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LOS GRUPOS AND THE ART OF INTERVENTION IN 1960s AND 1970s MEXICO

by

ARDEN DECKER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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ABSTRACT

LOS GRUPOS AND THE ART OF INTERVENTION IN 1960s AND 1970s MEXICO

By Arden Decker
Advisor: Katherine Manthorne

Throughout the 1960s and 70s, Mexican artists employed art interventions in commercial galleries, cultural institutions, and city streets to facilitate a renegotiation of the role of art (and the artist) in society. The art intervention, a mode of conceptualism, served to circumvent traditional spaces for the display of art and to destabilize and expose the hierarchies or power structures that shaped the art world and society at large. Artists began to explore alternative definitions of the artist and the art object as early as 1961, when progenitors of conceptualism such as Mathias Goeritz, José Luis Cuevas, and Alejandro Jodorowsky produced art interventions in galleries, theaters, art schools, museums, and public spaces.

These new interventionist practices were forged within the context of local and global social revolutions. In Mexico, widespread repression and censorship at the hands of the state culminated in the 1968 student and workers’ movements. Tragically marked by the government-initiated massacre of peaceful demonstrators in Tlatelolco, the movement accelerated incidents of protest, police and military brutality, and a crisis within cultural institutions. Though the Mexican government presented itself as aligned with socialist causes, the 1970s saw an unofficial dirty war launched against perceived radicals to quash the momentum activists had gained in 1968. This heated environment found artists in a continuing struggle to find new forms of expression as well as spaces for the display of their work. Many turned to collectivization and conceptualist tactics in what has come to be called the movimiento de los grupos or the “Group Movement” that flourished between 1973 and 1979.
Despite the proliferation of art interventions across the two decades (and within similar socio-political conditions) connections between the 1960s generation and the Grupos of the 1970s have not been adequately addressed. Accordingly, this project examines the ways in which strategies of intervention served as a form of resistance for both generations. I argue that the intervention served as a primary tool in the renegotiation of the social role of art and the artist. As a vehicle of conceptualism, interventionist practice served to introduce institutional critique, new media and mass communication, as well as performative actions as artistic modes, irreversibly altering the cultural landscape of Mexico.
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INTRODUCTION

GRUPOS AND THE ART OF INTERVENTION: MEXICAN CONCEPTUALISMS AND HISTORIES OF AMNESIA

The history of Mexican art in the 1960s and 1970s has recently benefitted from studies into unorthodox artistic practices such as conceptualism.¹ This period ushered in an unprecedented shift towards blurring the divisions of the pictorial or that sought to do away with the division of disciplines. The search for artistic autonomy became of primary concern to artists across these two decades, beginning with the progenitors of conceptualism in the early 1960s and later among numerous artist groups from the 1970s, collectively referred to as los Grupos (or the Groups). Many of these artists used strategies of conceptualism, and particularly art interventions as a means of renegotiating relations between artist, object, institution, and viewers, leading to what would later be called institutional critique. This new interventionist practice was forged within the context of both local and global social revolution, inextricably linking interventions to the political. Despite the fact that interventions were increasingly central to conceptual practice in Mexico, they have not been the explicitly analyzed by any existing study.

The art intervention can most generally be defined as a project that “interact[s] with an existing structure or situation,” such as an audience, an artwork, the public/public domain, or an institution and is most commonly identified as a mode of conceptual and Performance art.²


Interventionist practice in the 1960s and 70s aimed to transform the role of the artist and of society itself. As Cristian Nae has suggested, interventionist practices not only helped to define the “post-medium” condition of conceptualism (identified by Rosalind Krauss), they also served as a strategy for resistance and artistic autonomy.\(^3\)

