to its new context. Renzi also proposed that the art work would disappear if it was transplanted to an

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[69] Ibid., 146.
[70] Roberto Jacoby, "Tucuman Madre," *Ramona* 9, no. 10 (2000): 86.
[71] López Anaya, *Historia Del Arte Argentino*, 310.
[72] Juan Pablo Renzi, "La Obra De Arte Como Producto De La Relacion Conciencia Etica Conciencia Estetica," in *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino*, eds. Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman (Buenos Aires, Argentina: El Cielo por Asalto, 2000), 136.

institutional setting. Third, he suggested collective action and violence as the new aesthetic language.[73] Fourth, the consequences of such an art work would be similar to those of a political act. And finally, the art work's structure should transform ideology into reality.

In addition to discussing the use of collective political action as the new aesthetic of the avant-garde, the other important point addressed at the conference was the efficacy of the art. León Ferrari argued that art "will not be beauty or novelty, art will be efficacy and disturbance."[74] These debates about the appropriate course of action for a new avant-garde crystallized a month later in the project Tucumán Arde.

Tucumán was an impoverished rural region in the northwest of Argentina that had an inefficient economy that relied solely on the cultivation of sugar cane. Onganía's government promised to reactivate the economy through several structural changes denominated *Operativo Tucumán*. These policies, which were not really meant to alleviate the situation in Tucumán but rather to benefit local elites and transnational investors, aggravated the economic crisis.[75]

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[73] In this case, Renzi was probably not alluding to bloodshed or revolution, but rather to the violence of destroying artistic boundaries. As later on the group will explain in the Tucumán Arde Manifesto: "Intentional aggression becomes the new form of art. To violate is to posses and destroy the old forms of art that rest under the premise of individual property and personal pleasure. Violence is now the creative action of new contents: it destroys the system of official culture, opposing to it subversive culture…. " Tucumán Arde, "Declaración De La Muestra De Rosario," in *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino*, eds. Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman (Buenos Aires, Argentina: El Cielo por Asalto, 2000), 192.

[74] León Ferrari, "El Arte De Los Significados. Primer Encuentro Nacional De Arte De Vanguardia," in *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino*, eds. Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman (Buenos Aires, Argentina: El Cielo por Asalto, 2000), 142.

[75] Ana Julia Perón, "Tucumán 1965-1969: movimiento azucarero y radicalización política," *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*, Debates, 2008, http://nuevomundo.revues.org/38892.

A large group of artists decided to protest this exploitative situation through a collective action which they called Tucumán Arde. Amongst the artists involved in the project were Rodolfo Elizalde, Norberto Púzzolo, Juan Pablo Renzi, protagonists of the actions at Romero Brest's conference in Rosario, and Roberto Jacoby, Juan Pablo Suárez, Margarita Paksa, Eduardo Favario, and León Ferrari, former members of the Di Tella Institute in Buenos Aires.[76] Even though visual artists from Rosario and Buenos Aires had a fundamental role in the conception and organization of Tucumán Arde, amongst the participants there were also writers, scholars, and intellectuals from several different fields. The main objective of this interdisciplinary collective was to inform the public and protest against the repressed and impoverished situation of the people in Tucumán.[77] Rather than producing art objects, the ultimate purpose of Tucumán Arde was to incite political and social change. With this goal in mind, the participants of Tucumán Arde decided to gather information about Tucumán and present it in a compelling exhibition of newspaper clippings, recordings, videos, signs, and other resources that informed the public about the injustices committed by Onganía's government in this province.

Tucumán Arde was structured as a propaganda and action campaign in four stages. According to the group's report, the first stage of the project was a

[76] The complete list of participants included: Maria Elvira de Arechavala, Beatriz Balvé, Graciela Borthwick, Aldo Bortolotti, Graciela Carnevale, Jorge Cohen, Noemí Escandell, Eduardo Favario, Emilio Ghilioni, Edmundo Giura, Maria Teresa Gramuglio, Martha Greiner, José María Lavarello, Sara López Dupuy, Rubén Naranjo, David de Nully Braun, Raúl Pérez Cantón, Oscar Pidustwa, Estella Pomerantz, Jaime Rippa, Nicolás Rosa, Carlos Schork, Nora de Schork, Domingo J. A. Sapia, Roberto Zara. Tucumán Arde, *Declaración De La Muestra De Rosario*, 194.

[77] "Argentine Subversive Art: The Vanguard of the Avant-Garde," *The Drama Review: TDR* 14, no. 2, Latin American Theatre (Winter, 1970): 99.

trip to Tucumán to establish relations with the locals, assess the situation, and determine the main problems.[78] The second stage also consisted of in-situ research. The artists travelled with a crew of journalists who helped them gather information through interviews, surveys, and reports, which were recorded, photographed, and filmed. In order to conduct their project without being censored by the government, in this second stage the artists also gave a press conference at the Museum of Fine Arts where they gave false information to camouflage their true intentions. During a second press conference given the last day of this trip, the group revealed their true intentions. The third stage consisted of two exhibitions, one in Rosario and one in Buenos Aires, where the information was presented to the public. The fourth stage, which was never realized, encompassed the publication of the results and a final assessment of the project. These processes met all the standards of the "new aesthetic" that Renzi suggested in the avant-garde conference: it was collective, anti-institutional, and, not only its content but also its aims were political.

Not only was Tucumán Arde a collective project, but it was also interdisciplinary and communal. Journalists, technicians, and sociologists from the *Centro de Investigaciones de Ciencias Sociales* participated in the research process.[79] According to the manifesto of the Rosario exhibit, this interdisciplinary

[78] "Grupo De Artistas De Vanguardia Obra "Tucumán Arde" Informe Viaje a Tucumán De Los Artistas," in *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino*, eds. Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman (Buenos Aires, Argentina: El Cielo por Asalto, 2000), 186.

[79] Longoni and Mestman, *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino*, 152.

collaboration was part of the "form of the new art" where all disciplines would be integrated in an effort to "modify the social structure."[80]

The artists also joined forces with the *Confederación General del Trabajo de los Argentinos* or CGTA, the national workers union that had been working in the area. Artists and intellectuals traditionally operate only within an academic or artistic circle and, even when they advocate for the working class, their reality is removed from that of the proletariat. The alliance of Tucumán Arde with the CGT is fundamental, not only because of the support that this union provided for the artists, but also because it demonstrates the desire to break this separation and to collaborate with the working class.

The anti-institutionalism of Tucumán Arde went beyond rejecting the patronage of artistic institutions. In its alliance with different disciplines and with the people of Tucumán, it effected a movement to a communal setting. It transferred the sphere of action of the work of art from the artistic to the social and political field. With this type of collaboration, the artists were expanding the notion of what it meant to create a collective work of art.

This is perhaps one of the most productive outcomes of Tucumán Arde: the creation of a network of collective action. Even though the collaboration did not last beyond the exhibition, it was still an accomplishment to bring together diverse sectors of society. People who came from different disciplines, different economic classes, and different areas of the country were able to work together to achieve a common goal: bring social justice to Tucumán.

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[80] Tucumán Arde, *Declaración De La Muestra De Rosario*, 192.

In order to raise awareness about the situation in Tucumán, the strategy of the project was the creation of a "*circuito sobreinformacional*."[81] The objective information gathered by the artists during their trips to Tucumán, was contrasted at the exhibitions with the manipulated versions published by official media.[82] As Longoni and Mestman point out, this is a clear reference to the media art that Costa, Escari, and Jacoby had created in 1966: it utilized mass media in order to unmask the mechanism of production and circulation of information.[83]In this sense, Tucumán Arde was an expansion of the ideological project of media art. Costa, Escari, and Jacoby focused on unveiling how the public no longer had personal contact with the artistic field, and instead they only related to artistic events or objects through the unreliable information published by mass media. Tucumán Arde took this conclusion even further, proposing that the political and social reality of Argentina was being manipulated by the military regime and its official media. This difference demonstrates the jump that the avant-garde had taken in the last three years from intervention in the artistic field to intervention in the social and political spheres.

There is yet another subtle but significant similarity between media art and Tucumán Arde in terms of their modus operandi. Both projects involved the diffusion of false information. Media art sent information to the press about a happening that never occurred. Tucumán Arde used the same mechanism as a way of avoiding the government's censorship. In the first case, the false

[81] Ibid., 193.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Longoni and Mestman, *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino*, 173.

information was used as a tool to unveil the inner workings of the mass media machine. But in the context of the repressive Onganía government, the strategy became a way of gaining protection from censorship. Similarly, the interest in sociological theory that was present in media art was transformed into a process of sociological research to gather information about the injustices of the regime.[84]

The exhibitions that were carried out as part of the third stage of the project were articulated as multimedia installations.[85] As Andrea Giunta explains, the exhibition employed a variety of resources to communicate with the public.[86] Collages of newspaper clippings prepared by León Ferrari contrasted the information published by the mass media with that gathered by the artists and sociologists. Signs and billboards with slogans were hung on the walls, and charts that connected the government to the owners of the sugar refineries were laid out on the floor (Figure 2-4). Also, films and slides of the refineries were projected. The artists played back interviews with the people of Tucumán, and participants who were interviewed after visiting the exhibit. The lights were shut down in intervals of time that corresponded to the death of a child in Tucumán for malnutrition. The entrance to the building was partially blocked by opened sacks of sugar, and black coffee with no sugar was served alluding to monopolization of the sugar industry. In summary, the exhibit went beyond the plain presentation of

[84] Interestingly, Jacoby was a student of sociology, and he returned to it in the 1970s. Daniel Quiles, "Interview with Roberto Jacoby," *Literature and Arts of the Americas* 40, no. 75 (October, 2007): 324.
[85] Roberto Jacoby, "Interview," in Longoni, *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino,*298.
[86] Giunta, *Vanguardia, Internacionalismo y Política : Arte Argentino En Los Años Sesenta*, 276.

information and instead allured viewers through a variety of visual and sensorial metaphors.

The intention of creating a multimedia approach that projected information through different channels and stimulated all senses was very innovative. However, in retrospect, some of the participants have been critical of the quality of the end product. Roberto Jacoby describes the exhibition as rubbish, badly done, poor, and sad, with no artistic quality.[87] However, this lack of interest in presenting the visual material in a more aesthetically provocative way speaks of the true intentions of the artists. There was no intention of creating a conventional "art show." The aesthetic content of the work was rather its capacity to "agitate and move the public".[88]

The exhibition was successful in Rosario, but in Buenos Aires it was censored by the government. The censorship of the exhibition lead to the disbanding of Tucumán Arde, and consequently, the last stage of the project was never completed and the group was dissolved.[89] However, as a last act of alliance, the participating artists promised not to partake ever again in any bourgeois artistic institution. Some of the artists, such as Eduardo Favario, opted to join militant groups, and others abandoned all artistic activities for many years.[90]

The early 1960s was a period of great faith in the project of internationalization of Argentine art. Intellectuals aspired to make Buenos Aires

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[87] Roberto Jacoby, "Interview," in Longoni, *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino,* 299.
[88] Ibid., 298.
[89] Renzi, *La Obra De Arte Como Producto De La Relacion Conciencia Etica Conciencia Estetica*, 209.
[90] Longoni and Mestman, *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino,* 213-214.

one of the cultural capitals of the world. Artistic institutions like the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella played a fundamental role in the expansion and promotion of the avant-garde. But towards the middle of the decade the artistic panorama began to change. Artistic projects like media art pointed to a new direction for the avant-garde. Through their media art, Costa, Escari, and Jacoby dematerialized the art object, so that both the form and the content of the art were no longer confined to the limits of the art world. Their interest in communication theory and sociology led them to create a piece where the limits of art and social life were blurred.

The beginning of the military dictatorship in 1966 and international political events contributed to the radicalization of the avant-garde. By 1968, many artists understood that institutional frameworks limited the revolutionary potential of their art. These ideas were first proposed through radical actions like "Experiencias 68," and artists' interventions in Romero Brest's conference in Rosario, and the Braque Awards. These theoretical propositions of anti-institutionalism and anti-elitism were finally crystallized in the project Tucumán Arde. The collective and communal nature of the work, its interest in the merging of art and life, its utilization of sociological research, and the creation of artistic practices conceived as having the potential to effect social and political change, are characteristics that would echo for the next three decades.

CHAPTER 2

"EL SILUETAZO" AND THE REVITALIZATION OF CONCEPTUAL PRACTICES

Even though most of the artists that participated in Tucumán Arde ended up abandoning the artistic field, either permanently or for an extended period of time, a new generation of artists carried forward the conceptual experimentation that had characterized the Argentine art scene in the last years of the 1960s. This chapter will address the conceptual art of the early 1970s and how, after a period of decreased artistic production due to the political repression under the dictatorship, conceptual practices were revitalized in 1983 with a collective action denominated "El Siluetazo." I will analyze this artistic event and its symbolic function in depth, as well as its relation to previous artistic practices of the 1960s and 1970s to demonstrate the continuous use of conceptualism as an appropriate artistic language to respond to political violence and state terrorism.

Conceptualism in the 1970s: Arte de Sistemas

In 1970, after strong criticism of both the left and the right parties and the desertion of its most prominent artists, the Center for Visual Arts of the Institute Torcuato Di Tella was closed.[91] However, a new institution took its place as the heart of artistic innovation and experimentation. The Center of Arts and Communication (CAyC) lead by the art historian and artist Jorge Glusberg

[91] José E. Burucúa, *Nueva Historia Argentina. Arte, Sociedad y política* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1999), 125.

became the new institution for the avant-garde in Buenos Aires. The institution stated its goal as promoting projects in which "art, technology, and community concerns are combined in an effective interchange that highlights the new unity of art, science and the environment."[92] Indeed, the CAyC fostered an interdisciplinary approach to the arts and promoted artistic experiments that involved technology and science.

Jorge Glusberg categorized these experimental tendencies under the label *arte de sistemas* (systems art). Heavily influenced by structuralism and semiotics, Glusberg understood conceptual art, environmental art, and action art as different types of "codes" that were part of one corpus: systems art.[93] He defined each of these "codes" as autonomous structures that were interdependent with all other structures by virtue of the similarities in their conditions of production. This broad definition allowed Glusberg to group together artistic propositions that analyzed all types of structural systems: biological, environmental, linguistic, social, and political.

The conceptual artists that gathered around Glusberg and the CAyC were called *El Grupo de los Trece*.[94] The first three years of the decade were characterized by intense activities, numerous national and international exhibitions, and artistic experiments with explicit political content. One of the most prominent exhibitions of the period was *Arte de Sistemas II: Arte e*

[92] Jorge Glusberg, *Art in Argentina* (Milan, Italy: Giancarlo Politi, 1986), 20.
[93] Jorge Glusberg, *Retórica Del Arte Latinoamericano* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nueva Visión, 1978), 133.
[94] The members changed several times throughout the decade but the initial group was formed by Jacques Bedel, Luis Fernando Benedit, Gregorio Dujovny, Carlos Ginzburg, Jorge Glusberg, Victori Grippo, Jorge Gonzalez Mir, Vicente Lucas Marotta, Luis Pazos, Alfredo Portillos, Juan Carlos Romero, Julio Teich Y Horacio Zabala. López Anaya, *Historia Del Arte Argentino*, 329.

Ideología al Aire Libre. In September 23, 1972, this exhibit was inaugurated in the Plaza Roberto Arlt in the center of Buenos Aires.[95] As Ana Longoni explains, the location of the exhibition was one of the most relevant and defining aspects of the show; following the tendencies of the past decade, artists wanted to break away from the elitism of museums and galleries and take the streets in order to establish a dialogue with the public.[96] In the words of Glusberg, the show was characterized by artists who were deeply concerned about the nation's problems. Seeking to make explicit statements about reality, the art works alluded to life and death, pacifism and violence, and desire and consumption.[97]

A significant number of pieces exhibited in this show alluded explicitly to political violence. For example, Luis Pazos presented three caskets with crosses under the title "Monument to the Disappeared Political Prisoner."[98] Jorge Glusberg himself submitted a poll about art and ideology in the third world in which he gave the public a set of questions about their opinions on the relationship between art and politics. Juan Carlos Romero's piece consisted of a helium balloon printed with the words "the repressor beats the prisoner" written in lunfardo, the Argentine slang that originated amongst the popular classes in the 19th century.

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[95] Ana Longoni, "El Arte, Cuando La Violencia Tomó La Calle. Apuntes Para Una Estética De La Violencia " in *Poderes De La Imagen: I Congreso Internacional De Teoría e Historia De Las Artes. IX Jornadas Del CAIA*
(Buenos Aires: CAIA, 2001), 3.
[96] Ibid., 3
[97] Glusberg, *Art in Argentina*, 25.
[98] Juan Carlos Romero, Fernando Davis and Ana Longoni , *Romero* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fundación Espigas, 2010), 94.

