info@islaa.org
www.islaa.org

ISLAA Exhibition Talks

Horacio Zabala in Conversation with Iria Candela

January 13, 2021

Organized in conjunction with *The Counter-Public Sphere in the Condor Years* at the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA)

Nicolás Guagnini: Hello. Good morning. Thank you all for joining this program. Thank you to the team of ISLAA for letting it come true. And a special thanks to Iria for her studying and boundless devotion to Horacio's work. And my profound gratitude to the artist for being here today with us.

I'll express a few words from a general, and then a specific, point of view, before getting to the introduction of the speakers, Horacio in particular. The context in which this exhibition is developed embraces a fundamental shift in North American institutions, particularly in museums and universities. In the confluence of those institutions is where ISLAA operates—it is an institute for studies. And thanks to the pressure of Occupy Wall Street, the Me Too movement, Black Lives Matter, and other social movements, over the last few years, an important change has taken place in the United States. Over the past twenty to twenty-five years we've seen Latin American art presented in such a way that Lygia Clark is shown devoid of sexuality, Tarsila do Amaral without Négritude, León Ferrari without a critique of the Catholic Church, Hélio Oiticica without the favela, etc. In this approach, the Latin American art model mainly focuses on its relative proximity to another central thing, like Mondrian, for instance.

Thanks to these social movements, the idea of presenting Latin American art in comparison to itself has been increasingly well received. A Brazilian artist compared to artists from Chile, for instance, [and] to others from Argentina—as is the case in this exhibition—and read in relation to the other cultures that originally produced them and their sociopolitical contexts.

Within this context, the exhibition I curated for ISLAA, using material from its collection and its far-reaching and vast archives, is titled *The Counter-Public Sphere in the Condor Years*. That is the title in English, and it explores the meaning of the counter- public sphere. The "Condor Years" refer to the period of brutal repression during the dictatorships in the Southern Cone, all part of a broader plan that was an extension of the Monroe Doctrine, in which the CIA helped [Henry] Kissinger, infiltrated South America, and helped put in place dictatorships instead of democratically elected

governments. Those dictatorships controlled the public sphere. This control of the public sphere is not limited to the disappearance and torture of dissident citizens, but also extends to the systematic occupation of all discursive space: universities, newspapers or any form of mass media, and even circulation in the public space. Curfews are imposed, gatherings of more than three people are not allowed, protests are forbidden, etc.

Under those extreme circumstances of oppression in the public sphere, some remarkable artists, a group of them, generate the counter-public sphere. Within this framework, the exhibition features a work by Horacio Zabala performed in 1972, in a public square in Buenos Aires, titled *300 metros de cinta negra para enlutar una plaza pública*. The word is in the title, and the city in itself is one of the materials that make up the work. The public space is one of the materials that make up the work. And the performance is shown publicly, or happens, just a few days after a massacre takes place at a prison [in Argentina], the Trelew massacre. The details of all this are in my exhibition text, which essentially explains the meaning of the counter-public sphere and Horacio's relevance within this context.

I will now introduce the panelists. Iria is the Estrellita B. Brodsky Curator of Latin American Art at the Metropolitan Museum of New York, a position she reached by way of the Tate Modern. She obtained her PhD from the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. Her master's, from Columbia. She has worked with Orozco, Mira Schendel, Malevich. More recently, and very notably, with the Italian Argentine artist Lucio Fontana.

I would like to emphasize that this conversation is occurring in Spanish, and it's important to me to point out that Iria has proposed and leads—in all the different roles she has had, but particularly at the Metropolitan Museum, which is the alleged depository of all universal culture—the initiative for Spanish to be spoken, and for all art-related knowledge to be disseminated and discussed in the Spanish language. This position of decolonizing the museum is in line with those social changes I referred to at the beginning of this presentation, and within the general framework in which she is able to interrogate or discuss Horacio's work.