The art intervention first made an appearance in the late 1950s and early 1960s, though many antecedents may also be found in movements such as Dada and Surrealism. In the United States, Allan Kaprow and his development of the “Happening” (first suggested in 1958) demonstrated the potential for interventions to eliminate the “fourth wall” (or the barrier between artist, object, and viewer) to facilitate direct participation and interaction between the three. In the context of Europe, artists such as Guy Debord and the Situationist movement, implemented interventions as a means of extricating themselves from the gallery system and liberating the role of the spectator in object-viewer relations.\(^4\) In South America, artists such as the Argentine Marta Minujín, began staging Happenings (one of the many forms of intervention) which also sought to renegotiate the social potential for the coalescence of art, daily life, and political concerns within the context of the military dictatorship.\(^5\) The art intervention provided artists with a testing ground for evading, disturbing, or exposing hierarchies and power structures within art galleries, the term “Performance Art” did not arrive in Mexico until the late 1970s, which is discussed in chapter four of this dissertation. Nonetheless, interventionist practice has been described as a kind of “proto-Performance” by several authors (Alcazar and Fuentes, eds. *Performance y arte-acción en América Latina*, (Mexico City: Ediciones Sin Nombre, CITRU, and Ex-Teresa Arte Actual, 2005) and Rita Eder, “Two Aspects of the Total Work of Art: Experimentation and Performativity,” in *Desafío de la estabilidad*, 65-81.


\(^5\) Minujín is discussed in detail in chapter four of this dissertation.
institutions, governments, or within everyday life. The art intervention in Mexico sprang from the coalescence of inventing new artistic forms and of social revolution.

Until recently, the beginnings of the art intervention (and conceptualism at large) in Mexico were little-known and drastically understudied, largely due to the dominance of the promotion and collection of figurative and abstract art within cultural institutions. There was a dramatic increase in the use of the art intervention across these two decades, but how and why did Mexican artists of the 1960s and 70s begin to implement these strategies? And how might we begin to parse out generational connections (or disconnections) between early practitioners of conceptualisms and the Grupos, all of whom engaged in art interventions, whether in the city streets or in the art museum.

One answer may be found in 1968. This was a pivotal year for the citizens of Mexico and the world. Many countries faced the challenges of their public’s increasingly louder calls for social justice and tolerance as some of the most fervent political uprisings of the latter half of the twentieth century occurred. The civil rights, anti-war, and counterculture movements of the U.S., the student revolution of May 1968 in France, and the Southern Cone’s horrifying dictatorial regimes have been studied in detail, as has the artistic response to such events. While the architecture and design programs related to the Mexico City Olympics have recently been treated in detail, the roles of socially-driven and conceptual art of this time have surprisingly been paid less attention.⁶

The tragic events associated with the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City, took place during a time of global social revolution. On April 4th, civil-rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. On June 5th, U.S. Senator Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated and died on the

In May of that year, university students in Paris began a series of strikes that eventually led to a general workforce uprising that included ten million French citizens, forcing French society into a new, more liberal frontier. But it was the 1968 Summer Olympics that served as an international stage for tragedy and events that spawned unforeseen and buried conflicts, globally, in Mexico and in the U.S. During the ceremonies, Olympic runners gold-medalist, Tommie Smith and bronze-medalist, John Carlos raised their fists in the air as a sign of allegiance to the Black Power movement, in one of the most significant and infamous gestures of African-American solidarity, only to be banned from the games for life. This powerful act of unity is particularly poignant in contrast to the events that had unfolded in Mexico City just ten days prior— the Tlatelolco Massacre.

The increasingly conservative and oppressive social climate of Mexico under President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz’s administration finally came to a head with widespread protesting, largely initiated by university students, but also including professors, middle class workers, and even entire families. The political unrest grew more and more widespread and student demonstrations were met with unfounded and increasing state and police brutality. Díaz Ordaz and his administration made several smoke-and-mirror attempts, such as the notorious “extended hand” speech to quell the uprisings, but the government’s empty statements only provided more fuel for the flames as they continued to ignore the realities of this uprising, which had come to include illegal imprisonments, violent squashing of peaceful protests, and even disappearances of Mexican citizens.