Not every piece in the show addressed politics and violence explicitly. Victor Grippo participated with a piece entitled "Construction of an Oven to make Bread." As Lopez Anaya explains, Grippo's conception of the art work was highly influenced by Russian formalism and the concept of defamiliarization.[99] Grippo understood the art work as a system where images or everyday objects acquire signification through the modification of certain variables. This is precisely the process that takes place in this piece. Grippo took an everyday object, an everyday activity, and even an everyday worker and removed them from their usual context and space. The artist, with the help of the sculptor Jorge Gamarra and the rural worker A. Rossi, constructed a traditional Argentine rural oven. The project consisted of three stages: the construction of the oven, the baking of bread, and the distribution of bread amongst passersby along with a written explanation of the aesthetic intentions of the piece. Even though one can assume that there was a political subtext to the action of feeding the people of Buenos Aires and using rural traditions as a subject matter, the piece's main objective was to make visible a process.[100]

The most controversial of the works featured in "Arte de Sistemas" was not featured in the exhibition catalogue. Instead, Luis Pazos, Eduardo Leonetti, Roberto Duarte and Ricardo Roux spontaneously put together a work called "The Underground Reality" the day the exhibition started.[101] In order to observe this piece, viewers literally had to go underground through a set of stairs into a well

[99] López Anaya, *Ritos De Fin De Siglo : Arte Argentino y Vanguardia Internacional*, 178.
[100] Longoni, *El Arte, Cuando La Violencia Tomó La Calle. Apuntes Para Una Estética De La Violencia* , 5.
[101] Ibid., 4-5.

that was being excavated in the Plaza. The artists hung pictures of Nazi prisoner camps and painted sixteen crosses. These pictures, which Glusberg himself provided, were generic enough to simply represent abusive imprisonment. Through these images, the artists were referring to a specific national event that had taken place only a month before the exhibition: the massacre of Trelew. In August 1972, sixteen political prisoners who belonged to leftist militant organizations such as the People's Revolutionary Army, the Armed Revolutionary Forces, and Montoneros, were assassinated in the Rawson military base.[102] The subversive content of "The underground reality" led to the violent closure of the show by the police only three days after its opening. This is an example of the strong censorship that would become even stricter in the coming years. The advent of the 1976 military dictatorship and its so-called National Reorganization Process instated strict repressive mechanisms that ended up causing the cessation of the production of public political art for the rest of the decade.[103]

"El Siluetazo"

It would not be until 1983 that political art returned to the plazas of Buenos Aires. Shortly before the end of the dictatorship, Rodolfo Aguerreberry, Julio Flores, and Guillermo Kexel devised an artistic project which was in some ways a combination of the conceptual actions that had characterized political art

[102] *Entre El Silencio y La Violencia : Arte contemporáneo Argentino.* ([Buenos Aires]: arteBA Fundación, 2004)., 202

[103] See Fernando Bedoya, Juan Carlos Romero and Marcelo Lo Pinto, "El Arte Durante La Dictadura: Panorama Testimonial Del Campo Artistico Del 75 Al 83." in *Seminario: Arte, política y Pensamiento crítico* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del CCC, Centro Cultural de la Cooperación Floreal Gorini, 2006).

in the 1960s with the appropriation of public space characteristic of 1970's exhibitions such as "Arte de Sistemas II". "El Siluetazo", described by Carlos Basualdo as the most important oeuvre of this period, was an artistic event that became a milestone in Argentina's political and artistic history.[104]

"El Siluetazo" consisted of the depiction of thirty thousand human silhouettes painted on paper and pasted around the Plaza de Mayo in the center of Buenos Aires. The action took place on September 21st and 22nd of 1983, during a demonstration against the dictatorship. The protesters collaborated collectively with the artists to create paper silhouettes that represented the thirty thousand people who had been abducted by the military dictatorship. The idea, inspired by a print about Auschwitz by the Polish artist Jerzy Spasky, was to make statistics tangible and allow the public to grasp the true dimension of the genocide enacted by the dictatorship from 1976 to 1983.[105]

The name "Siluetazo" comes from the Spanish word for "silhouette" and the augmentative suffix "–azo," which in Argentina was commonly used to describe social uprisings, for example *El Cordobazo*. [106] However, Rodolfo Aguerreberry, Julio Flores, and Guillermo Kexel did not envision the project as a massive collective enterprise at first. They started to develop the idea for "El Siluetazo" in 1982 as a proposal for the Salon of Objects and Experiences of the

[104] Carlos Basualdo, "Between the Mimetic and the Cadaverous: Contemporary Art in Argentina," in *Arte Argentino contemporáneo : Colección Permanente Del Museo Nacional De Bellas Artes De Buenos Aires*, ed. Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes ([Buenos Aires]: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1994), 16.

[105] Julio Flores, "Siluetas," in *El Siluetazo*, eds. Ana Longoni and Gustavo A. Bruzzone (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2008), 92.

[106] El Cordobazo was a general strike that took place in 1969 in the city of Cordoba. Even though it was repressed by the government, this social unrest led to the deposition of the de facto president Juan Carlos Onganía. Longoni and Bruzzone, *El Siluetazo*, 15.

Esso Foundation. [107] Their initial concept was the creation of a visual representation of the physical space occupied by thirty thousand bodies. Since the beginning, the artists were aware this project would produce not only an aesthetic but also a political event because of its characteristics –group authorship, the large physical dimension, and openly political subject matter.

According to Julio Flores, they originally envisioned the creation of a labyrinth around the *Centro Cultural Recoleta* in which they would paste the figures. [108] The artists were grappling the technical difficulties, namely the large amount of material required to create thirty thousand silhouettes, the possibility of the rejection of their idea by the organizers of the Salon due to its political content, and, even if it was accepted, the issue of government censorship. Finally, they came to the conclusion that, due to the large scale of the project (thirty thousand paper silhouettes) they would need the collaboration of many people. In 1983, after the debilitating defeat of the military regime in the war against Great Britain for the control of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands and the consequent cancellation of the Salon of Objects and Experiences of the Esso Foundation due to the instability of the political situation, the artists decided to bring their proposal to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo.

By 1983, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo were already a consolidated and widely recognized organization. This group of mothers, most of whom had no

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[107] Rodolfo Aguerreberry, Julio Flores and Guillermo Kexel, "Las Siluetas," in *El Siluetazo*, eds. Ana Longoni and Gustavo A. Bruzzone (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2008), 73.
During this period, transnational companies such as Esso (Salon de Objetos y Experiencias la Fundación Esso) and Coca-Cola (Coca-Cola en las Artes) sponsored annual exhibitions of avant-garde art. However, as Julio Flores explains, these exhibits operated within a framework of government censorship and even artist's self-censorhip. Flores, *Siluetas*, 87.
[108] Ibid., 89-93.

formal education beyond primary or secondary school, was the only group that openly denounced the disappearances during the first years of the dictatorship.[109] The first fourteen mothers gathered on April 30th 1977 and marched around the center of the Plaza for half an hour. From then on, they continued this peaceful protest every Thursday afternoon. Soon, their network included hundreds of women in Buenos Aires and established connections to groups in interior provinces. In 1981, they decided take on a new form of protest and occupy the Plaza for twenty four hours. They called this demonstration "*Marcha de la Resistencia*" and began to organize this event annually. It was while the Mothers were organizing the third annual "*Marcha de la Resistencia*," that Aguerreberry, Kexel, and Flores decided to ask for their collaboration on their project.

The place that the Mothers chose for their protests, and where "El Siluetazo" took place, is highly symbolic and closely related to the political and social history of the country. The Plaza de Mayo is surrounded by *La Casa Rosada* or the presidential palace, the Cathedral of Buenos Aires, the *Cabildo* or Town Hall, the National Bank, different ministries, and within short distance of military buildings and financial institutions.[110] The immediacy of all these institutions makes the Plaza de Mayo the political, economic, religious, and military center of power of the city and the nation. Moreover, by 1983, when the artists proposed the realization of "El Siluetazo", the Mothers had already been carrying out their demonstrations at the Plaza for four years. With their

[109] Marguerite Guzman Bouvard , *Revolutionizing Motherhood : The Mothers of the Plaza De Mayo* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1994), 1.
[110] Maria Claudia Mingiaca and Maria Cristina Perez, "Irremediablemente Subjetivos: Obras De Julio Flores, Martin Kovensky, Analia Regue y TOMARTE (Grupo Alternativo De Arte)" (Rosario, November, 2007): 4.

demonstrations, the Mothers had transformed the Plaza so that it "not only reflected power and dissent but also celebrated their unique battle for human rights and their radicalized, collective version of motherhood."[111] As Julio Flores explains, the Plaza became the space where recent history and the origin of Argentina's collective identity coexisted.[112] The starting point of the intervention was the Plaza de Mayo.

The proposal of "El Siluetazo" that the artists presented to the Mothers listed four main objectives: to demand the release of all political detainees; to give protesters another form of expression that would span beyond the timeframe of the protest (since the silhouettes would stay pasted on the streets even after the demonstration ended); to create a graphic action impossible to ignore by the government and the media due to its large scale and unusual nature; and to create an activity that would bring people together days before the protest (since 1500 silhouettes were fabricated before hand and then taken to the Plaza the day of the event). The artists also explained in the proposal the metaphoric content of the project. They argued that the silhouettes would allow for a duplication of the presence of each protester and would add to the demonstration the presence of those "absent." Moreover, they considered that the silhouettes would make the disappeared symbolically present and allow them to demand justice on their own

[111] Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood : The Mothers of the Plaza De Mayo*, 2.
[112] Flores, *Siluetas*, 93.

behalf; at least until the dictatorship removed the representations and disappeared them again.[113]

It is oftentimes overlooked that the collaboration was not exclusively with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. The protest itself was also organized by the Human Rights NGO "Peace and Justice Service".[114] Also, the artists' proposal made an open call for collaboration to all artists and artistic institutions, and other organizations, like the Sociology Student Center and the School of Fine Arts.[115] Even though many organizations were summoned to collaborate in "El Siluetazo," ultimately the idea was to spontaneously engage all the people that would gather in the Plaza to participate in the protest. In other words, their project was conceived as the spontaneous collaboration of multiple social groups and individuals.

Aguerreberry, Flores, and Kexel, specifically sought the assistance of the Mothers because they did not align with any political party. The artists feared that other organizations, for example political parties, could take over the idea and claim authorship as a propagandistic device.[116] They did not want the silhouettes to belong to a specific organization; they wanted them to represent everyone. This detail is relevant because it demonstrates that not only did they envision a

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[113] Federico Zukerfeld, "Continuidad De La Línea En El Trazo: De La Silueta a La Mancha," in *El Siluetazo*, eds. Ana Longoni and Gustavo A. Bruzzone (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2008)., 63

[114] Flores, *Siluetas*, 94.

[115] The proposal lists the following social actors: Bellas Artes, Centro de estudiantes secundarios, Actores (Lista Blanca), MAS, JUP, Centro de Estudiantes de Sociologia, Arquitectura, JPTP, Intransigencia y Movilizacion, Bellas Artes mañana, Comité de Paz, CTERA, Juventud Intransigente, Movimiento Anarquista, Familiares. Zukerfeld, *Continuidad De La Línea En El Trazo: De La Silueta a La Mancha*, 66.

[116] Flores, *Siluetas*, 94.

collective artistic project, but also a democratic one with the free participation and collaboration of myriad social actors.

Julio Flores, the artist who has written most extensively about "El Siluetazo," explained that besides *socializing* the production of the silhouettes, "El Siluetazo" also *socialized* the role of the curator. In other words, participants were not only free to create the silhouettes according to their own preferences, but they also decided where and how to paste them. This *socialization* of production and curating created a collective installation that "valorized discursive discontinuity and multiplied the communicational impact."[117] In other words, the collective character of "El Siluetazo" accounts for its open and multiple meanings. Giving people the opportunity to express themselves and create their own meanings was an especially subversive political act in the context of the dictatorship.

The open nature of the project was also demonstrated by the flexibility of the artists who willingly adopted the suggestions of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and other participants. For example, the Mothers requested that the silhouettes not be pasted on the floor, because this implied the death of the disappeared. [118] Also, they did not want the silhouettes to be personalized or inscribed with the names of the disappeared; instead, they envisioned each silhouette as representing a multitude not an individual. The Mothers also wanted the silhouettes to be void of symbols of political parties. The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo also asked for the creation of silhouettes of pregnant women,

[117] Ibid., 95.
[118] Guillermo Kexel, "Precisiones," in *El Siluetazo*, eds. Ana Longoni and Gustavo A. Bruzzone (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2008), 110-111.

children, and babies. [119] All these petitions were accepted by the artists. Nevertheless, the day of the demonstration, the myriad participants did not follow the request of making depersonalized silhouettes. People spontaneously started writing the names of the disappeared on the silhouettes and later on, the Mothers even provided lists with the names and dates of the disappearance. As Kexel explains, in the end, a dual effect was achieved: even though the silhouettes were personalized, they were still anonymous from far away.[120] This discrepancy between the initial proposal and the final product highlights the collective and processual nature of the project. The artists or leaders proposed an idea, but it was finally up to the people to decide the definitive execution, form, and meanings of the work.

The artists brought rolls of paper and paint to create the silhouettes at the Plaza de Mayo. As they anticipated, other participants of the protest spontaneously started to collaborate with them. The production of the silhouettes engaged the protestors rapidly and the painting of the silhouettes became very efficient. As the artists themselves declared, after a half hour their presence was no longer necessary.[121]

Because of the collective character of the event, the silhouettes had many different forms and styles. Some people used cardboard stencils, others used the

[119] The Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo (Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo) was a group formed at the time the Mothers formalized their society in 1979. As Guzmán explains, "though they collaborated with the Mothers, their goals were to find their grandchildren who were either born in captivity or who were disappeared along with their parents, and this would remain their primary objective." Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood : The Mothers of the Plaza De Mayo*, 94.
[120] Kexel, *Precisiones*, 111.
[121] Kexel, *Precisiones*, 112.

body of the participants as a stencil, and some others simply made freehand drawings (Figures 5 and 6). In terms of the application of the paint, there were also several techniques: some of the silhouettes were solid black shapes, others were left blank with the negative space painted black, some were just a thin outline in an otherwise blank piece of paper and others had a bolder outline, almost like an aura or halo of light (Figure 7). Moreover, some of the silhouettes were only abstract representations, and others had some degree of detail or naturalistic features, for example hair, eyes and recognizable faces. However, the vast majority was left blank or was simply printed with the phrase "*Aparición con Vida*" or the name of a disappeared and the date of his or her abduction.[122] The variety of styles of silhouettes makes the documentary photographs of "El Siluetazo" visually complex, and invites the viewer to inspect closely the details of each individual silhouette. This was probably also the effect that the individualization of the silhouettes had on the viewer the day of the event: it captured the attention of the casual observers more effectively and for a longer time than completely homogenous figures would have.

Another aspect in which the participants employed their creativity was in the placement of the silhouettes. As Julio Flores explained, some silhouettes were not just pasted in "aseptic" places, such as white or grey plain walls. Instead they were in dialogue with the city's architecture.[123] For example, the silhouettes in Figure 8 seem to be in action: sitting down or kneeling on the green areas next to

[122] "Aparición con vida" or "Reappearance with Life" was the phrase coined by the Mothers to communicate their demand of having their sons and daughters returned alive, as they were taken.
[123] Adrián Pérez, "Faltaba la imagen del desaparecido," *Página/12,* September 6th, 2010.

the Plaza. In the case of Figure 9, the silhouette of a pregnant woman seems to be climbing up the stairs followed by a man. The silhouettes of children in Figure 10 seem to be playing a game similar to "Ring around the Rosie," as they hold hands around a tree facing the viewer. The suggestion of action and other figurative details, such as eyes or hair, give the silhouettes an uncanny quality. Moreover, they demonstrate the capacity of the participants to use the silhouettes creatively and to produce individualized expressions on the basis of the same general idea.

The project was successful in several different ways. For example, it accomplished its objective of bringing people from different backgrounds together to work for a common cause, including people that had never participated in demonstrations before.[124] The appropriation of the public space was also successful. The second "*Marcha de la Resistencia*" a year before had been violently suppressed by the Federal Police and the participants were not allowed to enter the Plaza. However, in this case, the protest was carried out successfully. In that year, there had been a radical shift in political situation: the military regime lost its prestige due to the worsening economic situation and the defeat in the Falkland/Malvinas Islands; the transition to democracy had begun and the end of the dictatorship was only a few months away.[125] Like the famous photograph by Eduardo Gil shows, protestors were closely watched by the police but they were able to achieve their goal of covering a large section of the city with the paper silhouettes (Figure 11). The participants started creating silhouettes in the afternoon of September 21st and they did not stop until midnight. The last

[124] Flores, *Siluetas*, 101.
[125] Adrián Pérez, "Faltaba la imagen del desaparecido," *Página/12,* September 6th, 2010.

silhouettes were pasted the morning of the 22nd. Different newspapers reported a varied number of participants, so the numbers range between three and fifteen thousand people.[126] Either way, given the imminent advance of democracy at the time, the armed forces could not suppress such a large political and artistic event. [127]

Perhaps one of the greatest accomplishments of the event was the creation of a symbol for the disappeared that would be used repeatedly in human rights demonstrations. "El Siluetazo" was reenacted at the Obelisk of the Republic Square in December of the same year and in March of 1984.[128] The silhouettes were used thereafter in countless protests and events. Even six years later, they were part of the protests against Menem's projects of national reconciliation and pardon for military personnel.[129] Thus, the silhouettes became a symbol of the disappeared, but also of social uprising and the fight for human rights; a symbol of the Argentine people coming together to demand justice.