I'm going to turn now to Horacio. Horacio was part of the Grupo de los Trece. Of the extremely influential Grupo de los Trece, in Buenos Aires. He was active as part of the group between 1972 and 1976. In 1976, when the regime started, he went into exile in Europe, where he lived for twenty-two years. Together with a very important artist, Edgardo Antonio Vigo, he also organized a mail art exhibition. Certainly worthy of mention is that his work was exhibited at the Reina Sofía Museum, the Daros Latinamerica Collection, and in Essex.

His curriculum is as vast and rich as you can imagine. But what I most want to focus on in this introduction is that very early on, at the beginning of the 1970s, Horacio starts dealing with the issue of prisons and the prison system in his work. And he develops prison-related models and explanations from his cartographic work. If one thinks about prison and cartography, that is practically synonymous with surveillance and punishment. And that key aspect of Horacio's work is developed almost in parallel with the development of Michel Foucault's line of thought. So that is a parameter of ideological-theoretical reading that is very significant for this artist, and which denotes the importance of this artist. Now, without further ado, I would like to introduce Iria and Horacio, who will be in conversation with you all.

Iria Candela: Thank you, Nicolás, for the introduction. Thanks to ISLAA as well, and especially to Ariel Aisiks for inviting me to this conversation with the artist today. Thank you to Horacio, in particular, for your work. And to ISLAA, I would like to extend my gratitude for the intense work of restoring the legacies and archives of the stories of so many artists of the continent who can now be studied thanks to your support and effort.

The Counter-Public Sphere, the exhibition currently on view at ISLAA that Nicolás described briefly, and, in a funny manner, is very timely, and I highly recommend going to see it. Not only because it coincides with the declassification of documents about the spine-chilling Operation Condor, which plunged the Latin American region into a decades-long period of horror, but also because the exhibition's closure, which I think is tomorrow, coincides with an unprecedented situation of political legitimation in relation to the occupation of public space, with the public sphere, that makes us question many of the things we take for granted nowadays in a rule of law such as that of the United States. I'm referring to, of course, the assault on the US Capitol last week.

It is an honor for me to talk to Horacio Zabala today about these issues in relation to his work. He is an essential figure of conceptualism. Horacio was born in Buenos Aires in 1943. In 1961 he joins the faculty of architecture at the University of Buenos Aires, and soon after graduation, he begins to devote his time to creating art. In 1976 he leaves for Europe, to avoid the dictatorial regime in his country. He doesn't return to Buenos Aires until the year 1998. In Europe, he lived in Rome at first and later on he spent some time in Vienna and Geneva.

Before we begin the conversation, I'd like to emphasize one of the most interesting things about Horacio Zabala's work as a conceptual artist. It's as if, to him, there is no specific language in art. Nor does he choose art for the sake of it. In fact, he has said that his motivation really lies in finding ways to communicate concerns, ask questions, generate problems by means other than the usual channels of mass media or social communication; that's why he makes art.

Horacio, I'd like to start our conversation by talking about the intellectual-artistic context you inhabited in Buenos Aires in the late 1960s and early 1970s, just after you finished your studies in architecture. In 1972 you joined the Grupo de los Trece, an association of conceptual Argentine artists that included other relevant figures such as Jacques Bedel, Luis Benedit, Carlo Ginzburg, Víctor Grippo, Luis Pazos, Juan Carlos Romero, and Jorge Glusberg. You also participated in the exhibition program of CAyC, Centro de Arte y Comunicación, an experimental art center directed by Glusberg. Those were tumultuous years, when the political radicalization of society also reached the artist community, artists who became politicized in the 1970s, trying to make an impact within cultural institutions. This, in a way, contrasts with a more anti-institutional position, let's say, that was held in previous years by the Instituto [Torcuato] Di Tella circle.

Tell us about CAyC and the Grupo de los Trece. What was the atmosphere like? How did it feel to be a part of the that collective spirit?

Horacio Zabala: It's a pleasure to be talking with you, of course.

I associate institutions with the only two private institutions that were interested, during those years, in experimental art or, at least, in nonconventional, nontraditional art. First, as you mentioned, was the Instituto Di Tella, and later, the Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAyC).