While the initial targets of the student and worker protests were varied, the Summer Olympics provided an emblem of the government’s corruption, against which Mexicans could
Nine straight weeks of demonstrations culminated in a massive, citywide march of over 15,000 university students and sympathizers on October 2. That evening, at least 5,000 protestors gathered at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in the Tlatelolco section of the city. At sunset, military and police forces surrounded the gathering with tanks and began firing live shots into the crowd. As the chaos subsided, anywhere from 200 to 1,000 lives had been taken by the hands of the government, including students, workers, and innocent bystanders including women and children.  

Tlalteloco undeniably impacted the trajectory of contemporary art in Mexico. Yet, social forces did not act alone in encouraging the proliferation of artists groups in the 1970s. It should be noted that many of the artists were very young in 1968 and the expedient erasure of this event within official memory distanced the younger artists from the crisis. As Olivier Debroise notes, “in the mid-1970s, a generation that had only heard about the events of 1968 (or that had only seen them on black-and-white TV sets) regained a belief in collective destinies.” But beyond embracing collective practice, how did the 70s generation relate to this political moment and was it unique in precipitating conceptual practices? Without denying that 1968 was a game-changing event, I argue that there is a longer trajectory that must be taken into account when discussing “los Grupos.”

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7. The beginnings of the movement were largely focused on university bureaucracy and a desire for greater social freedoms. However the movement quickly grew to encompass worker’s rights, improving urban conditions, and a call for transparency of the immense corruption of the Mexican government. This history is described in greater detail in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

8. The Mexican government quickly began covering-up the true number of deaths and many victims were simply disappeared.

The 1970s artists were taught by those who had begun their careers in the 1950s and early 60s. The 1950s saw a generation searching for new artistic methods that would liberate them from the nationalism and “social art” that had come to dominate official culture as a result of the promotion of muralism and the Mexican School of Painting abroad. This generation, labeled by Octavio Paz as “La Ruptura” or the Rupture, utilized both figuration (called *Nueva presencia*) and abstraction to pursue individual and often more internal artistic expressions that rejected what they perceived to be propaganda and didacticism. Alongside the Ruptura, and aided by the expansion of education and a cultural scene committed to opening new channels for the creation and display of art, artists also began to question the merits of either figuration or abstraction, favoring explorations into the dematerialization of the object as well as the potential for interdisciplinary approaches for art making. These were artists that were already beginning to explore conceptual proposals and were the first in the country to define artistic interventions (in public and within institutions).

The Ruptura was defined by the younger artists of the 1950s who no longer believed in a need to work within the framework of nationalist art (and muralism in particular). With the failures of the Mexican Revolution, came the failure of Muralism.\(^\text{10}\) The post-Muralist generation inherited an artistic landscape largely cultivated by *los tres grandes* and their paradoxical relationship to the collectivization of society, and by extension, artistic practice. While muralism was both international and experimental in the 1920s and 1930s, by the 1960s the movement had come to be viewed by artists as institutionalized and as an official art that usurped the support of the Mexican government and private patrons. New experimental practices that did not neatly fall

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\(^{10}\) See: Chapter One of this dissertation and Raquel Tibol, *Confrontaciones: crónica y recuento*. (Mexico City: Ediciones Sámara, 1992).
into categories of painting or sculpture had a difficult time finding audiences as there was little to no institutional support for such work.

The continuing focus on the muralists and the Mexican School of Art fueled the growing discontent among young art students unable to find an escape from the strong arm of government-approved art. Moreover, arguments over figuration and abstraction had come to dominate the rhetoric surrounding art production. Debates between established artists (particularly with Siqueiros) over the crisis in Mexican art in the late 1950s and early 60s assisted in creating a dismissive attitude (by cultural institutions) towards artists that were beginning to introduce interdisciplinary approaches to their work. The dominance of abstraction exemplified by artists such as Manuel Felguérez and Vicente Rojo and movements such as neo-figuration (labeled \emph{nueva presencia} in Mexico), which included the artists Arnold Belkin, José Luis Cuevas, Alberto Gironella, and Francisco Icaza, continued to be promoted and supported by the Mexican government and cultural institutions. Nonetheless many of these artists also participated in non-traditional platforms for the production and display of art as they debated the future.