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[126] The number of participants according to the different newspapers: 3000 *La Razón*, 5000 *La Nación*, 8000 *La Prensa*, 10000 Clarín *y Tiempo Argentino*, 15000 *La Voz.* Roberto Amigo, "Aparicion Con Vida: Las Siluetas De Los Detenidos-Desaparecidos," in *El Siluetazo*, eds. Ana Longoni and Gustavo A. Bruzzone (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2008), *note* 250.

[127] Flores, *Siluetas*, 102.
After the defeat in Malvinas in June of 1982, the military government announced the decision to institutionalize the country. In December of 1982, the "Asamblea Multitudinaria," a coalition of different political parties, organized a protest demanding the reinstitution of democracy. One hundred thousand people participated in this protest which was brutally repressed by the armed forces. However, after this uprising, the government of General Reynaldo Bignone announced that elections would be held the following year. Democratic elections were carried out October 30th 1983, less than a month after El Siluetazo. Sergio E. Visacovsky y Rosana Guber, "Crisis o Transición: caracterizaciones intelectuales del dualismo argentino en la apertura democrática," *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* no.62 (Enero, 2005): 65.

[128] This is another central square in Buenos Aires that is not closely related to political power, but rather to the youth movement and the festivities to celebrate the transition to democracy. Longoni and Bruzzone, *El Siluetazo*, 47.

[129] Amigo, *Aparicion Con Vida: Las Siluetas De Los Detenidos-Desaparecidos*, 229.

As Carlos Lopez Iglesias notes, even though the press covered "El Siluetazo" and reported the participation of artists and art students, the event did not draw the attention of critics and art historians at the time.[130] Not unlike the historiography on 1960's conceptual art, it is not until the 1990s and 2000s that art historians started to study the event. The first critical analyses about "El Siluetazo" addressed the question of whether or not it was an artistic event.[131] Later on authors like Gustavo Buntinx and Eduardo Grüner moved beyond this initial question and tried to explain the metaphoric meaning of the silhouettes and how these images functioned symbolically.[132] Other scholars like Santiago García Navarro, Maria Rosa Gómez, José Luis Meirás, and Federico Zukerfeld, and have tried to situate "El Siluetazo" within Argentinean art history, relating it to other forms of post-dictatorial art or, in the case of Navarro, to the artistic experiments of the 1960s.[133] More recently, scholars have inscribed "El Siluetazo" in other discourses such as the aesthetics of abjection, relational aesthetics, memory, and

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[130] Carlos Lopez Iglesias, "Siluetas," in *El Siluetazo*, eds. Ana Longoni and Gustavo A. Bruzzone (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2008), 325.

[131] Laura Mango and Jorge Warley, "Madres De La Plaza De Mayo: Un Espacio Alternativo Para Los Artistas Plasticos," in *El Siluetazo*, eds. Ana Longoni and Gustavo A. Bruzzone (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2008)., Edward Shaw, ""Siluetas: La Exhibicion Artistica Del Año"," in *El Siluetazo*, eds. Ana Longoni and Gustavo A. Bruzzone (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2008)., Amigo, *Aparicion Con Vida: Las Siluetas De Los Detenidos-Desaparecidos*, Juan Carlos Romero, "Informe Salvaje," in *El Siluetazo*, eds. Ana Longoni and Gustavo A. Bruzzone (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2008).

[132] Gustavo Buntinx, "Desapariciones Forzadas/ Resurreciones Míticas," in *El Siluetazo*, eds. Ana Longoni and Gustavo A. Bruzzone (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2008)., Eduardo Grüner, "La Invisibilidad Estrategica, o La Rendicion Politica De Los Vivos," in *El Siluetazo*, eds. Ana Longoni and Gustavo A. Bruzzone (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2008).

[133] Santiago García Navarro, "El Fuego y Sus Caminos," in *El Siluetazo*, eds. Ana Longoni and Gustavo A. Bruzzone (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2008)., Maria Rosa Gomez, "Marcas Urbanas: Señalizaciones y Duelo Colectivo," *Newsletter Publicacion Electronica De La Facultad De Ciencias Sociales UNICEN*, no. 11. José Luis Meirás, "Transf(H)Erencias: Continuidades y Reinicios En Practicas De Arte De Accion Colectiva y Politica 1983-2005," in *El Siluetazo*, eds. Ana Longoni and Gustavo A. Bruzzone (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2008)., Zukerfeld, *Continuidad De La Línea En El Trazo: De La Silueta a La Mancha.*

performance theory.[134] Given the scope and the aim of this chapter, I will only analyze the first three theoretical approaches.

The Question of Aesthetics

Even though art critics did not recognize at first "El Siluetazo" as an artistic project, early on, the journalist Edward Shaw of the *Buenos Aires Herald* and the artist Juan Carlos Romero identified "El Siluetazo" not only as a political event, but also an aesthetic action.[135] In 1985, the magazine *La Bizca* published in its first issue a group of texts under the title "*Madres de la Plaza de Mayo: un espacio alternativo para los artistas plásticos*." The different documents referred to the art works created parallel to the political protests in the Plaza de Mayo (almost all of them were created after "El Siluetazo"). The issue included a chronicle of the events that took place during "El Siluetazo" written by Guillermo Kexel and a short analytical text by the artist Fernando Bedoya. In the introduction to the issue, Laura Mango and Jorge Warley explain "El Siluetazo" as both a political and aesthetic phenomenon because of its subversion of artistic tradition.[136]

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[134] Martín Guerra Muente, "Poderes De La Perversión y Estética De Lo Abyecto En El Arte Latinoamericano," *Revista Guaraguao* (2008)., Flavia Costa, "De Qué Hablamos Cuando Hablamos De "arte Relacional"," *Ramona*, no. 88 (2009), 9., Estela Schindel, "Siluetas, Rostros, Escraches: Memoria y Performance Alrededor Del Movimiento De Derechos Humanos," in *El Siluetazo*, eds. Ana Longoni and Gustavo A. Bruzzone (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2008)., Vincent Druliolle, "Silhouettes of the Disappeared: Memory, Justice and Human Rights in Post-Authoritarian Argentina," *Human Rights and Human Welfare* 9 (2009), 77., María José Melendo, "Formas De La Memoria En El Arte Postdictatorial," *Ramona*, no. 78 (2008): 25.

[135] Shaw, *"Siluetas: La Exhibicion Artistica Del Año"* 131, Romero, *Informe Salvaje*, 139 .

[136] Mango and Warley, *Madres De La Plaza De Mayo: Un Espacio Alternativo Para Los Artistas Plasticos*, 150.

The 1995 essay "Aparición con vida: las siluetas de los detenidos desaparecidos" by the Argentinean art historian Roberto Amigo is one of the first and most widely quoted analysis of "El Siluetazo."[137] Following the declarations of the artists, Amigo argued that the radical artistic change proposed by "El Siluetazo" resides in the mechanism chosen to create the silhouettes: the participation of the public. He denominated this new type of art *aesthetic actions of political praxis*, interventions in which the participants are unaware of the aesthetic character of their actions. With regard to the social effect that the interaction had on the participants, Amigo proposed that "El Siluetazo" had reconstructed the solidarity that had been broken by the dictatorship. Following this analysis, we can conclude that, in "El Siluetazo," the process is just as important as the objects produced by it. The value of this artistic event goes beyond the ability to impact viewers emotionally and intellectually when they encounter the somber image of a city invaded by the presence of phantasmagoric shadows. The artistic product is not just the resulting image; it encompasses the complete action: the gathering of people in a public space to work together and create collectively a visual expression of a common sentiment.

The reconstruction of the social bonds that had been damaged by political repression is not simply an unintended byproduct of the artistic event. On the contrary, it was one of the ideas that first inspired the artists to create the project. As I mentioned earlier, the fourth objective stated by artists in the proposal was to create an activity that would bring people together days before the protests. This means that the artists were fully aware of the capacity of "El Siluetazo" to

[137] Amigo, *Aparicion Con Vida: Las Siluetas De Los Detenidos-Desaparecidos.*

promote social cohesion. Given the political context, the creation of this social space was an especially defiant and subversive action. If we understand "El Siluetazo" as the complete action and not only the products it created, then it is also possible to assert that it functioned as a political and aesthetic action not only because of its subject matter, but also because of its form.

Even though Shaw, Romero, Mango, Warley, and Amigo recognize that "El Siluetazo" was not just a political but also an aesthetic event, they do not provide a clear definition for the term "aesthetic" or "artistic." In my opinion, the silhouettes function as artistic objects because they exceed a merely functional purpose. In the case of "El Siluetazo," the primary function of the demonstration was to communicate factual information: the protesters were trying to say that there were thirty thousand disappeared people in Argentina and that those responsible should pay for their crimes. In an exclusively political demonstration, protestors would have used purely functional mediums, such as signs, chants, and even their own presence in the Plaza, to communicate this message. But in the case of "El Siluetazo," they created objects that did not just state information, but rather they communicated a variety of meanings through metaphoric forms. The silhouettes were able to condense not only the political situation in Argentina, but also the pain of those affected by state terrorism. The phantasmagoric presence of silhouettes of the disappeared invading Buenos Aires elicited not only an intellectual, but also an emotional response. As a system of expression, "El Siluetazo" allowed the relatives of the disappeared to not only enunciate their anguish, but to actually show it through the use of symbolic forms.

The Symbolism of the Silhouette: Between resurrection and the acknowledgment of death

In addition to the discussion of the political and aesthetic character of "El Siluetazo," scholars have also offered several interpretations about how these images may function. The Peruvian art historian Gustavo Buntinx proposed the idea of a ritual dimension.[138] He explained that, beyond raising awareness about the genocide, "El Siluetazo" brought the disappeared back to a new life. Therefore, Buntinx considers "El Siluetazo" both an experience of insurrection and resurrection.[139] This interpretation coincides with the idea stated by the artists in the initial proposal: the silhouettes would function as reincarnation of the disappeared both making the absent metaphorically present and allowing the disappeared to protest on their own behalf.[140]

In contrast to Buntinx, for Eduardo Grüner, the silhouettes, rather than ritually bringing the disappeared back to life, function as an acknowledgement of death. In the essay "La Invisibilidad Estratégica o la Rendición Política de los Vivos," Grüner examines the problem of the representation of horror and disappeared bodies.[141] He understands "El Siluetazo" as an example of "*representación sustitutiva*" (substitutional representation): the image substitutes the absent body and, in doing so, it restitutes its history and appeals to memory.

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[138] Buntinx, *Desapariciones Forzadas/ Resurreciones Míticas,* 279.
[139] Buntinx arguments rely heavily on Walter Benjamin's notion of aura. Benjamin's aura is described as a "strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be." The mother's relationship to the disappeared (which is embodied in the silhouettes) is an inverse analogy of this concept: proximity through metaphysical distance. Ibid., 260- 261.
[140] Zukerfeld, *Continuidad De La Línea En El Trazo: De La Silueta a La Mancha*, 64.
[141] Grüner, *La Invisibilidad Estrategica, o La Rendicion Politica De Los Vivos,* 297.

He reads the silhouettes as references to the police device of drawing contours with chalk around dead bodies. Even though he asserts that appropriating the methods of the repressive apparatus (in this case the police) is a political gesture, he also believes that it implicitly acknowledges that the disappeared are deceased bodies. Grüner concludes that the silhouettes are figures in which "the representation of the dead body depends on the promotion of the death of the material body or the critical denunciation of that death…[In other words,] the body has to die so that the image can live."[142]

Buntinx's and Grüner's arguments are seemingly contradictory.[143] Nevertheless, these interpretations are not necessarily contradictory. These two polarities constitute the dual nature of the silhouettes. The silhouettes bring back the presence of the disappeared but also highlight the absence of the body. They give back agency to the disappeared and allow them to speak at a moment in time when official discourse denied the genocide.[144] However, in order to denounce the crime, the silhouettes must also announce their own death. In fact, even though Buntinx's argument relies mostly on the idea of the silhouettes as redeemers of life, he also acknowledges the possibility of a dual interpretation. He notes that art historian Roberto Amigo, like Grüner later on, related the silhouettes to police markings on crime scenes. Moreover, Buntinx also notes that the artists claim that

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[142] Ibid., 301.

[143] Ana Longoni and Gustavo Bruzzone characterize them as "inverse readings." Longoni and Bruzzone, *El Siluetazo*, 34.

[144] On April 28th, 1983, only a few months before the first Siluetazo, the military government released the "Final Report" and exit of power. Claiming victory of the Dirty War against subversion, the report, which was read on national television, denied the existence of concentration camps or the perpetration of disappearances. Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror : Argentina and the Legacies of Torture,* 6.

they took the idea of the silhouettes from the pedagogical practice of making children draw the contours of each other's bodies. Buntinx concludes that both interpretations are valid and that "El Siluetazo" "gathers references and connotations that are both vitalistic and forensic"[145]

It is important to note that Grüner's argument was made a posteriori with the benefit of historical perspective and might not be consistent with the original intentionality of the participants in the demonstration. At the time, it was still unclear whether or not the disappeared were dead. The Mothers were still promoting the motto "*Aparición con vida*," which manifests their hope of finding their sons and daughters alive. This also explains their refusal to paste any silhouettes on the ground. The decision of not accepting the death of their children was not just based on their desire to be reunited with their loved ones; it was also a political stance. "*Aparición con vida*" was part of their discourse of resistance to a system that denied responsibility for the disappearances. Even though the official strategy of the Mothers promoted "life", the silhouettes inevitably carry with them the suggestion of death. In fact, during the next "Siluetazo" which took place only a few months after the first, silhouettes were painted on the floor.[146]

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[145] Buntinx, *Desapariciones Forzadas/ Resurreciones Míticas*, 260.

[146] The Siluetazos of December 1983 and March 1984 were not directly organized by Agueberry, Kexel, and Flores. In an interview conducted by Ana Longoni with the musician Fercho Czarny, he claims to be the main organizer of these two events. In this interview, he also explains that it was the artist *Coco* Bedoya who suggested painting silhouettes on the ground. Czarny claims that he is a rock star who knows very little about politics; therefore, he did not know whether this was suggested for practical or political reasons. Either way, the fact that silhouettes were painted on the floor shortly after the first Siluetazo demonstrates that, intended or not, the silhouettes connote the acknowledgment of death. Ana Longoni , "Entrevista a Fercho Czarny "Un Woodstock De Protesta,"" in *El Siluetazo*, eds. Ana Longoni and Gustavo A. Bruzzone (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2008), 119-124.

This duality, instead of being a contradiction, is precisely the essential quality that makes the silhouettes an appropriate and faithful representation of the disappeared because this tension between life and death is also characteristic of the state of the disappeared.[147] The disappeared are neither alive nor dead. Their death cannot be confirmed but it is also impossible to prove that they are still living. For their relatives, the absence of a body indicates the possibility of death, but that same absence is what gives them hope of finding their loved ones alive. In other words, the absence of the body generates both the possibility of life and death. Both the disappeared and the silhouettes share this liminal condition, in one case created by an absence (the missing body) and in the other by a presence (the representation of the missing body).

The ability of the silhouettes to reproduce this duality is what makes them a powerful representation and an effective political gesture. Beyond trying to represent the physical appearance of the disappeared, "El Siluetazo" was able to mimic the condition of the disappeared. Other types of representations, such as photographs, are unable to reproduce this condition because they were taken at another time in life, prior to the disappearance. As Julio Flores explains, the

[147] Emilio Crenzel is one of the authors that has explained the liminal condition of the disappeared and the effect that this condition has on the mourning process: "As the disappeared occupied a space that was somewhere between life and death, the basic social frameworks of time, space, and language that their relatives, friends, and acquaintances would normally have used to evoke them were fractured. The linear progression of time and life's natural culmination in death were suspended, defying the subjective differentiation between past and present and generating constantly renewed cycles of distress and hope. Even if the family and friends of the disappeared imagined that they were being held captive, they did not know where they were held and therefore lacked a spatial representation of their captivity. Lastly, in most cases, the absence of a body or grave completely blurred the distinction that cemeteries create between the world of the living and the world of the dead, and prevented the bereaved from practicing rites –such as wakes and funerals –that helped process loss." Crenzel, *Memory of the Argentina Disappearances : The Political History of Nunca más,* 16-17.

silhouettes are the visualization of an idea, of the word "disappeared" that, up until then, did not have a corresponding image.[148] This statement is especially relevant because the Mothers had systematically used photographs of their disappeared sons and daughters in their demonstrations since 1977. Notwithstanding, Flores asserts that there were not visual parallels to the word disappeared.[149] This means that Flores is implicitly noting that photographs are registers of individuals during their life and that the silhouettes are images people in their present state of disappearance.