The Instituto Di Tella was directed by Romero Brest and CAyC by Jorge Glusberg. Those periods are relatively close in time. The Di Tella closed and CAyC opened, but many artists have worked at both institutions. Marta Minujín, for instance, first worked for one institution and later for the other one. Some haven't worked for any of them. Others worked only for one of them. What I mean to say is that direct connections exist. And both address, in very general terms, what at that moment was known as the "neo-avant-gardes." That is, after the avant-gardes came the "neo-avant-gardes," internationally speaking. And within the neo-avant-gardes, new trends emerged from the Di Tella that supported or promoted pop art and everything that came after pop art, transgressions included, as well as the "happenings" and everything that was going on in the New York art world.

In turn, CAyC had another strand. It was what was happening, also, internationally, and was not as closely associated to production and consumption as pop art was, but rather to its relationship with some European neo-avant-gardes, such as arte povera. Arte povera was led by Germano Celant, who will join the Guggenheim in New York some years after.

There is a connection between the "poor theater" theories in Poland and the practice of a group of artists in Turin, Italy, [led] by Germano Celant, with whom I was in contact

during my stay in Italy, that address the two focuses, let's say, which are very different to each other. The Di Tella group had a very different focus from that of CAyC. CAyC also supported the indefinable thing that is Latin American art, which was then in question, problematic.

In general, it was defined in very traditional terms and even, to a certain extent, as something very easy to manipulate, literally, something very downgraded and not related to experimentation or research. Not international at all. Instead, the Di Tella follows a trend where pop art is an art of consumerism. It's an art of Western consumerism, etc. Therefore, these two things can be seen at both institutions. One of them, the Instituto Di Tella, more powerful from a financial perspective, or in terms of its budget. And the other one, CAyC, poorer. Both of them "poor." What I mean is that these were the groups that, at that time, were relevant in Buenos Aires—which is not Argentina—in this big city, and they had no direct relationship with its own population.

Jorge Glusberg led touring exhibitions worldwide, in North and South America, in Europe, in all the countries in Western Europe. (At that time, the Berlin Wall was still standing, so on both sides of the wall.) In this way, he was "globalizing," a word that didn't exist at the time, the possibilities of nonconventional visual languages that we were engaged with at CAyC in Buenos Aires.

IC: You mention the theories of [Jerzy] Grotowski's theater. How did you get to know them? How did they influence you? How did they influence you to take a certain kind of approach that was different from that of the other artists you have mentioned?

HZ: Of course. Yes. On the one hand, more directly, is arte povera, since it is visual art—arte povera from Turin, by the Italians, with Germano Celant. And on the other hand, Grotowski, who is further away, from a cultural point of view. And specifically, Grotowski's work in theater, experimental theater, of course. But with a particular interest in disrupting the thousand-year-old relationship between the show and the audience, right? In the interaction between the audience and the show. Thus, a spatial environment is created, one that no longer sets the artist on one side and the audience on the other, but that, instead, allows for a penetration from both sides. This attempt that in art happens within arte povera, for instance, and which appears through the use of new materials—which, in fact, are not new but are traditional and natural materials that have not undergone industrial processes—or by focusing on these materials through art, where a reappropriation, let's say, of natural phenomena takes place, and which does not appear in the conceptual art trend, but entails a different sensitivity.

IC: And that, for instance, implies that you started to effectively envision the possibility of acting in public, open spaces. The idea of the public sphere as a possibility.

HZ: Exactly.

IC: Speaking of a specific example, can we talk about that experience of the first opportunities for CAyC, where you and another group of artists proposed an open-air exhibition at the square Nicolás mentioned earlier, called Plaza . . .

HZ: Roberto Arlt, yes.

IC: Exactly. Thank you. And my question is . . . I'm going to share the screen to be able to see the images. Thanks for your patience.

Here are some images from the exhibition at ISLAA. There we can see, in these documents that survive thanks to photography, your participation in that exhibition. An example of this search, of this insertion, as we have said, in the public sphere, is fostered by the episode of the massacre at Trelew, which is the name of the Argentine city where it took place, in 1972. The illegal execution of sixteen guerrillas, detained at a jail in Rawson in retaliation for their attempt to escape, on August 22 of that year, under the dictatorship of General Lanusse.