As the recent exhibition and catalogue, \emph{Desafío a la estabilidad: procesos artísticos en México, 1952-1967} has shown, artists of the Ruptura and \emph{nueva presencia} were heavily invested a reaction against muralism and nationalism, but they were not solely devoted to debates around abstraction or figuration with respect to the future of Mexican art.\footnote{Rita Eder, ed. \textit{Desafío a la estabilidad: procesos artísticos 1952-1967}. (Mexico City: MUAC/UNAM, 2014).} In fact, many also searched for new forms of plastic experimentation that were as equally rooted in theater, literature, and poetry as they were in aesthetic investigations. Collaborations between the Ruptura artists and those that represented a new mode such as Mathias Goeritz, José Luis Cuevas, Alejandro...
Jodorowsky, Juan José Gurrola and many others forged the emergence of conceptualisms in Mexico.

As conceptualism solidified into an artistic trend beginning in the mid-1960s, it nonetheless remained heterogeneous in its practiced forms in Mexico and across the globe. It came to encompass a variety of strategies and ideologies from installation-based work, the dematerialization of the object, phenomenology, institutional critique, and action art, which often bordered on the category of what would come to be called Performance art.\(^\text{12}\) Despite the variety of forms practiced, there are certain shared interests and goals that may be identified across national lines.

A desire to reactivate and reengage the spectator in the artistic process played a major role in the artistic goals of conceptualists across the world. From the most often-cited progenitor of social conceptualism (or social sculpture), Joseph Beuys, to the early happenings of Argentine artists such as Roberto Jacoby, Oscar Bony, or Marta Minujin, conceptualism began to take the social function of art to new levels of importance while simultaneously remaining grounded in art historical and institutional critique. For the Mexican case in the 1960s and even into the 1970s, the search for new models for an art that could speak to and involve the public, grew not solely out of political unrest, but also from the rejection of their own artistic history: the perceived didactic, nationalist qualities offered up by the dominant artistic models: muralism, figurative painting, *mexicanidad*, and tendencies towards abstraction.

Mexican conceptual practices did not grow and thrive during the 1960s and 1970s for the same reasons as it did in the United States, Europe, or even South America. It did not develop solely in reaction to the dominance of Minimalist sculpture, to promote utopian and mystical

\(^{12}\) The term “Performance” did not arrive in Mexico until the 1970s as is discussed in greater detail in chapter four of this dissertation. In the 1960s, the terms action, intervention, or event were used interchangeably to describe these types of practice.
ideologies, or to continue explorations in phenomenology. Rather, Mexican conceptualisms share commonalities with these trends, while consistently providing a reaction, a record, and a response to not only the particular political and cultural climate of Mexico, but also to local and international artworld debates and movements.

_I quit painting when I saw that it only made us marvel, without changing anything, when I felt film was winning me over, when I realized that to survive, the tactile and the trigger are needed. Not the brush. To be radical is to be fundamental: we should listen attentively to the present, it is the translator of the future._\(^{13}\) (Felipe Ehrenberg, 1976)

Mexican artist Felipe Ehrenberg’s assertion that “we should listen attentively to the present” reflects a general spirit of the 1960s and 70s when the division between the official, government-supported Mexican art (international geometric abstraction and neo-figuration) and younger artists’ promotion of conceptual practices grew into a large chasm. This schism would only increase as the 1970s generation pushed to reflect the condition of the world in which they lived and to revitalize an artistic climate that had grown increasingly repressive, chaotic, and paranoid after 1968. Building on the headway made by the artists of the Ruptura and the early actions of artists like Goeritz, Jodorwosky, and others, the 70s generation—and in particular the activities of the Grupos—made the most significant contribution towards the introduction of conceptualism in Mexico. Collectively, the progenitors of conceptualisms in the 1960s and the Grupos ushered in a new era of unorthodox art practices in Mexico, but their relationships to trends and ideas outside of the local context have been less explored.