Sharing the ambiguous existential state of the disappeared transforms the silhouettes from a lifeless symbol into active presence. Because of the analogous relationship with the disappeared, the silhouettes acquire the uncanny ability to gaze back at the viewer. The press reported that people "people manifested discomfort or oddness provoked by the feeling of being watched, confronted by those faceless figures."[150] This capacity to engage the viewers and to act not just as an image, but also as an active presence makes the silhouettes one of the most compelling representations political violence in Argentina.

"El Siluetazo" in Dialogue with Argentinean Conceptualism

Beyond understanding how the silhouettes function and what their symbolic meaning was, it is essential to situate this artistic event within Argentine art history and more specifically, Argentine conceptual practices. Recently, some

[148] Adrián Pérez, "Faltaba la imagen del desaparecido," *Página/12,* September 6th, 2010, http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-152664-2010-09-06.html.
[149] Longoni and Bruzzone, *El Siluetazo*, 52.
[150] Ibid., 30.

scholars have studied the intersections between "El Siluetazo" and more recent examples of political street art like *El Escrache* or the street signals of *Grupo de Arte Callejero*.[151] There are evident similarities between these contemporary practices and "El Siluetazo;" nevertheless, one of the most provocative comparisons is the avant-garde collective of the 1960s, Tucumán Arde. In the essay "El Fuego y sus Caminos," Santiago García Navarro offers a succinct analysis of the relationship between these two artistic events.[152] He notes that there is continuity between these 1960s conceptual practices and "El Siluetazo." However, he focuses mainly on the differences between the two. He argues that, unlike Tucumán Arde, "El Siluetazo" does not emerge from an anti-institutional avant-garde program, neither is it the product of an elaborate plan of action nor as part of the revolutionary fight. He goes on to explain that, unlike Tucumán Arde, "El Siluetazo" did not dissolve art into politics. Instead, it defined aesthetics as inseparable from politics, while maintaining its potential as the engine of resistance.

García Navarro's mention of Tucumán Arde as an antecedent of "El Siluetazo" is quite accurate. [153] However, his analysis seems to fall short in the

[151] Maria Rosa Gómez, Federico Zukerfeld, and José Luis Meirás. These street performances and conceptual actions became widely popular in the second part of the 1990s. "El Escrache" consisted of a surprise action where the houses of the former military personnel were signaled through the use of graffiti, flyers, and street performances as the residence of a person guilty of acts of genocide. Similarly, el Grupo de Arte Callejero creates street signs that look like official traffic signs to mark the residences of repressors or the former clandestine concentration camps.
[152] García Navarro, *El Fuego y Sus Caminos*, 338.
[153] Julio Flores in his essay "Siluetas" also acknowledges this parallelism. Even though Flores does not compare directly Tucumán Arde and El Siluetazo, his mentioning of the antecedent and its characteristics demonstrates that the artists saw a correlation between the two event and that they had in mind the theoretical issues addressed by artists in the 1960s. Julio Flores writes: "¿qué participación en la estética del espacio público tienen derecho a tener los que no ejercen necesariamente presiones y poder sobre el estado, o fueron derrotados absolutamente?... Pero

assessment of the theoretical propositions behind "El Siluetazo." García Navarro fails to recognize that even though "El Siluetazo" did not share the revolutionary ardor of the late 60s, it is still an anti-institutional reaction to a capitalist system. Julio Flores makes this clear when he explains the motivations behind the artistic action. He explains that "it began to be indispensable to answer with our own production means, like any other worker, to the capitalist culture and the art that we felt was being imposed by the National Reorganization Process."[154] In other words, even though "El Siluetazo" was not as directly anti-institutional like Tucumán Arde, Aguerreberry, Kexel, and Flores still conceived it as a reaction to the cultural systems enforced by the dictatorship.

As García Navarro points out, another similarity between these two aesthetic actions is their interest in the dissolution of the barriers that separate art and life. Longoni and Bruzzone have pointed out that "El Siluetazo" revives the utopian ideal of integration of life and art that interested artists in the 1960s.[155] Only a year after the event, the critic Edward Shaw described "El Siluetazo" as "*arte es vida, llevada a cabo aquí en su más alto grado*" or "Art is life, taken here to its last consequences."[156] However, as noted, García Navarro considers that there are important differences between both actions in their assessment of aesthetics. He argues that Tucumán Arde dissolved art and politics completely

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antes de que el país ardiera los artistas habían mostrado al Tucumán Arde con su formato alternativo, independencia autogestiva y el apoyo de los sindicatos más combativos de la época." Flores, *Siluetas*, 85. "Cuando otros creadores toman hoy como paradigmas realizaciones como Tucumán Arde y el Siluetazo, están señalando de donde viene el camino y preguntándose hacia donde se sigue" Ibid., 106.

[154] In this essay, Flores emphasizes the relationship between El Siluetazo and cultural politics. In fact, this quote is preceded by an analysis of censorship and the cultural field during the dictatorship. Ibid., 89-90.

[155] Longoni and Bruzzone, *El Siluetazo*, 43.

[156] Shaw, *"Siluetas: La Exhibicion Artistica Del Año"*, 135.

and, unlike "El Siluetazo", it did not maintain the potential of aesthetics.[157] Perhaps, García Navarro reads more easily the aesthetics in "El Siluetazo" because this event produced concrete objects: the silhouettes. Tucumán Arde on the other hand did not create such concrete products, but this does not mean that it was void of aesthetic potential. Even though the exhibitions in Rosario and Buenos Aires were humble, Tucumán Arde tried to engage the viewer in a multisensory experience. Bitter coffee was served as a metaphor for the closing of the sugar refineries, the lights were shut down in intervals of time that corresponded to the death of a child in Tucumán from malnutrition, the walls were covered with newspaper collages created by Leon Ferrari, documentaries produced by the participants were shown, and recorded interviews were played.[158] In sum, Tucumán Arde, not unlike "El Siluetazo," deliberately used metaphoric and visual devices to communicate with its audience. In both cases, the use of aesthetics is the vehicle to transmit a political message.

Moreover, the aesthetic potential of both "El Siluetazo" and Tucumán Arde does not reside exclusively in the objects or exhibitions they produced. These two projects were able to create aesthetic experiences that go beyond visuality. They transformed social interactions into aesthetic products. "El Siluetazo" and Tucumán Arde are collective experiences in which people worked together for a common objective, producing a subversive message collectively. In a context of state repression and systematic violence, these two artistic actions successfully created a diverse network of people that came together to confront

[157] García Navarro, *El Fuego y Sus Caminos*, 338.
[158] Longoni and Mestman, *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde" : Vanguardia artística y política En El '68 Argentino*, 167-168.

authority. In the case of Tucumán Arde, the artists collaborated with sociologists, unions, and the residents of Tucumán that were being affected by the closing of small sugar mills. "El Siluetazo" convened through the Mothers all of civil society, but especially activist groups, students, and artists. The restoration of social connections and the promotion of solidarity and togetherness is perhaps the most important aesthetic quality of these two art works.

Finally, another aspect in which García Navarro's comparison that fails to capture the nuance of these events is his claim that "El Siluetazo" is not part of an elaborate plan of action. Reading the artists' proposal and the origin of the project, it becomes clear that indeed "El Siluetazo" took a great deal of planning and discussion. Even though there certainly is an element of spontaneity, especially in the way the event was carried out, the artists carefully planned the experience and had explicit intentions about its outcome. Since the beginning, "El Siluetazo" was conceived as an aesthetic action; as noted, it was originally meant to be presented at an art exhibition. Additionally, as with Tucumán Arde, behind "El Siluetazo" there were complex theoretical questions: how to integrate art and life, how to create an artistic response to state terrorism and avoid censorship, how to create a collective system of expression, etc. Furthermore, the artists were aware of the metaphoric potential of the silhouettes and how they could represent the presence of an absence.[159]

While using different methods, Tucumán Arde, and "El Siluetazo" were striving to raise awareness of state violence. Tucumán Arde sought to create a *circuit of counter information*. Their premise was to gather data from primary

[159] Aguerreberry, Flores and Kexel, *Las Siluetas*, 63.

sources about the true situation of Tucumán and contrast it with that which was being broadcast by the media. In other words, their work was informational and didactic. "El Siluetazo," on the other hand, was meant to be a *system of expression:* the artists wanted to give protesters a new form of expression.[160] After years of censorship under a military regime, giving people tools of expression was truly a political act. Ultimately, both projects were trying to make visible something that was invisible in the discourse of the military or the narratives presented by the media. Unveiling the inner workings of cultural and political institutions and revealing information that is concealed from the public is, in fact, a common objective of media art, Tucumán Arde, and "El Siluetazo."

Even though media art, Tucumán Arde, and "El Siluetazo" seek to deconstruct the official narrative and create a counter discourse, the three of them do so through the use of different conceptual strategies. Media art focused specifically on the cultural sphere and the relationship between media and the art world, using *false information* to reveal the deceptive relationship between reality and broadcast information. Tucumán Arde also sought to make visible the discrepancy between reality and official discourse; however, in this case, artists focused on one specific political issue and they used *factual information* to demonstrate the deliberate manipulation of the public opinion carried out by the military regime. "El Siluetazo" did not intend to raise awareness through the presentation of false or factual information, but rather it intended to impact the audience by giving *visual expression* to the statistics calculated by human rights organizations. Their strategy was a large scale appropriation of city so that the

[160] García Navarro, *El Fuego y Sus Caminos*, 338.

public, the government, and the media could no longer ignore the violent disappearance of thirty thousand people. The strategy of shocking the viewer had perhaps a closer resemblance to the conceptual art of the early 1970s. For example, the piece that caused the closure of the exhibit "Arte de Sistemas," "The Underground Reality," used the disturbing pictures of Nazi prisoners to represent the national massacres carried out by the government.[161] "El Siluetazo" also shares with the art of this period the intention of appropriating public spaces. Removing the art from the galleries and inserting it into public spaces certainly increased the impact of the work, widened the audience, and contributed to closing the gap between art and life.

Interestingly, over the course of three decades, the artists involved in media art, Tucumán Arde, "Arte de Sistemas II," and "El Siluetazo" chose conceptualism as the vehicle to express political dissent. Undoubtedly, artists in Argentina were aware of international trends and were eager to participate in an international art dialogue. But at the same time, conceptualism itself as an approach or artistic idiom can be conducive to this type of expression. Its form is already intrinsically subversive of the art establishment, allowing artists to transfer these oppositional strategies into political commentaries.

It is significant to analyze the relationship of "El Siluetazo," Tucumán Arde, and the art exhibited at "Arte de Sistemas" because it ultimately demonstrates that there is continuity between these practices. They are all created as a response to state violence; they share similar theoretical questions, and

[161] Longoni, *El Arte, Cuando La Violencia Tomó La Calle. Apuntes Para Una Estética De La Violencia*, 6.

methods; and they all ended up blurring the boundaries between art and politics. Lopez Anaya argues that the optimism of the 1960s came to an end with the collapse of utopian revolutionary projects.[162] I argue that the promise of democracy and the end of the dictatorship in the 1980s created perhaps a similar historical context that allowed for the revitalization of political conceptual art. However, that optimism collapsed again and the promise of change and justice was not fulfilled. In the following decade, a new generation of artists would respond to this new era of political disenchantment.

[162] López Anaya, *Historia Del Arte Argentino*, 312.

CHAPTER 3

MARCELO BRODSKY: PHOTOGRAPHY AND MEMORY

Due to the loss of credibility of the military regime in their defeat in the Falkland/Malvinas Islands war, the persistent economic crisis, and the pressure of the public opinion, the military government was compelled to announce the transition to democracy. On April 28th, 1983, the exit of power was announced on national television through a final report that claimed the victory over the Dirty War against subversion and shamelessly denied the existence of concentration camps or disappearances. In December of 1983 a democratically elected president, Raúl Alfonsín of the Radical Civil Union Party, took office.[163] That same year, Alfonsín's government created the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared or CONADEP. This entity was in charge of gathering information about the disappearances through testimonies of relatives, friends, and survivors of abduction and torture. Initially, it had been stipulated that the Commission would function for only six months, but the number of people to interview was so large that this deadline was extended to a year. The work of the Commission culminated in 1984 with the publication of the report *Nunca Más* (Never again). Crenzel explains that the report was successful in its collection of data and testimonies, but it did not denounce specifically who was responsible for the disappearances.[164]

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[163] Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror : Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 13-14.

[164] However, Crenzel also notes that the report was used as the backbone strategy of the prosecution during the trials of the military juntas, and the court legitimized the report as a

In a climate of political instability and preoccupied by the possibility of a military backlash, Alfonsín decided to put on trial only those that could be deemed most responsible. "The Due Obedience Law" allowed lower ranking military officers to claim that they had merely followed orders, and thus not be prosecuted as perpetrators of crimes. However, the nine former commanders of the first three Military Juntas were publicly charged and tried.[165] Jorge Rafael Videla and Emilio Eduardo Massera, two of the junta leaders more directly responsible, were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment. Alfonsín declared February 23rd, 1987 as the "*Punto Final*" or the cutoff date for all trials related to the Dirty War. Four hundred repressors benefited from "Due Obedience Law" and four hundred and fifty torturers or enforcers from the cutoff date.

The process of finding and prosecuting those responsible for the disappearances was severely dismantled during the neoliberal government of Carlos Menem (1989-1999). Menem granted presidential pardons to senior military officers, including Videla and Massera. He claimed that "Argentina lived through a dirty war, but the war is over. The pardons will definitely close a sad and black stage of Argentine history." [166]

In the midst of inadequate governmental action, the need for addressing the history of the disappeared and for creating strategies of collective memory

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truthful account. Crenzel, *Memory of the Argentina Disappearances : The Political History of Nunca más*, 2.

[165] As Crenzel notes the prosecution used the CONADEP report as their backbone strategy. The report was thus legitimized by the court as a truthful account of official acceptance. Ibid., 3.

[166] Menem's presidency was also marked by economic policies that benefited elites. He and his minister of Economy, Domingo Cavallo, imposed strict neoliberal policies and dismantled Argentina's state-run businesses and industries. Diana Taylor , *Disappearing Acts : Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 14.

was stirred by the commemoration of the twenty year anniversary of the start of the dictatorship in 1996.[167] One of the artists who responded to this call for remembrance and started working on the subject of the disappeared was Marcelo Brodsky. Brodsky had been living in Spain since in 1977 when he left Argentina after an attempted kidnapping by the military.[168] His brother Fernando was not so fortunate and was disappeared in 1979 at the young age of 22. Both Brodsky and Fernando were young graduates from the *Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires* and were active in political organizations, a very common practice amongst people their age.[169] In 1995 Brodsky moved permanently back to Buenos Aires and started creating art pieces focused on the issue of memory and remembrance and the importance of these two in the context of political repression and state terrorism.

Brodsky's work is mostly rooted in photography, but he combines it with elements of performance, installation, and video art. His artistic process starts by researching into his personal history and the political history of the dictatorship.

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[167] Marcelo Brodsky was strongly influenced by both the anniversary of the start of the dictatorship and by the declarations of Alfonso Scilingo about the death flights. Interview, *Nexo*, 119.

[168] In 1977 the military tried to kidnap Brodsky. He was able to escape thanks to a passerby who tried to defend him by shooting a gun. He fled to Brazil and eventually made his way to Spain. After studying photography and economics in Spain, he returned to Buenos Aires in 1985. In Argentina, he had his first professional exhibit entitled *Palabras* and he joined the artistic circle of photographers of his generation (Marco Lopez, Res, Gabriel Valansi, etc.). He decided to move back to Spain in 1989 due to the difficult economic situation in the country. Nicolás Guagnini, "Interview: Marcelo Brodsky," in *Nexo : Un Ensayo Fotográfico* (Buenos Aires: Marca : Centro Cultural Recoleta, 2001), 119.

[169] El Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires, commonly known as "El Buenos Aires", is a prestigious preparatory school that since 1911 functions as a dependency of the University of Buenos Aires. The students of the Buenos Aires are widely known for their academic excellence and their political activism. Due to this active engagement of the student body with national politics, many students and alumnae from this institution were disappeared during the Dirty War.

Based on his findings, he creates pieces that, while preserving an important aesthetic and artistic value, give the viewer an insight into Argentina's past and the horrors of state terrorism. The outcome of this interaction with the past is twofold: it allows the honoring and remembrance of those who lost their lives under the regime, but it also opens a space for dialogue and incites viewers to discuss these political histories and how they affect the present. In this chapter I will discuss two of Brodsky's photographic essays, *Buena Memoria and Nexos*, and the 2005 project *Memoria en Construcción: debate sobre la ESMA*. I will also analyze the dialogue between Brodsky's work and earlier conceptual practices that responded to state violence such as Tucumán Arde and "El Siluetazo."