Just one month after these events, the artists responded by organizing an artistic, theatrical, gesture—which you can describe in greater detail, Horacio—in an open space, in a public square, as a kind of counter-official commemoration, as Ana Longoni has called it. On September 23, CAyC presented an exhibition titled *Arte e ideología: CAyC al aire libre: arte de sistemas II* at Plaza Roberto Arlt, in the city center.

There, all thirteen of you, together with other invited artists, exhibited the collective work titled *La realidad subterránea*, which includes pictures of Nazi camps; sixteen crosses at the bottom of an excavation, which make reference to the repressive situation you were experiencing; and the installation of *300 metros de cinta negra para enlutar una plaza pública*, which is the image we see here, one of very few images that have survived from that event in which you surrounded the entire perimeter of the square with a black plastic band—using, as you have mentioned, poor, affordable materials—that was about three hundred meters long and sixty centimeters wide. And there, after certain sections, you began to create a series of knots representing black ribbons. In a certain way, you put a public square into mourning.

It's a minimalist gesture, very povera, definitely of mourning. It reminds me a great deal of the work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude and their "concealment," with an outdoor audience, which, after just two days, was completely censored and dismantled by the authorities. Apparently, a public officer showed up, merely due to the political nature of the initiative.

Horacio, can you cast your mind back and talk about those two specific days? From setting up the work until its dismantling. What do you remember of those two days, today? Can you recall how you did it and how you experienced it?

HZ: Alright. First of all, I'd like to clarify that this exhibition was a group exhibition, organized by CAyC and by all of us, meaning the Grupo de los Trece. Not only did visual artists participate, but also, musicians, singers, and poets. Plays were also performed in the square, making it impossible to tell who was the audience and who the performer. In that sense, it was also a consequence of experimental theater, particularly of Grotowski's poor theater. I mean, the experience was not simply about art in the open air, as some had expected. Rather, this event in the public space opened up the possibility of having new experiences with the body, new sensitive experiences, based on works that leave behind this distinct separation between art and its performance in the audience.

I think that, beyond this characteristic of the works is the artists' reaction to this tragedy, to the tragic event in which thirteen people were killed, with no previous trial, that happened a month before the opening of this public space, outdoors, in the square. Thus, many changed their works and responded with other characteristics, they responded to the execution with works of a political nature, while others kept the works they had planned on showing a month before.

Well, I am one of the ones who did not. I belong to the group that reacted with a work that was completely different but related to the experience of brutal violence. My work is this black tape, which is an archaic visual code comprehensible to all, the color of mourning. It is historically an allusion to pain and to death. The mourning of the public square, the presence of this black tape, indicates the presence of an absence. The black tape shows what could not be presented, what is missing. Mourning is a sign of what no longer exists. It is an empty image that signals the impossibility of a visible image.

We could also say that it is an emotional and conceptual appropriation of the real tragedy of what happened in the real reality. And so, this work—which lasted twenty-four hours because it was dismantled, together with the rest of the works in the square, dismantled, destroyed—is the result of a negative creative process, let's say. A black line is a formal and conceptual reduction that tends toward immateriality. A black line offers the most significative possibilities with the least material resources. In other words, a "poor art." An art that finds in materials that can be acquired in a warehouse, such as the black plastic ribbon, the means of expression.

Now, in this work in particular, the title is very important, because it describes the work itself, as it is titled *300 metros de cinta negra para enlutar una plaza pública*. The title is

a description of the work, not an explicit condemnation, or an explicit ethical condemnation, or a metaphor for the execution, or about the actions and projects of the regime. The title is also not a political slogan, nor does it clarify my intention or offer any explanations. Personally, I'm not interested in artworks that are self-evident, self-sufficient, or baroque. However, I am interested in the relationship between works and their context. Relationships, in general, like energy, are not necessarily visible. They are thought, felt, imagined. The formal resolution of this work of *300 metros de cinta negra para enlutar una plaza pública* is based, in a way, on the application and the real translation of a famous aphorism by an architect, the rationalist Mies van der Rohe, that synthesizes the expressive poetics of the Bauhaus school of art and design: "Less is more." Though, I included a new significant word: "Less is *much* more." With fewer things, we can say many more things.