Buena Memoria

Buena Memoria is the photographic essay that launched Brodsky's career as a professional photographer and earned him international acclaim.[170] Brodsky claims that this work sprang from the need to resolve his relationship with his country, his identity, his history, his exile, and the memory of the impact of the dictatorship.[171] As Brodsky explains in the catalogue of the exhibition, the artistic process started when he returned to Argentina and found an old high school photograph from 1967.[172] He decided to try to find his classmates and organize a high school reunion. He printed a large version of the original photograph and used it as a backdrop to take portraits of his classmates (Figure 12). His search for

[170] According to Guido Indij, *Buena Memoria* is the best travelled exhibition ever by an Argentinean artist. As of 2006, it had been exhibited on over a hundred occasions in twenty different countries. Brodsky et al., *Buena Memoria : Un Ensayo Fotográfico*, cover.
[171] Ibid., 119.
[172] Brodsky et al., *Buena Memoria : Un Ensayo Fotográfico*, 20.

his old friends took him to Spain and New York. In some cases, he could not transport the large high school photograph, so instead he used a smaller version and included it in the background of the portraits.

Brodsky's project developed further when the high school authorities of the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires decided to honor the memory of the alumnae who had been killed during the dictatorship and asked Brodsky to participate in the commemorative event called *Puente a la Memoria* or Memory Bridge.[173] The idea of this exhibition inspired Brodsky to write on the enlarged high school photograph he had been using as a backdrop for the high school portraits. He crossed out with a red crayon the faces of the two classmates that were killed by the regime, circled with colors the faces of some others, and wrote notes about the present lives of all of his classmates (Figure 13).[174]

Most of the annotations on the photographs simply mention some biographical detail about each classmate. For example, Brodsky writes: "Gabriel works as an audiovisual producer" or "Silvia is very tall, like she always was. She is a physical therapist." These statements seem to acknowledge how his classmates went on with their lives after the dictatorship. However, other annotations reveal how the lives of his classmates were marked by death, trauma,

[173] Alejandro Margulis , Guillermina Perot, and Guillermo Báez , *Reconstrucciones De Desaparecidos* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Instituto Movilizador de Fondos Cooperativos, 2002), 42.

[174] The objective of this event was to remember the disappeared and their lives. Garaño and Pertot explain that "the idea was that each disappeared would become more than a name, to have their identity reconstructed through photos, poetry, or even report cards. Along with these panels, Marcelo Brodsky exhibited the picture of his 1967 first year class… The giant picture was the starting point of the photographic essay Buena Memoria –published in 1997- and of the traveling exhibition that is touring around the world." [Translation by author] Santiago Garaño and Werner Pertot , *La Otra Juvenilia : Militancia y Represión En El Colegio Nacional De Buenos Aires, 1971-1986* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2002), 171.

and exile. Brodsky writes about one of his disappeared classmates: "Martín was the first to be taken away. He never met his son, Pablo, who is now twenty years old. He [Martín] is my friend, the best friend." In other statements Brodsky describes how the dictatorship caused an emotional trauma for some of his classmates, and how others had to leave the country.[175]

The markings on the photograph have a sketch like quality. They seem to be quickly, expressively, and carelessly made. Brodsky uses red, green, light blue, yellow, purple, and white, giving the otherwise black and white photograph a splash of color. His use of color or the random circling of faces seems to be arbitrary except for the color red that is reserved for those who were killed by the dictatorship and purple, which marks Alfredo, the only presently active political militant. The sentences that describe what happened to each of his classmates also share the same careless quality of the markings. The grammatical structures of the sentences are very simple and direct and oftentimes they use colloquial language. For example, in his own portrait Marcelo writes: "I am a photographer and I miss Martín." This informality, the sketch-like quality, and the use of vibrant colors make the markings seem to be those of a teenager, reinforcing the nostalgic feel of the photograph and emphasizing the fact that a great number of the disappeared people were of a very young age.

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[175] Sentences about trauma: "Jorge had a hard time and that fucked him up." "Gustavo prefers not to show up because of the past." "Eduardo was detained he was released and today is an analyst." "Patricia pulled herself together but she was also hurt." "Silvia does not want to know anything about us. Why would that be?"
Sentences about exile: "Damián works with computers and he returned from Peru." "Alvaro is good looking. He has five children and lives in Madrid." "Erik got fed up. He lives in Madrid." "Ruth lives in Vienna." "Ana went to live in Israel twenty years ago. Her first son speaks Spanish well. The second one some. The third only Hebrew." "Leonor escaped and returned to Buenos Aires not too long ago."

However, Brodsky's work goes beyond a simplistic or melancholic rendering of memory. David Foster explains that the writing in the photograph subverts the typical nostalgic nature of the high school portrait and inscribes it with a political process.[176] The result of this inscription or contextualization is a photograph where past and present collide. The images of the young students establish an indexical relationship with the past, and Brodsky's writing brings the present into the space of memory.[177] As Elizabeth Edwards notes, photographs are windows to the past, bearers of memory that give their viewers access to a past either real or imagined. In the case of *Buena Memoria*, Brodsky provides images (the individual portraits of his classmates) and text that allow the viewer to gain access to the present as well. The end result is a product that clearly shows how the past and the Argentinean dictatorship, has affected the present. Brodsky transforms the photograph from a personal memento into public evidence of the cruelty of state terrorism. The personal histories of those in the portrait are revealed to the audience and those stories become a testimony of the violent history of Argentina. In other words, the information that the artist attaches to the original photograph is what allows the viewer to understand the portrait in a new light and ultimately, to reflect upon "the nightmare of history in which these individuals are frozen." [178]

Similar to the written annotations and marks, when the photograph became part of the commemorative event *Puente a la Memoria* at the Colegio

[176] Foster, *Urban Photography in Argentina : Nine Artists of the Post-Dictatorship Era*, 15.
[177] Elizabeth Edwards, "Photographs as Objects of Memory," in *The Object Reader*, ed. Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 332 and 334.
[178] Foster, *Urban Photography in Argentina : Nine Artists of the Post-Dictatorship Era*, 14.

Nacional de Buenos Aires another layer of meaning was added. The day of the event, the organizers read a list of the names of the disappeared alumnae.[179] The audio of this reading became part of the *Buena Memoria* installation and it is played in the background wherever the photograph is exhibited. Thus, the audio adds a performative aspect to the photograph and one more level of complexity to the network of times and spaces that collide in the image.[180] Moreover, the commemoration of the alumnae was a historical event in and of itself. *Puente a la Memoria* was the first official event organized by the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires, a prestigious public institution, in honor of the memory of the alumnae that were disappeared by the dictatorship.[181] Therefore, this audio is also evidence of the historical process of official acknowledgment of the violent past and the recuperation of memory by Argentine political and cultural institutions.

Brodsky's project did not conclude with the exhibition at the Colegio Nacional. After participating in *Puente a la Memoria*, he was invited to publish a catalogue for the exhibition.[182] The publication of this book allowed Brodsky to expand his research into his personal past, so he added a lot of material that was not originally in the exhibit. The catalogue included the class photograph and the individual portraits Brodsky took in the mid-nineties. He complemented each portrait with a short paragraph of poetic descriptions about the present lives of his

[179] Brodsky et al., *Buena Memoria : Un Ensayo Fotográfico*, 62.
[180] In his essay about Brodsky's project, David Foster describes the various layers of *Buena Memoria* and the dense networks of times and spaces that Brodsky brings together. Foster, *Urban Photography in Argentina : Nine Artists of the Post-Dictatorship Era*, 21-22.
[181] As Andrés Larroque, one of the student leaders who spoke at the event, mentioned in his speech: "today is a historic day because it's the first time that the high school has paid this kind of tribute. I think we have achieved with Puente a la Memoria a level of transmission of feeling that was only possible thanks to the testimonies of all the generations. " Garaño and Pertot, *La Otra Juvenilia : Militancia y Represión En El Colegio Nacional De Buenos Aires, 1971-1986*, 171.
[182] Margulis, Perot, and Báez, *Reconstrucciones De Desaparecidos*, 43.

classmates, about their personalities, or similar remarks about how the dictatorship affected them.[183]

The second section of the catalogue is specifically about *Puente a la Memoria.* Brodsky documented the exhibit by taking pictures of the reflections of the viewers on the glass of the 1967 class photograph as they contemplated the piece. He included these pictures in the catalogue along with striking testimonies of current students from the Colegio Nacional who attended the event (Figure 14). These portraits captured clearly the expressions of the viewers as they examined the photo. In fact, we can assume that the artist deliberately chose to include in the catalogue those portraits in which viewers clearly seemed troubled, pensive, or disturbed. Brodsky explains that these portraits "constitute a fundamental part of this project, as they represent the instant that experience is transmitted from one generation to another."[184] In other words, he was trying to represent the exhibition as a cathartic episode in which students learned about and confronted their nation's past.

Brodsky also uses interesting visual strategies in order to express the solemnity and significance of this encounter. The 1967 photograph was hung in front of a large window, so that the light coming from behind the photograph illuminates the viewer. Brodsky captured this light effect in the portraits, rendering the viewers literally and metaphorically enlightened (Figure 15).

[183] Brodsky admits that one of his recurrent obsessions is the relationship between word and image. In 1982 he published a book of poems entitled *Parábolas*. His interest in words is very evident in this catalog. Almost all of the pictures have a descriptive caption where the photographer expresses personal details, ideas, and emotions. He also included a poem dedicated to his deceased friend Martín.

[184] Marcelo Brodsky , *Memoria En Construcción : El Debate Sobre La ESMA* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: La Marca, 2005), 57.

Brodsky also artfully collides past, present, and future in these portraits of the exhibit. Underneath the main class photograph, the more recent portraits of the 1967 class were hung. Brodsky angled some of the photographs of the viewers so that these individual portraits of his classmates would also be included in the shot. The result is a photograph in which representations of past, present, and future come together: the 1967 class photograph represents the past, the individual portraits of his classmates represent the present, and the young faces of the viewers contemplating these two representations could be understood as a metaphor of the future.

Brodsky dedicated the last two sections of the book to his best friend Martín (Figure 16) and his brother Fernando, both of them victims of the military regime. Again, the artist used pictures from his family albums along with poetic captions (Figure 17). These pictures function as a memorial for the victims but also as evidence of the entanglement of personal and political histories, and how the dictatorship changed people's lives.

The process of reconstructing the victims as real individuals is especially relevant in the Argentine context at this time when, at least on an institutional level, the mourning process was being denied by the granting of pardons to the responsible military figures. Menem's administration in the 1990's proposed a discourse of reconciliation that denied the official acknowledgement of the horrible atrocities carried out by the dictatorship and the culpability of their perpetrators. This inappropriate response from the government created a need to reconstruct the past on other cultural sectors, like the visual arts. Moreover, the

fact that most of the victims were "disappeared" also reinforced this frustration: without a body to mourn, the grieving process was disrupted. *Buena Memoria* is a response to this need for remembrance, for accepting the death of the disappeared, and for making public the injustice, the violence, and the suffering inflicted by the dictatorship.

Restoring the individuality of the victims is also an important part of Brodsky's project. As Martín Camparós explains, the disappeared had been transformed into "collective figures without a personal history," and therefore, it was necessary to acknowledge that before being disappeared, the victims had a life.[185] By showing images of their lives, Brodsky is able to bring back the personhood, agency, and dignity of the disappeared.[186] This recuperation of memory based on personal experience is arguably more effective than other modes of remembrance. As Andreas Huyssen explains, official monuments are inevitably toppled or become invisible.[187] Quoting Nietzche, Huyssen argues that only that which does not cease to hurt remains in memory, therefore, Brodsky's photography is effective as a mnemonic device because it stems from a deep hurt and communicates his experience.[188]

The pictures of Fernando that Brodsky appropriates from his family albums present a double meaning. Besides being images of remembrance, Brodsky deliberately chose pictures that can be read as premonitions of the grim

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[185] Brodsky et al., *Buena Memoria : Un Ensayo Fotográfico*, 9.
[186] David Foster argues that the "restoration of agency to the disappeared is the objective of Brodsky." Foster, *Urban Photography in Argentina : Nine Artists of the Post-Dictatorship Era*, 17.
[187] Andreas Huyssen, "El Arte Mnemonico De Marcelo Brodsky," in *Nexo : Un Ensayo Fotográfico* (Buenos Aires: Marca : Centro Cultural Recoleta, 2001), 11.
[188] Ibid., 11.

future of his brother. Horacio González argues that "Marcelo Brodsky's art seeks to free from within the photograph, the hidden itinerary of destiny, as if we were before an ultra-realist act, of an almost physical nature."[189] This revelation of the future in the images of the past is evident in almost all the pictures of Fernando, sometimes as a ghostly atmosphere and other times through political imagery within the pictures.

A clear example of this revelation of "the hidden itinerary of destiny" is a picture where Fernando, as a young boy, is sitting on his bed with his legs and hands crossed (Figure 17). His face is blurred due to the lengthy exposure. The picture was taken by Brodsky with an old camera his father had given him.[190] Brodsky explains that he intentionally chose the images that reflected more appropriately the situation he was trying to show.[191] The erasure of the facial features gives Fernando a ghostly appearance which "seems to be a prelude, an anticipation of the disappearance."[192]

In some other photographs, the setting or other symbols within the photograph are what seems to be directly related to the tragic history of Fernando. For example, in one of the pictures, Fernando is standing in front of a monument to Simon Bolivar (Figure 18). Brodsky writes in the caption:

> Fernando, already a teenager with his hands in his pockets, passes before a youth power graffiti that says: "Peace is Strength". In the marble, the scene of an oath.

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[189] Horacio González, "Mármol, Imágen y Martirio," in *Nexo : Un Ensayo Fotográfico* (Buenos Aires: Marca : Centro Cultural Recoleta, 2001), 14.
[190] Brodsky et al., *Buena Memoria : Un Ensayo Fotográfico*, 71.
[191] Margulis, Perot, and Báez, *Reconstrucciones De Desaparecidos*, 45.
[192] Ibid., 45.

> Why is Bolivar blindfolded with a handkerchief and why does an Argentine flag hang from his horse's neck?
> Justice, the sword, blindness, history, power, peace and strength turn around my brother in a strange game of premonitions.[193]

The words justice, power, and peace become especially significant when one takes into account that both Marcelo and Fernando were politically active.[194] For example, Marcelo, who graduated in 1973 from the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires, was part of a militant group from that institution named ARS8 (*Acción Revolucionaria Socialista* 8 de Octubre or Socially Revolutionary Action October 8th) named after the date of the murder of the Argentine revolutionary Che Guevara. The same connection between symbols of militancy and the politically active future of the brothers is present in the pictures of Fernando wearing t-shirts with the iconic image "El Che" (Figure 19). Within Brodsky's exhibition, these family photos become omens of the political murder of his brother.

The class picture from 1967 and these photographs of Fernando demonstrate that Brodsky's artistic process goes beyond simply repurposing images from his family albums. The artist, who is not the author of most of these photos, appropriates these pictures and manipulates them. He attaches to these images of the past a specific political message that is rooted in the present. The writing in the 1967 class photograph transforms a high school memento into a document of the pernicious acts of the dictatorship. Similarly, the pictures of Fernando become the uncanny proof that political repression and state terrorism destroyed the life of a young man.

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[193] Brodsky et al., *Buena Memoria : Un Ensayo Fotográfico*, 73.
[194] Garaño and Pertot, *La Otra Juvenilia : Militancia y Represión En El Colegio Nacional De Buenos Aires, 1971-1986*, 88 and 202.

Moreover, Brodsky inscribes these images with specific personal narratives, the story of his brother and the stories of his high school friends and the effects of the dictatorship in their lives. By taking the images from the family album, adding written references, and bringing them into the exhibition space, Brodsky is able to attach new meanings to found objects. He transforms the anonymous images of young people into a visual history of political violence in Argentina. It is the clever and poetic combination of word and image that gives Brodsky's work its potency. As the artist explains, his work is, "a tool to convert [the disappeared] into real accessible people."[195] Attaching a narrative to these images and contextualizing them restores the agency that the victims lost when they were disappeared.

Nexo: Objects as Memory

If in *Buena Memoria* the emphasis is on the personal past and the stories of the lives of his childhood friends, in other projects Brodsky has focused on larger historical events. An example of this historical research is the photographic essay *Nexo* published in 2001. Like *Buena Memoria*, *Nexo* is not the catalogue of a specific exhibition, but rather the compilation of several projects that deal with the same issues.[196]

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[195] Richard Leslie, "The Disappeared." *Art Nexus* 6, no. 65 (August, 2007): 54.

[196] The book does not provide specific information about the exhibition of the works. It indicates that "The Storeroom" was part of the exhibition "La Desaparicion: Arte y Politica" at the Centro Cultural Recoleta in Buenos Aires in 1999. Another installation, "The Condemned of the Earth," was part of the 2000 book fair also in Buenos Aires. "Los Campos II" was part of a temporary urban installation in Buenos Aires in 2001. There is no information about the other pieces. Marcelo Brodsky , *Nexo : Un Ensayo Fotográfico* (Buenos Aires: Marca : Centro Cultural Recoleta, 2001).

In most of the pieces included in *Nexo*, Brodsky shifts his attention from the portraits of the victims or the disappeared, and, instead, he takes an interest in objects. These objects, which are often decaying or are traces of something else, have a strong connection to the history of the dictatorship and can be read as material evidence or reminders of the atrocities of the regime. Brodsky seems to be interested in exploiting the symbolic potential of the objects that outlived the military government. This is the case of the installation "The Condemned of the Earth." (Figure 20)

In this installation, the artist arranged four decaying books in a panel box. The books rest on a layer of black soil. All four volumes are highly damaged and it is only possible to read the titles of three them: *For Marx* by Louis Althusser, *Contemporary Industrial Society* by Eric Fromm, Irving Louis Horowitz, André Gorz, Herbet Marcuse, and Víctor Flores Olea, and *Condemned of the Earth* by Franz Fanon. Brodsky explains the origin of the books in a text attached to the piece:

> These four books were buried during the military dictatorship. They stayed underground for nearly twenty years, in the garden at Nélida Valdéz and Oscar Elissamburu's house in Mar del Plata… Today unburied by their children, the books are a testimony to what we had to go thorough… Their pages, words, and signs have been transformed into the memory of what they were, and into a testimony salvaged by a new generation.[197]

The fear of being classified as subversive and the possibility of being found guilty of supporting the leftist revolutionaries led this couple to the desperate act of burying their own possessions. Brodsky's statement about the

[197] Ibid.,77.

piece seems to imply that there are several dimensions to these objects: they function as traces of a personal past, as historical evidence of the ideological oppression of the regime, as markers of a collective memory, as political statements, and as a link between generations.

Brodsky's project is not necessarily to preserve or restore these objects. Instead, he is trying to present them as evidence of terror. In his installation, he kept a layer of soil underneath the books in order to stress the fact that these had been buried, thus denouncing the state of terror and surveillance that provoked such an inconceivable action. In the catalogue's introduction to the piece, Brodsky establishes a comparison between these buried books and the images of the Nazis burning books before the start of the Second World War.[198] Brodsky emphasizes that in Argentina, it was not necessary for the military to burn books; Argentineans burned them themselves out of fear. These books and their story allow Brodsky to transmit vividly the experience of living under a repressive military regime. The installation ultimately gives the viewer a new understanding of history, of how ideological oppression functioned, and how it affected people.

The pictures of the burned books that Brodsky includes in *Nexo* also reveal the type of ideas that were labeled as subversive by the military.[199] All three legible titles are by authors who write critical theory or political philosophy and that are associated with leftist ideas. The close shots of the books capture words and phrases like "Social Justice", "Marx's philosophical revolution",

[198] Ibid., 75.

[199] Some of the photographs in *Nexo* are film stills from *Rayuela,* a short video with images of the books that Brodsky made along with Eduardo Feller in 2001. ibid., 84-85. The name of this video makes me believe that the fourth book is the novel *Hopscotch* by Julio Cortázar.

"theory and criticism", "democracy", "law", etc (Figure 20). As Huyssen notes these books remind us of "another kind of disappearance: not that of the human bodies, but that of the ideals of social justice advanced by those texts."[200]

In addition to using the books as material evidence of an infamous past of ideological repression, Brodsky also uses them as a point of comparison with the disappeared, and more specifically with the bodies of the disappeared. Brodsky states that "these books had a dignified burial, a privilege that too few of the dictatorship's victims had."[201] The owner of the books, whose testimony is included in *Nexo*, also calls attention to this comparison between the buried book and a buried body when she mentions her joy in not occupying the place of the books.[202] As is the case with *Buena Memoria*, some of the strength and aesthetic quality of Brodsky's work comes from the combination of word an image. The images of the unburied books become powerful and persistent when the viewer learns about their origin and comprehends the poetic metaphors that Brodsky creates between the objects and the victims of the regime.

As he did in *Buena Memoria*, Brodsky added one more layer of meaning to his piece by documenting the reactions of the viewers. During the Book Fair in Buenos Aires, he took photographs of the audience through the glass of the installation and included them in *Nexo* (Figure 21). Again, the two layers of the photograph seem to represent the conjunction of past and present that takes place

[200] Huyssen, *El Arte Mnemónico De Marcelo Brodsky*, 10.
[201] Brodsky, *Nexo : Un Ensayo Fotográfico*, 77.
[202] In a letter that the owner of the books wrote to Brodsky she states: "The joyful shots of our sons when they found the books contrasted sharply with the image of the ruined volumes and everything they represented. I gave thanks that the books occupied that place, and not us." Brodsky included a facsimile of the letter in the catalog *Nexo,* which adds on to his treatment of the books as documents or evidence. Ibid., 78.

when audiences, especially in Argentina, encounter Brodsky's work. This repeated practice of documenting the viewers interacting with the art work, and then including these portraits along with original photographs seems to suggest two things. First, that Brodsky is proposing a concept of memory not as fixed monolith, but rather as an ever changing construct that is constantly being created and modified in the present. As María José Melendo explains, some monuments tend to be problematic because they function as "totalitarian metaphors of the past they reify."[203] However, Brodsky's conceptual photography and his interest in portraying the viewers as active participants in the construction of meaning challenge this possibility of "fossilizing the past."[204] Melendo proposes that, by giving the viewer a central role in the art work certain forms of street art function as anti-monumental gestures. I propose this anti-monumentality that Melendo describes is the same effect that Brodsky achieves through the inclusion of the audience's portraits. In these portraits, the reflection of the viewers is superimposed on the photographs, literally changing our view of the original image (Figure 14). By capturing the moment in which the public encounters and interacts with the photographs, Brodsky acknowledges the central role that the observer has in the interpretation of the work of art and the production of meaning. As a result, these images defy the conception of memory as a fixed construct.

The second relevant aspect in the inclusion of these portraits is that they expand the limits of what we might initially understand as the art work. Again, as

[203] María José Melendo, "Formas De La Memoria En El Arte Postdictatorial," *Ramona*, no. 78 (2008): 25.
[204] Ibid. 25-26.

Melendo proposes in relation to street art, the artistic manifestation is not reduced to the object that is being produced, but rather it includes the whole action and its context. Brodsky's work does not encompass solely the photographs that he creates in the first place, but also the events in which the public interacts with them. In other words, the portraits of the viewers demonstrate that his art goes beyond the restrictions of the objects and includes the cathartic moment in which collective memory is deconstructed.

Constructing Memory: Debate sobre la ESMA

Perhaps the project in which Brodsky's conception of memory as an ever changing construction is the most evident and explicit is the book *Memoria en Construcción: Debate sobre la ESMA*. Similarly to *Buena Memoria* and *Nexo*, this book is not strictly an art work. It is a project conceived by Brodsky as a platform for the debate and exchange of ideas between different cultural actors and social groups. The project originated as a response to the controversy of how to use a very symbolic space in Buenos Aires, the ESMA. The *Escuela de Suboficiales de Mecánica de la Armada* (in English Navy Petty-Officers School of Mechanics) was the main and most brutal concentration camp of the military dictatorship.[205] At least five thousand Argentineans were imprisoned in this clandestine facility which has become "a symbol of repression and state terrorism, a place of horror and memory." [206]

[205] Seoane, *El Golpe Del 76*, 67.
[206] Marcelo Brodsky, "ESMA, Un Desafío," in *Memoria En Construcción : El Debate Sobre La ESMA* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: La Marca, 2005), 44.

The controversy over this space started at the end of the 90's when Carlos Menem, announced that the buildings of the ESMA would be demolished. In place of the former concentration camp, he proposed to build a green space that would symbolize the reconciliation of the Argentine people.[207] This led to a long legal battle presided by several activist groups who opposed this ruling. Finally, in 2005, a court ruled that the 35 buildings and the 17 hectares of land would be turned over to the people and converted into a memorial to the victims of state terrorism.[208] Brodsky was part of the social movement to recuperate this space and, as Florencia Berstein explains, winning this battle was a monumental achievement and "the involvement of artists like Marcelo Brodsky was integral to the process from the beginning." [209]

Nevertheless, the court ruling did not end the controversy. After being given the space, Argentines had to decide how to use it and what the memorial would look like.[210] It is in this context that Marcelo Brodsky decided to create the book *Debate sobre la ESMA*. The purpose of the project was organizing an existing debate and bringing together different opinions from different fields and different contexts.[211] In Brodsky's words, "this book pretends to participate in this

[207] Persino, *Memoriales, Museos, Monumentos: La Articulación De Una Memoria Pública En La Argentina Postdictatorial*, 12.
[208] Florencia Berinstein, "Memoria y Resistencia: Dispatch on Cultural Resistance and Reclamation in Argentina." *Fuse Magazine* 29, no. 3 (July, 2006):9.
[209] Ibid., 10.
[210] For a discussion of the controversies about the ESMA and the Memory Park, another important memorial space along the River Plate, see Persino, *Memoriales, Museos, Monumentos: La Articulación De Una Memoria Pública En La Argentina Postdictatorial.*, 1-16.
[211] Brodsky, *ESMA, Un Desafío*, 44.

debate by providing images and ideas that can contribute to enrich [the discussion] and endow it with new visual and intellectual elements." [212]

Debate sobre la ESMA is a multifaceted project with four main components: Zona de Ensayos, Zona de Obras, Zona Abierta and Anexo Documental. The first chapter is a compilation of essays about the history of the dictatorship, the ESMA, and the issues around the construction of memorials and museums. The writers of these essays come from diverse fields like history, art history, journalism, and anthropology. The next section is a large selection of works by Argentinean artists who deal with the issue of state terrorism.[213] The second to last chapter presents abstracts of the specific proposals of different organizations like the Association of Disappeared Ex-Detainees, the Foundation for the Historical and Social Memory of Argentina, and the Association Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. The last section is a compendium of official government documents and decrees related to the transference of the ESMA to the Argentinean people. Indeed, Debate sobre la ESMA is not one coherent book but rather "a collage, a kaleidoscope constituted by dissimilar positions" expressed in different languages.

The issue of deciding how to create a space for memorializing the disappeared is vital to the Argentine formation of collective memory. How to remember and what to remember are not easy questions to answer. As Brodsky's

[212] Ibid., 44.

[213] The sample includes both the work of a few artists who started working before the beginning of the dictatorship and whose work anticipates the violence, some artists who were directly responding to the military repression, and a large artists working in the 1990s and 2000s. Some of them art: Juan Carlos Romero, Carlos Alonso, Luis Felipe Noe, León Ferrari, Alberto Heredia, Victor Grippo, Guillermo Kuitca, Roberto Jacoby, Oscar Bony, Fernando Traverso, Margarita Paksa, Grupo de Arte Callejero, Grupo Etcétera.

book demonstrates, different social actors and groups have different ideas about what is an appropriate way of commemorating. According to Silvina Persino this diversity of opinions is not negative or problematic.[214] On the contrary, it is precisely what constructs a productive or exemplary memory that would allow future generations to remember their history and prevent the repetition of mistakes made in the past. [215]

The importance of integrating diverse voices to the debates of memory resonates in the essays included in *Debate sobre la ESMA*.[216] Brodsky himself proposes that, above all, the answer to the question of how to remember has to be multiple:

> the itinerary and the testimonies, the elements of the period and their context, the interpretations of the survivors and their relatives, the eyewitnesses, the intellectuals, the artists, the educators, the scientists. A choir of voices that is not necessarily harmonic or unidirectional. A menu of options from which one can draw one's own conclusions[217]

Collecting diverse voices that speak through different mediums is precisely what this book does. It creates a space for different social groups to express their

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[214] Persino, *Memoriales, Museos, Monumentos: La Articulación De Una Memoria Pública En La Argentina Postdictatorial*, 7.

[215] Silvina Persino explains that according to Tzvetan Todorov there are two modes in which social groups can remember an event: the literal memory and the exemplary memory. Literal memory refers to a unique and untransferable memory. On the other hand, the exemplary memory is that which, without denying the singularity of experience, can transform literal memory into an example and a learning experience for the future. The exemplary memory alerts people of the dangers of the repetition of history. Ibid., 6-7.

[216] The importance of allowing different voices and narratives to be heard is explicit or implicit in most of the essays. Two clear example of the advocacy for a polyphonic museum are the proposals of Lila Pastoriza and Pilar Calveiro. Lila Patoriza, "La Memoria Como Política Pública: Los Ejes De La Discusión," in *Memoria En Construcción : El Debate Sobre La ESMA* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: La Marca, 2005). Pilar Calveiro, "Conferencia "Puentes De La Memoria: Terrorismo De Estado, Sociedad y Militancia", in *Memoria En Construcción : El Debate Sobre La ESMA* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: La Marca, 2005).

[217] [Translation by author] Brodsky, *ESMA, Un Desafío*, 44.

opinions and to analyze the proposals of one another. These discussions are absolutely fundamental to the success of the memorializing spaces because the more heterogeneous the groups who participate, the more representative the project becomes.[218] In *Debate sobre la ESMA*, Brodsky takes the call for heterogeneity one step further. Not only does he propose a discussion model with different voices, but also different communication mediums. Brodsky gives equal importance to the contributions made through written proposals and visual forms. This inclusion of artistic production as part of an intellectual debate is perhaps the most innovative aspect about Brodsky's book.

Brodsky's Art in Dialogue with Argentinean Conceptualism

Even though the oeuvre of Marcelo Brodsky is grounded in postmodern practices of image appropriation, his work is also in dialogue with the conceptual experimentations of the 1960's through the 1980s. Brodsky initiates his artistic process in the research of his personal history and the political history of the dictatorship. As I explained in the first chapter, this research component is also present in Tucumán Arde. The objective of Tucumán Arde was to raise awareness about the situation in Tucumán through the creation of a "*circuito sobreinformacional*." The information the artists gathered in their research trips was contrasted at the exhibitions with the versions of the official media. Similarly, Brodsky's work functioned as a counter-official discourse. When Menem's

[218] Persino, *Memoriales, Museos, Monumentos: La Articulación De Una Memoria Pública En La Argentina Postdictatorial.*, 7.

government was advancing its discourse of "forgive and forget," Brodsky's art was a call for remembrance.

Brodsky does not call for active revolutionary political action in the way that Tucumán Arde did. However, his work does share with the 60's avant-garde the interest in blurring or challenging the division between art and political and social life. Moreover, for both Tucumán Arde and Brodsky, social dialogue was a central component of their artistic projects. The fourth stage of Tucumán Arde, which was never realized due to censorship, encompassed the publication of the results and a final assessment of the project in the form of a symposium. In other words, presenting their findings at the exhibitions in Rosario and Buenos Aires was not the end goal of the project, but rather a means to open up a dialogue about art, politics, and how to effect social change. *Debate sobre la ESMA* is the project that shows most clearly Brodsky's intention of using his work as site for the discussion of issues of memory and representation.

There are also some interesting correspondences between "El Siluetazo" and Brodsky's oeuvre. By sharing the narratives of his disappeared brother and classmates, Brodsky's photographic essays restore the personhood, agency, and dignity of the disappeared. This was also one of the main objectives of "El Siluetazo." The silhouettes were meant to give back agency to the disappeared and allow them to speak on their own behalf, in a context where official narratives denied the genocide.

At the same time, both projects allow the participants to speak of their own loss and experience of the dictatorship. Through his art, Brodsky, a survivor

himself of an attempted kidnapping, shares the stories of his friends and family but also shares his own story and experience coping with the trauma of violence and state terrorism. The participants of the protest during "El Siluetazo" were also speaking of their own trauma and, whenever they used their own bodies as a stencil for the silhouettes, they were acknowledging that each and every one of them could have been a victim of the dictatorship.

Another commonality is that both "El Siluetazo" and Brodsky's photographic essays give a central place to the participation of the viewer. Even though in Brodsky's work audiences do not engage in the production of the art object like they do in "El Siluetazo," he still highlights the subject/object interaction through the incorporation of the portraits and testimonies of his audience. In both cases, the centrality of participation suggests an acknowledgment of the construction of memory as a collective enterprise.

In her essay "Photos and Silhouettes: visual politics in the human rights movement," Ana Longoni explains the contrasting strategies of photographs and silhouettes in representing the disappeared. Longoni refers specifically to the photographs used by the Mothers in their placards. She argues that, whereas pictures emphasize the life before the disappearance, the silhouettes accentuate the disappearance itself and the absence. Similarly, while photographs emphasize individualization, the silhouettes stress a quantitative connotation. However, given the way in which these photographs were installed en masse in public spaces, they end up composing a collective sign as well (Figure 22 and 23).

In reality, the distinction between the photographs used by the Mothers and the silhouettes is not as extreme as Longoni seems to suggest. A photograph and a name by themselves are not capable of restoring the personhood or the individual biographies of the disappeared, especially if they are displayed along with hundreds of other photographs. Moreover, taking into account that many of the silhouettes had the name of a disappeared, the effect of the use of pictures ends up being very similar to that of the silhouettes. Longoni's argument is more applicable to the work of Marcelo Brodsky than it is to the photographs used by the Mothers. Brodsky's incorporation of narrative in his photographic essays does carry out the recuperation of individuality and personal biography that Longoni attributes to the pictures used by the Mothers. Depicting the lives of his brother, his friends, and his classmates through the use of photographs and written text, allows Brodsky to truly engage his viewers with the personal histories of those affected by the dictatorship.