From a strictly visual perspective, the work is a black line that surrounds the space of the square. It is an abstract work. It is a minimalist work but, nevertheless, it is a concrete work, as it makes reference to a real event in the history of Argentina, in a public space. It is a work that highlights the context of its origin. In very general terms, I believe no work of art is necessary in itself. And that no artist should be forced to create and exhibit his own work, although, in the face of tragic social events, it is possible for artists to react through their own artistic practice and with their own poetics. This reaction has to do with their emotionality, with their existential circumstances, and with their ethical requirements.

A sinister event that has just taken place, the execution, sets off in the artist, any artist, the idea for a work of art. This project is a sort of translation of the consequences of the event. In my case, the work resulting from this creative process cannot be but tragic, as the project was conceived and felt under the radiance, the resonance, and the contamination of a negative stimulus. I think it's a tragic work of art; I think this is a tragic work of art. It's not a simple representation—it comes before representation. A tragic work, in this case, is a review of one of the many occurrences of state terrorism, which demands the reinterpretations of those who observe it, who truly give sense to the work. Therefore, one could affirm that the process of putting something into mourning, working with mourning, in a certain way, infects those who contemplate the work, those who experience it. This experience lets arise the aesthetical being in the observer. If viewers are beholding what they want to see, in a certain way, their way of looking is their way of being. Thus, viewers identify with what they think and feel. The viewer is what he looks at and what he feels.

I think this work is the most classical sense possible: a work of tragic art that comes from a tragedy. The tragic element of the work reveals the impossibility of representing it by any means other than figuration. This work, this absence, makes us feel and reflect, once and again, about the true, original, and dark event that happened in the

real reality. I think a tragic work is an endless review that hides nothing but acknowledges, reveals, and questions the event to recall, talk about, and discuss it repeatedly, again and again. The tragic work of art diverges, if we can talk of divergence, from what is thought in solitude and felt in silence, without altering the dark, sad nature of the real event.

Set in a public space, a tragic work uses that setting to take the consciousness of the observer by surprise. The sense and the meaning of the tragedy evoked in this work are not present within the work. Sense and meaning are found behind the eyes of the viewer. That gaze is part of the tragedy. I do not believe that works of art, of any kind, fulfill expectations of any kind. Nor do they serve as a tool of communication. I think tragedies have the ability to mobilize thought with imagination and memory. Perhaps with the hope to sublimate the pain caused by barbarity. I think this could be a way of approaching my own work. An interpretation from the artist's practice.

IC: I really like what you said about sublimation and, now that you have explained it from a different perspective, the idea of the tragic work. Also very interesting is the contrast between a work that, on the one hand, is so rational and stylized, intellectually speaking, and, on the other hand, truly demands from the audience a response of pure emotion, feeling, commotion of course, repulsion, of weeping in grief, and therefore, let's say, it creates empathy.

It is curious because, generally, conceptual art operates in a purely rationalized environment. Whereas this work moves between these two poles. Do you see it this way?

HZ: Exactly. Of course.

IC: I'd like to, Horacio, if you want, taking into account this work and the oppressive and repressive political context in which you were living in such a way, to make a connection with the things you did immediately afterwards. For instance, this work, *Forma y función*, from 1973, which you create, there are several variations of this work, as you may know, with twenty-five empty bottles that are used in three different ways. There is a bottle filled with naphtha, another that holds a flower, and another that contains wine.

This idea of art as a tool to respond to violence, which you appropriate within the Duchampian readymade. Here it's more povera, in fact, but it's also Duchampian. We recently spoke about Edgardo Antonio Vigo, a visual artist who was a great influence when you two were in contact at that time, and who inspired your linguistic usage of words, but also, in considering art as poetry, as visual language.