Through his art, Marcelo Brodsky is proposing a very particular form of remembrance, and, in a sense, his work can be read also as a statement on how to create effective representations of political violence that restores the personhood of the victims and engages the public in the creation of memory. Through his incorporation of the viewer's experience, Brodsky's work promotes a conception of memory as a changing construct that is constantly being created in the present. The pictures of Fernando in his youth, in which an uncanny premonitory element is revealed, seem to acknowledge that our vision of the past is always permeated by our present knowledge. He also suggests that remembrance should restore the

individuality and the agency of the disappeared. Moreover, by incorporating the buried books and the history of intellectual censorship, Brodsky implies that remembrance should not be limited to the disappeared, but rather that it should be assessed in all its complexity, taking into account all the social and psychological effects of the dictatorship. Finally, Brodsky's work suggests that remembrance should not be enclosed in an object, but rather memory art should open up a site for collective discussion and debate in which to negotiate cultural representations in which to come to terms with political violence.

CONCLUSION

Between the 1960's and the 1990's, Argentine conceptual artists proposed a variety of theoretical and formal strategies to confront through their art the cruelty, violence, and impunity of military dictatorships. By the middle of the 1960s, the avant-garde became increasingly interested in the dematerialization of the work of art and the relationship between art and life. Experimental projects such as *arte de los medios* or media art of Eduardo Costa, Raúl Escari, and Roberto Jacoby surpassed the traditional borders of the art world in order to analyze the relationship between art, audience, and mass media. By the end of the decade, artists openly rejected the project of "modernization" and "internationalization" of the Argentine art scene proposed by Jorge Romero Brest and the emblematic Di Tella Institute. Instead, the avant-garde embraced radical politics and abandoned the art institutions. With public actions such as the assault on the Conference of Romero Brest and the Braque Awards, the artists announced their resignation from what they considered the bourgeois art establishment.

A number of factors made this abandonment of the art institutions possible. The first condition was, as I mentioned before, the dematerialization of the work of art. The dematerialized form of conceptual art allowed for the emancipation of artists from the institutions because, without a traditional art object, artists no longer needed a space to exhibit or the validation of the establishment to enter a competitive market. The actual existence of a strong institutional framework, a privilege that not many Latin American countries had

at the time, was another of these conditions. The avant-garde was able to attack the system because there *was* a system; in fact, an extremely dynamic and influential circuit of cultural institutions. Finally, the repressive dictatorship of Juan Carlos Onganía (1966-1970) contributed to the increasingly contestatory tone of the artistic debates in Argentina.

The radicalization of the Argentinean avant-garde was crystallized in the collective Tucumán Arde. The large group of artists behind this project proposed a new "aesthetic program" characterized by anti-intuitionalism, a close relationship between work of art and context, and the promotion of collective violent actions. The strategy of the project was the creation of a circuit of counter information that would contradict the manipulated reports offered by the military government and the official media. Even though the project did not accomplish all of its initial goals and most of the participating artists abandoned completely the production of art, the conceptual strategies established by Tucumán Arde would be echoed by generations of artists to come.

During the early 1970s artists continued to create conceptual art, but in this case, under the sponsorship of a new institution: The Center of Arts and Communication (CAyC). One of the most important exhibitions of the period was Arte de Sistemas II (1972), which took place at the Plaza Roberto Arlt in the center of Buenos Aires. The show presented several explicitly political works of art and this led to its closure by the police. This type of censorship became even stricter during the 1976 military dictatorship, and it caused the repression of public political art for the rest of the decade.

Conceptual art returned to the streets of Buenos Aires in 1983 with the collective action "El Siluetazo." As an artistic and political enterprise, "El Siluetazo" is closely related to Tucumán Arde. Even though "El Siluetazo" did not share the revolutionary ardor of the late 60s and its direct anti-institutionalism, the artists were also interested in the relationship between art and life and they conceived the project as a reaction to the cultural systems enforced by the dictatorship. These two projects also share the ability to create aesthetic experiences that went beyond visuality, transforming social interactions into artistic products. I argue that what encouraged the return of conceptualism in the form of public political actions was the hope for the restoration of democracy that Argentines felt in 1983 with the discrediting of the regime in Malvinas and the call for elections, a similar context to that experienced by artists at the end of the 60's when the promise of a proletarian revolution encouraged many.

During the 1990s, when the official discourse of President Carlos Menem promoted reconciliation and the pardon of those responsible for the crimes of the Dirty War, artists such as Marcelo Brodsky employed conceptual strategies to create compelling representations of political violence that restore the individuality of the disappeared and encourage the participation of the public in the creation of a collective memory. Similarly to how avant-garde of the 60s tried to raise awareness about the situation in Tucumán through the creation of a *circuito sobreinformacional*, Brodsky's work countered the official discourse of "forgive and forget" advanced by the government. Tucumán Arde and Marcelo Brodsky also have a parallel interest in social dialogue. In both cases the end goal

of the art is to provoke communal dialogues about art, politics, how to effect social change, and, in the case of Brodsky, how to deal with issues of memory and representation. “El Siluetazo” and Brodsky’s photographic essays also share important characteristics such as the restoration of the agency of the disappeared and the centrality of the role of the viewer, which suggests the acknowledgment of the construction of memory as a collective enterprise.

This genealogy through four decades of conceptual art demonstrates that there is continuity between these practices. They are all created as a response to state violence and challenge the official narratives that were being imposed by the military governments; all of them share similar theoretical questions, and methods; and they all blurred the boundaries between art and politics. Moreover, I propose that all these artists and groups chose conceptual art as the appropriate vehicle for their message because conceptualism can be conducive to these types of contestatory antiestablishment expressions. Conceptualism, along with its rebellion against traditional norms and the subversiveness implicit in the dematerialization of the object, allowed artists to easily transfer these oppositional strategies into political commentaries.

Even if there is a clear continuity between these practices, how have they changed over four decades? Of course there are many answers to this question, but the difference between the `60s avant-garde and the conceptual art of the `80s and `90s resides essentially in the relationship between art and politics. Militancy has been replaced by activism. Contemporary artists no longer promote political revolution as their cause. Instead, “El Siluetazo” and artists such as Marcelo

Brodsky try to negotiate the construction of cultural representations and to open up sites where the Argentine people can interact, dialogue, and cope with the violence and trauma that marked their history and their lives during the 20th century.

APPENDIX: FIGURES

Figure 1: Eduardo Costa, Raul Escari, and Roberto Jacoby, *Total Participation* or *Happening for a Dead Boar, 1966*

Figure 2: Tucumán Arde

Figure 3

Figure 4

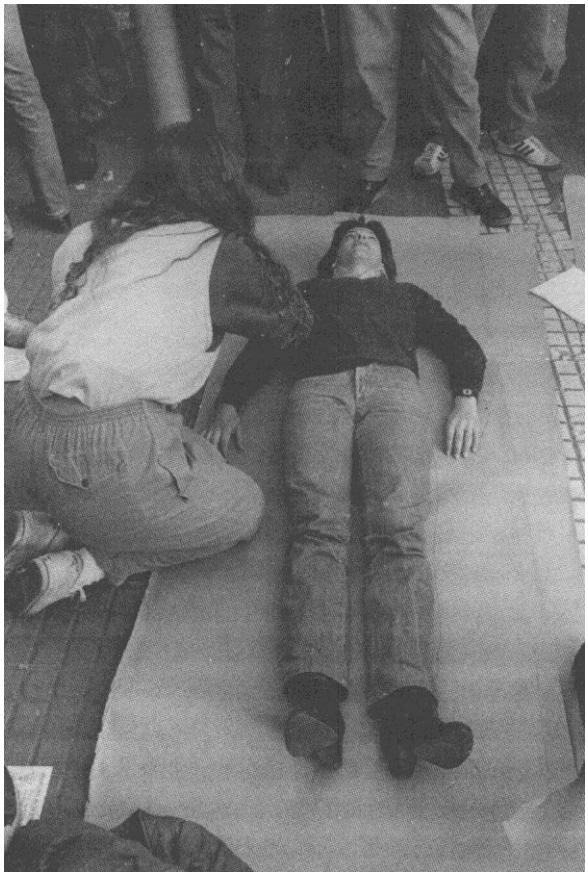


Figure 5: “El Siluetazo”

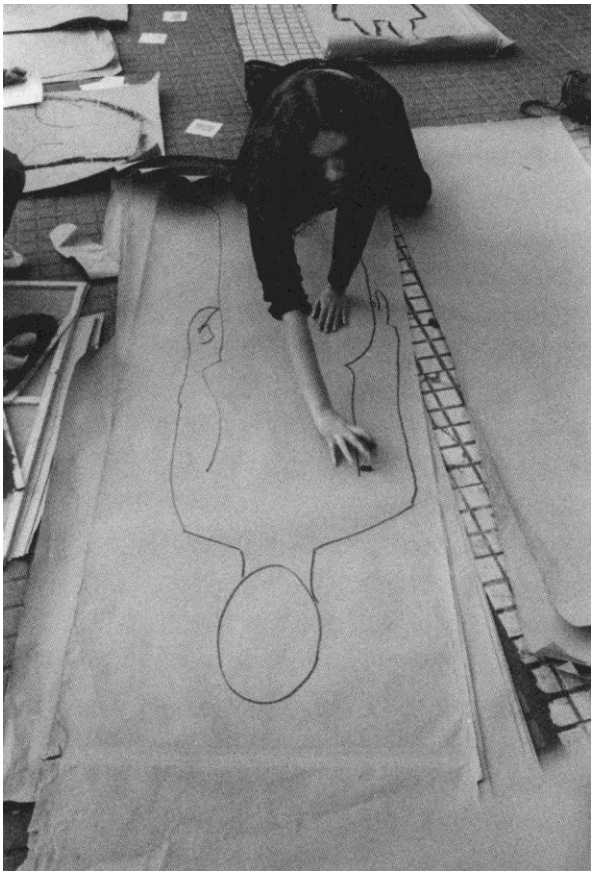


Figure 6: “El Siluetazo”

Figure 7: “El Siluetazo”

Figure 8: “El Siluetazo”

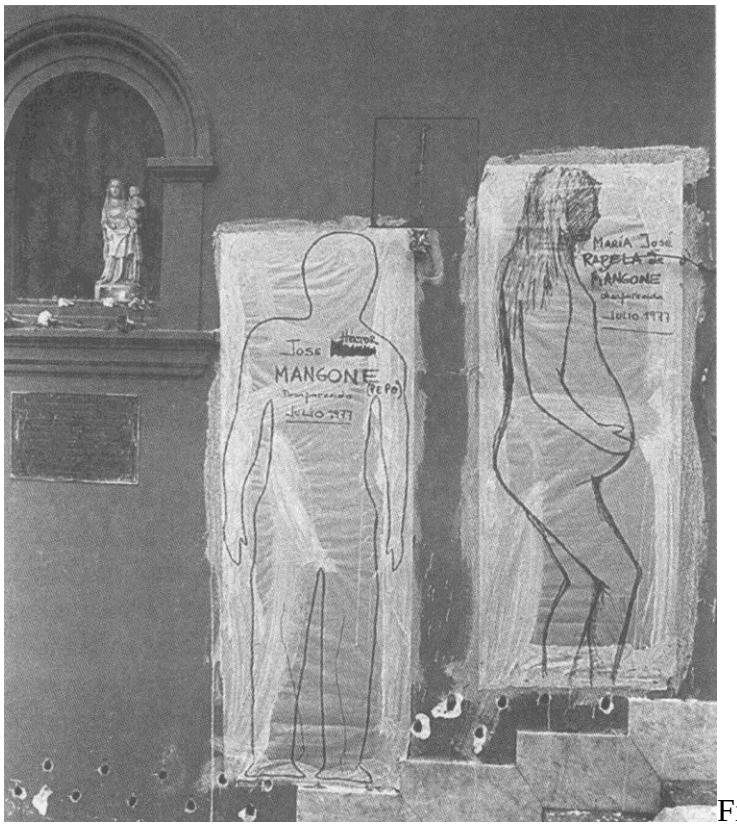


Figure 9: “El Siluetazo”

Figure 10: “El Siluetazo”

Figure 11: Eduardo Gil (photographer), “*El Siluetazo,”* 1983

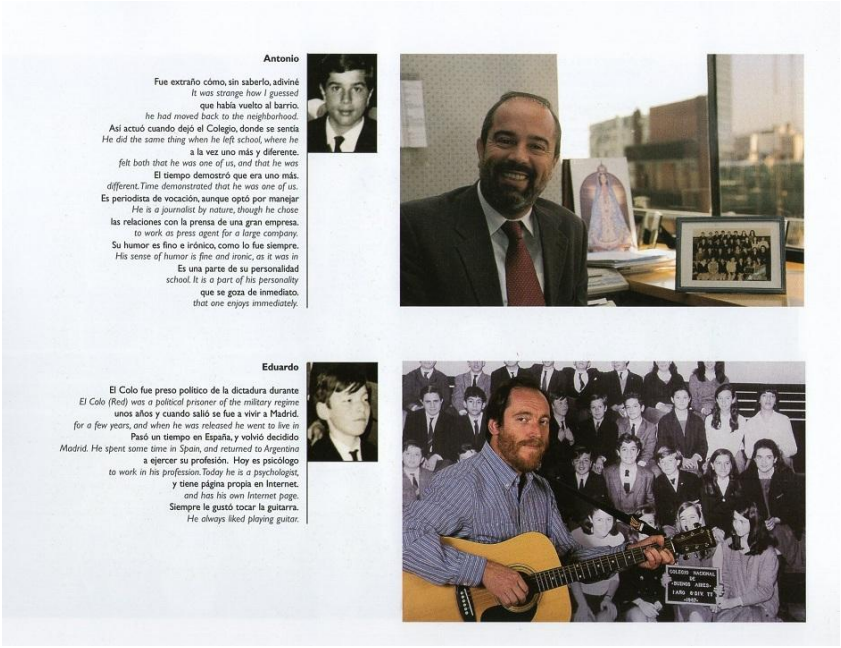


Figure 12: Antonio and Eduardo, page view from *Buena Memoria.*

Figure 13: *Altered Gigantograph*, 1996, 69” x 46”