In order to connect this work with other works from that time, with that essential work of yours that is conceptual art in its purest form, titled *Este papel es una cárcel*. It's a picture you took of a piece of paper on which you wrote this phrase, and which demonstrates how, during a period of repression, art is envisioned as a repressive discipline as well. You see art as a repressive or oppressive institution in itself. You talk about so many of the contradictions you are describing right now. That question of how to solve that tension between quitting art to move into political activism but without quitting art entirely.

How do you connect these works? I'd like you to talk about prison, the concept of prison Nicolás emphasized earlier. Immediately after making this artwork you develop a project of designs of prison architecture and prisons for artists. That idea of prisons, of being imprisoned—how do you develop it in your work?

HZ: Let's say that around 1972, more or less, I start thinking of the prison as a metaphor for art. That is, art as a closed system, on the one hand. And I use the language of architecture, which is my background, because it is a language that can be easily understood by all. I think any person who can read and write, can read architectural drawings. From there, I start to think about the extraordinary precedent this has in art history, even, far off in time, in the mid-eighteenth century, Piranesi had his *Imaginary Prisons*.

Piranesi's prisons are anti-utopias, but they are prisons conceived almost for large crowds. They are collective prisons. Whereas I fragment this, and all the prisons I produce, whether floating or underground, are individual prisons. They are for a single person. So this is already a very big difference. They are inventions, more or less, these prisons floating on the river. I say more or less, because at the time of the dictatorship in Argentina, there was a warship that functioned as a prison as well. It was docked at the Port of Buenos Aires. There was a ship they had turned into a prison. That is to say, it was a floating prison. I think Piranesi hadn't imagined this, but the Argentine dictatorship did—to use the La Plata River and the Atlantic Ocean as punishment to penalize individuals.

I was always fond of the idea of the individual being completely isolated and separated, in a bubble, let's say, in the case of the prisons that are submerged, who cannot see the outside world. This image, for me, coincides with a time when art, as a closed system, was still feasible, but difficult to extend conceptually.

On the other hand, the repression in Argentina had paved the way for these closed spaces to emerge as punishment, something terrifying for artists, as their works could no longer be exhibited and they could only produce art in their studios, without showing it. Artists did not exhibit their works during the dictatorship. In a way, the consequences

of that confinement within the artist's own studio and the production of art from that confinement is not much different from the consequences the current pandemic will have.

IC: Yes, I was going to allude to that issue. You anticipated what this period would be like. It's a very ironic relationship, to really be enclosed in the studio making art without being able to show it or interact with those who will understand the work, ends up being alienating. This alienation, I think, is suffered by everybody. This is in relation to prisons, but you have also worked with empty bottles, one of them serving as a vase with a flower.

HZ: This was a work . . . I started to work with objects at the same time, in 1973. And this digression, let's say, from drawings to working with objects and language was the consequence of my friendship with the artist and visual poet Vigo, whom you mentioned earlier. I met him at Instituto Di Tella in 1968. He had curated an exhibition called *Novíssima poesia*. That was the title. It was there that I met him. He guided me and strengthened my knowledge of the universe of Marcel Duchamp. Particularly, of the readymade.

That is how I access the object, which is available at a warehouse or in any corner store, which you can buy, transform, and change the course of its regular use toward another form of communication. These everyday objects, industrially produced, in this case are titled *Forma y función*. This also comes from the Bauhaus, from functionalism in architecture and its relationship with shape, on the one hand. Their potential uses are the possibilities of an object like the bottle, an industrially produced object. All the bottles are exactly the same, of course, the only thing that changes is their content.

And there you have the three possible uses: wine, water, and naphtha or benzine—that is, a Molotov cocktail. And the aesthetical, which could be the flower, a rose in the bottle, somehow speaks about shape and content, which are two archaic bonds, to understand that works of art have shape and also content.

I think I felt very comfortable playing in the space between architecture and art history, language, and the title of the work, and even playing with those words. As well as with historical references and the weight of words. Allusions to functionalism, shape, water, and the Molotov cocktail, to the transformation of society by violence, etc. That is another variant that had nothing to do with prisons, but rather with this receptivity the readymade gave me, and which is reflected in many of my other works from that time.

IC: Amidst the readymade, arte povera, and also architecture. Considering your architectural training and your work as an architect throughout the years, how has your

profession influenced artistic practice? As we were saying the other day, there are plenty of artists who are architects, right?

Spatial, territorial issues seemed to be in vogue among artists at that time. I make reference now to this other series you worked on in the 1970s, the cartographies. Luis Benedit, for instance—he was also an architect.

HZ: Exactly.

IC: The issue of people and their environment. How would you say architecture has influenced and still influences you today?

HZ: I think that academic training at that time—I don't know if it has improved or declined since then—when both of us, Benedit and I, studied, provided a general overview. Our professors had been students who had worked or had direct references to the Bauhaus's modern architecture. So, they were good professors who, in fact, were always open to new possibilities for transforming architecture and its social and urban function. This direct relationship was not acknowledged by any school of fine art, anywhere. Since they dealt with academic knowledge, the visual arts, in particular, ignored the background that, in turn, architecture provided. So, it was a good education.

I think my training in architecture was a good entry point into art, and I had several friends and colleagues in art and architecture, such as Benedit, obviously. Nicolás García Uriburu as well—he was the one who colored rivers to discuss environmental pollution—and Osvaldo Romberg. There were several architects-cum-artists or artists-cum-architects who deviated from or transgressed the rigid or academic separations and began to work in both arenas.

Without leaving art aside, I also worked mainly as an architect. During my time in Rome I worked at architecture and design studios. Art and architecture were channels or communicating vessels, let's say. It's what they've always been and what they still are. Later I privileged art, though I could have continued sailing on the two boats.

IC: We talked about the time you spent in Rome in 1976, where you actively worked as an architect. I wanted to mention that work.

Anyway, Horacio, time has gone by so fast! It's so interesting, all the things you are sharing with us. I'd like to leave some time for questions from the audience.

HZ: Sure.

IC: Let me see. Just a second. Nicolás, our collaborator, is going to help relay questions from the audience.

NG: Hello. The first question, a very important one, and also, very general, is about the Latin American context. It is a question that this exhibition puts forward as well, which is whether in those situations of repression and exile there was any contact between the different Latin American productions. Specifically, if you were in contact with Antonio Dias during your stay in Italy. This would be a sub-question within the main question. First, the Latin American issue. Second, Antonio Dias.

HZ: Sure. It's an interesting question, difficult to answer. In fact, I'm going to quote Jorge Glusberg, whom I became deeply acquainted with over the course of several years. He had curated a group exhibition in which a large number of artists were involved, called *Hacia un perfil del arte latinoamericano*. With that title, the exhibition—I'm not sure, but I think more than fifty artists from around the world participated—he tried to make the world see that a single Latin American art does not exist. What really does exist are Latin American issues. And those cultural, economic, and political issues, among others, may or may not be reflected, or it might be reflected in different ways, depending on their source. We can't speak of a European art either. We can speak of art from France, art from Italy, art from Greece. . . It is unclear why there should be a Latin American art. I've never really understood it either.

Anyway, I got to know Antonio Dias, indeed. I met him in Rio de Janeiro and consider him a great artist. I don't know what his opinion would be about this. I think his works, even the most abstract and obscure ones, are deeply political and Latin American. It's very difficult to imagine he could have produced the same work in a different context. I don't think in terms of illustrations. I think Latin American art is not an illustration of the Latin American. It is a complex issue. That's why it is a good question. Because it has no answer at all, or because it has a lot of answers.

IC: Regarding this issue, there is another question in relation to what you've just said: "How did references to international conceptual art circulate within CAyC? How were you received by the Grupo de los Trece? Did they match the concerns you had at the time, as a group? Was the category of conceptual art rejected?"

HZ: I think conceptual art underwent a transformation in the people I know, and in myself. Its entire tautological side, the act of reducing art to language. . . These were formal reductions, made by simply changing the title of some of [Joseph] Kosuth's conceptual works, or of any of the works of the great conceptual artists, including Dennis Oppenheim, among others. By changing the title of a work, you could change its content.