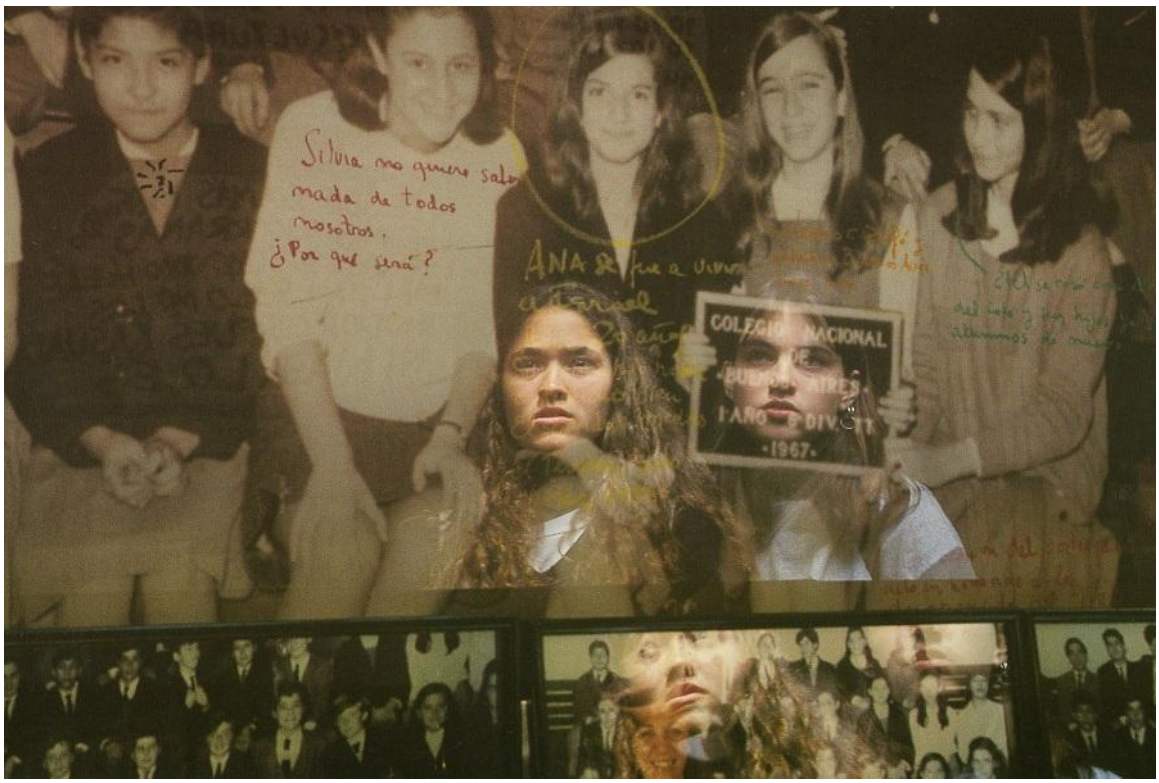
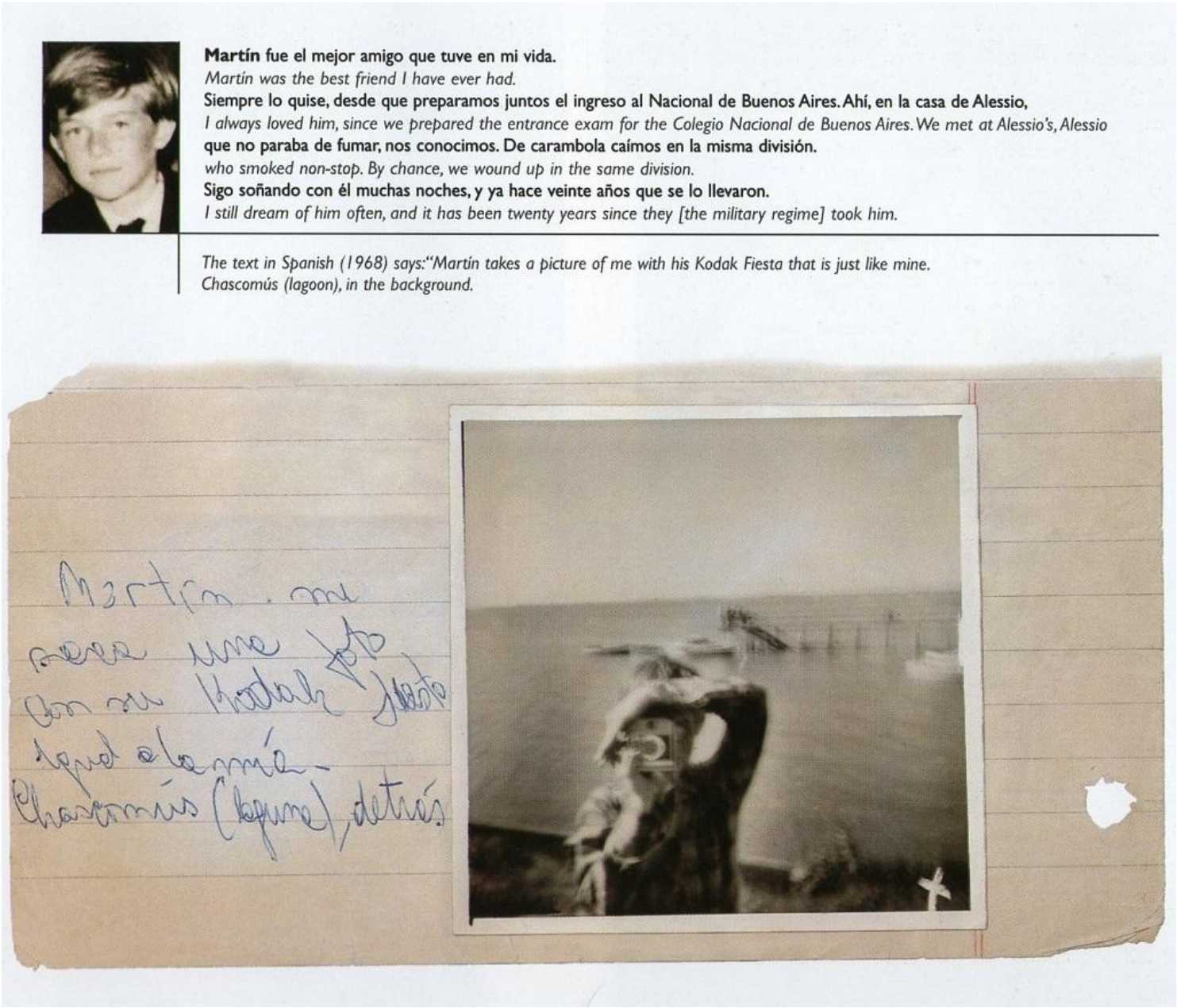


Figure 14: Visitors Puente a la Memoria

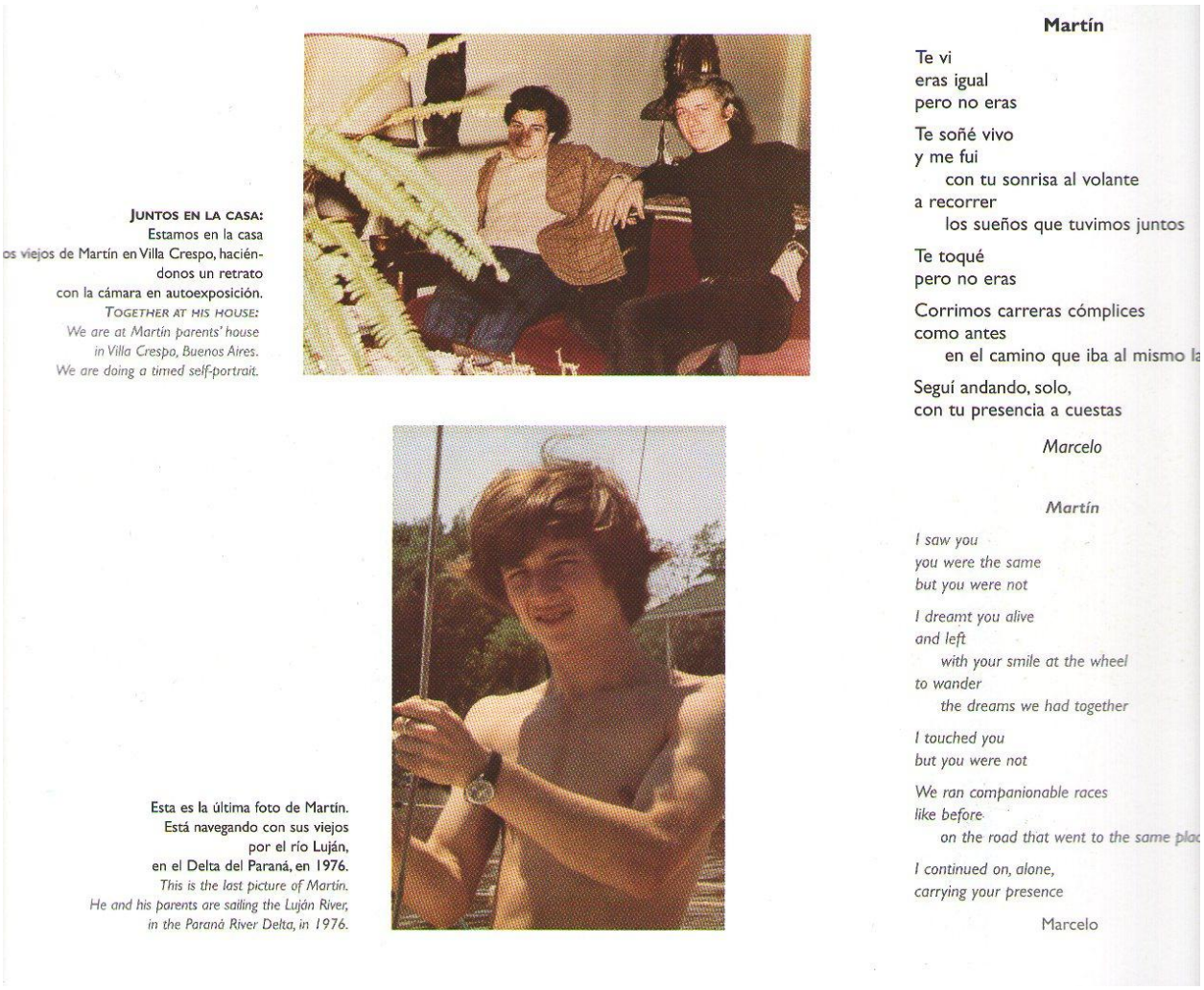
Figure 15: *Martín* page view from *Buena Memoria*



Martín fue el mejor amigo que tuve en mi vida.
Martín was the best friend I have ever had.
Siempre lo quise, desde que preparamos juntos el ingreso al Nacional de Buenos Aires. Ahí, en la casa de Alessio,
I always loved him, since we prepared the entrance exam for the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires. We met at Alessio's, Alessio
que no paraba de fumar, nos conocimos. De carambola caímos en la misma división.
who smoked non-stop. By chance, we wound up in the same division.
Sigo soñando con él muchas noches, y ya hace veinte años que se lo llevaron.
I still dream of him often, and it has been twenty years since they [the military regime] took him.

The text in Spanish (1968) says:"Martín takes a picture of me with his Kodak Fiesta that is just like mine. Chascomús (lagoon), in the background.

Martín. mi
amigo me saca
con su Kodak Fiesta
igual a la mía.
Chascomús (laguna) detrás.



JUNTOS EN LA CASA:
Estamos en la casa
os viejos de Martín en Villa Crespo, haciéndonos un retrato
con la cámara en autoexposición.
TOGETHER AT HIS HOUSE:
We are at Martín parents' house
in Villa Crespo, Buenos Aires.
We are doing a timed self-portrait.

Esta es la última foto de Martín.
Está navegando con sus viejos
por el río Luján,
en el Delta del Paraná, en 1976.
This is the last picture of Martín.
He and his parents are sailing the Luján River,
in the Paraná River Delta, in 1976.

Martín

Te vi
eras igual
pero no eras

Te soñé vivo
y me fui
con tu sonrisa al volante
a recorrer
los sueños que tuvimos juntos

Te toqué
pero no eras

Corrimos carreras cómplices
como antes
en el camino que iba al mismo la

Seguí andando, solo,
con tu presencia a cuestas

Marcelo

Martín

I saw you
you were the same
but you were not

I dreamt you alive
and left
with your smile at the wheel
to wander
the dreams we had together

I touched you
but you were not

We ran companionable races
like before
on the road that went to the same plac

I continued on, alone,
carrying your presence

Marcelo

Figure 16: Pictures of Martín and poem written by Brodsky: page view from *Buena Memoria*

FERNANDO RUBÉN BRODSKY, MI HERMANO, secuestrado el 14 agosto de 1979 y desaparecido desde entonces.
FERNANDO RUBÉN BRODSKY, MY BROTHER, was kidnapped on August 14th, 1979 and is still disappeared.

Figure 17: *Fernando Ruben Brodsky*, 1968.

Caption: Fernando Ruben Brodsky, my brother, was kidnapped on August 14th, 1979 and is still disappeared.

Figure 18: *Nando in the Park*, n.d.

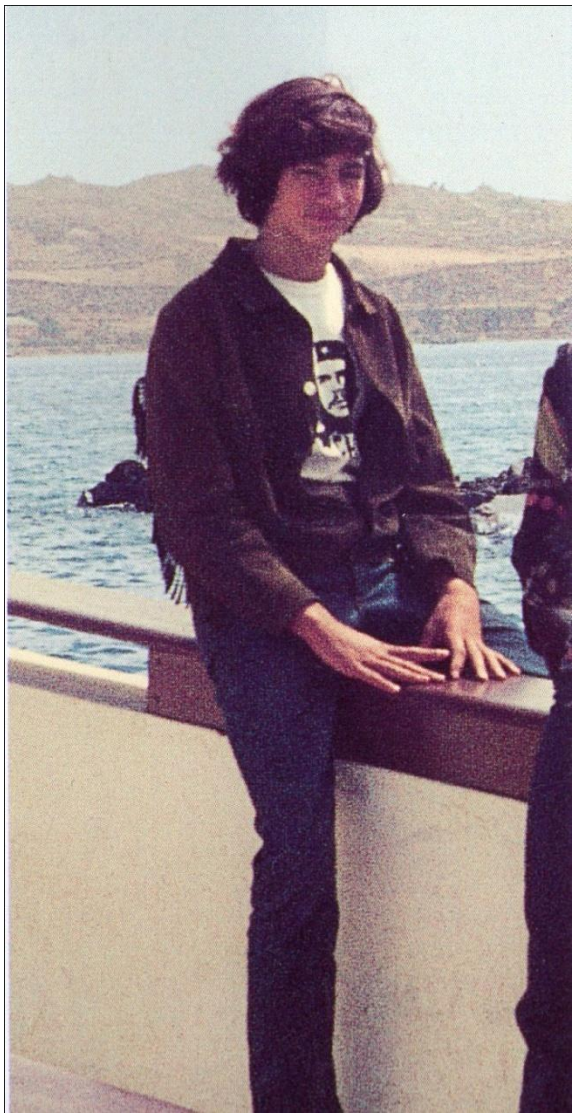


Figure 19: *No title*. Portrait of Fernando Brodsky. n.d.

Figure 20: *The Condemned of the Earth*. Installation. Buenos Aires. 1999. Wood, earth, paper, 60 x 85 x 15 cm.

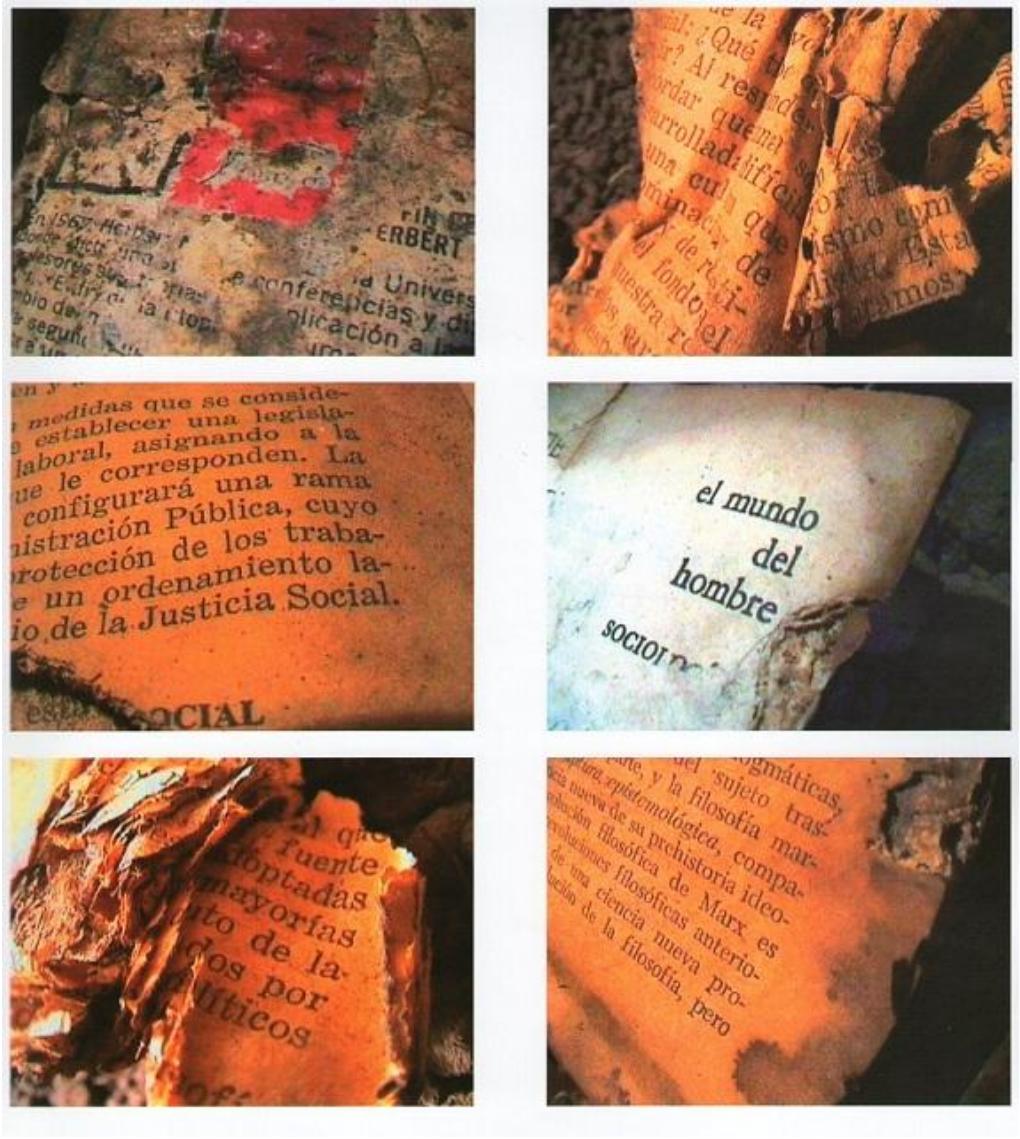


Figure 21: *Rayuela*. Buenos Aires. *Stills from The Condemned of the Earth* video by Eduardo Feller and Marcelo Brodsky 100 x 120 cm.

Figure 22: Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and photographs of the disappeared. http://argentinaPerónista-rollon.blogspot.com/2010/08/1977-1983.html

Figure 23: Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and photographs of the disappeared. http://www.pachakuti.org/textos/hemeroteca/2007_1/madre_asturiana.html

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