I mean, some of them really had a strong communicative potential, but interest was very limited. It was like . . . I always felt they spoke strictly to calculative thinking, right? What Heidegger calls "calculative thinking," a mental geometric dimension. Instead, I think arte povera, with a pile of straw, for instance, communicated different kinds of things that were not quantifiable, that were hardly tradable, that were not immediately consumable. So, I think they were forgetting the more tactile side of things. They forgot the object that is there, and which communicates with the user. Tactile and immediate. Not only visual, but also linguistic, or tautological, or grammatical.

IC: Another related question: "Some theorists argue that CAyC was mainly a political resistance against the military regime. Others say it is the home of institutional critique, that is, the art of the concept that questions the definition of the artwork itself. Which of the two do you think best defines CAyC?"

HZ: In the Grupo de los Trece, there were thirteen of us, so there were many trends within the same group. There were those who were political militants, for instance, who belonged to the left, but who kept that somewhat separate from what they produced as artists. There were others, however, who were also political militants but whose works were political reactions, even from a visual point of view. There were others who were not interested at all in politics and were very formal and they did things very well.

It's very difficult to say if one trend prevailed over another. There were many trends, and they blended together and contaminated one another. And that was positive. I think the mix was good.

IC: Another related question—there is a lot of interest in CAyC—"What was your involvement in the São Paulo Biennials? Particularly the 1978 edition. Do you remember it?"

HZ: Yes, yes. Of course, I do. I was not a part of CAyC anymore at that time because I had left the country. I was not there. Anyhow, I remember that one time—I was not living in Argentina, but in Rio de Janeiro—I met Antonio Dias, the Brazilian artist, and he told me, "It is a shame there is no São Paulo Biennial due to the military."

Art biennials gave Brazilians the chance to see what was happening outside. So, it was a very interesting point of view, because if artists do not organize a biennial, if we criticize biennials and biennials close down, we are left without queries or answers in relation to the outside world. This was a different perspective. And I learned of it from a Brazilian, a Brazilian artist.

IC: Interesting. And regarding that indoor-outdoor connection, there is another person in the audience interested in mail art. They would like to ask if you can go deeper into this

issue, especially, regarding the role of censorship in the exhibition that was titled *La última exposición de arte-correo*. How did censorship manage to reach mail art?

HZ: Alright. Well, it did not reach it. Mail art was a system of communication among artists that was really interesting, before the internet existed, as it allowed us to keep in contact with artists from other places. But it didn't exist. One could say mail art had clearly defined limits.

Vigo and I, we titled the show . . . We were two curators: Edgardo Antonio Vigo and I. We decided to call it *La última exposición* because we believe mail art should not be exhibited in an art gallery. It was about the circulation of works. It was not the same as if they were paintings. No, no. They were not paintings. And they were not paintings to be seen. I mean, exhibiting in an art gallery a postcard with a message that was sent from one spot on the planet to another was considered a violence to the work. Therefore, we called it the *última*, and it was the last one we organized.

I believe the means were incorrect and things started to get mixed up. At the Paris Biennial, in 1971, there was a section dedicated to mail art. And that was a contradiction.

IC: Yes. Excellent. Well, Horacio, I think we've reached the time limit allowed on this platform, but it was a pleasure to be in conversation with you.

HZ: Likewise.

IC: [It's been great to hear you] explaining things in a different manner and reviewing your work from that time in light of current events. I hope we will continue to have discussions in other forums.

HZ: Certainly!

IC: And in conversations off-screen as well! Thank you also to the audience for being here, for listening to Horacio, and for sending us such interesting questions.

HZ: No doubt.

IC: I also want to thank Ariel and Nicolás for their support. And thanks to you, of course.

HZ: Very well. Thank you!

IC: Thanks to you.

HZ: See you soon.

IC: See you soon.

Translator: Luz Bassetto
Copy Editor: Jessica Ruiz DeCamp