Utilizing collectivism and social progressiveness, the artists of the 1970s largely worked in groups that shared similar goals despite the varied strategies employed to achieve them. From the use of humor and satire by the members of No-Gruppo to the serious attempts by Tepito Arte

\(^{13}\) Felipe Ehrenberg, _Manchuria: Visión periférica, Felipe Ehrenberg 50 años._ (México D.F.: Editorial Diamantina and La Máquina del Tiempo, 2008), 57.
Acá, Germinal, or TIP, to draw attention to specific community issues, or the incendiary graphic works with radical political messages produced by Suma and Grupo Mira, the artists associated with the Grupos often employed guerilla-style, interventionist tactics to create and exhibit their work. Strongly reacting to the violence and socio-political struggles that had arisen due to the events of 1968 as well as new government-sponsored initiatives to further urbanize Mexico City, the Grupos used this moment to take advantage of a new audience, ready for change and looking for the artistic voices that could speak for them. In 1977, many of the artists and collective associated with the Grupos received international attention due to their participation in the X Paris Youth Biennial, and they continued to be an essential component of experimental practices in Mexico until 1982, when most of the Grupos had disbanded.

Despite the urgency with which the artists of the 1970s began creating conceptual art and art interventions, their history has become buried and to a large degree lives only in the archives of the artists, select institutions that dared to support their work, and the memories of participants and witnesses. Moreover, a lack of critical reception due to the ephemeral nature of many of these projects has led to a history that has (for better or worse) been told largely through the perspective of the artists themselves. There have been numerous interviews and texts written by the artists of these generations, but there has not been adequate historical analysis of their works. An understanding of this period would benefit from more unbiased accounts.

Evidence of the significant impact the progenitors of Mexican conceptual art and the early stages of the movement had may be seen in the work of those artists who continued working into the 1970s. Regardless of the significant artistic innovations made by Mexican artists across these two decades, the history of conceptualism in Mexico is at best muddled and is

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14 Reception is also an issue when examining the publics of art interventions as sometimes there was no audience or documentation. Moreover, the decision not to directly engage the public or to not document an action was at times intentional. The emphasis on the ephemeral was often part of the concept.
only now beginning to be reconstructed and dealt with in any critical manner. Therefore, it is the primary goal of this project to recover this longer history of conceptual art through the particular phenomenon of the increasing and continued use of art interventions to expose the inner workings of institutions, both political and cultural.

LITERATURE

Recently, the scholarly landscape surrounding the 1960s has also begun to change and some headway is being made towards the bridging of proto-conceptual artists and conceptualists of the 1970s. The recent, comprehensive “prequel” to the 2006 La Era de la discrepancia (discussed below), the 2014 exhibition and catalogue, Desafío a la estabilidad: procesos artísticos 1952-1967 (Defying Stability: Artistic Processes in Mexico 1952-67) organized by art historian Rita Eder and a team of curators and scholars at the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC) is the first comprehensive attempt to reframe this period. The essential contribution tackles all brands of experimental practices during these two decades from early Performances and actions, experimental filmmakers, to architecture and photography, including many of the artists and projects included in this dissertation. However, the exhaustive nature of the project treats the period with an almost encyclopedic approach as they covered a vast range of artistic practices and themes, leaving much work to be done in framing experimental tendencies within the context of conceptualism. The chronological frame, while necessary, leaves audiences to make their own connections between generations and this is nearly impossible to achieve without some discussion of 1968, which the project eschewed. Nonetheless, the exhibition’s inclusion of many art interventions and non-traditional practices
paved a preliminary path for understanding the proto-conceptualisms that directly influenced the
Grupos after 1968.

In many ways my project is indebted to, and is an extension of, the work begun by
Olivier Debroise and Cuauhtémoc Medina with the exhibition and indispensable catalogue La era de la discrepancia/ The Age of Discrepancy: arte y cultura visual en México 1968-1997/ art and visual culture in Mexico 1968-1997. The first comprehensive attempt to survey and recover this “lost” period of Mexican art history, it is one of the only sources for seeing key works and identifying the major players, historical events, and ideologies circulating at the time. In explaining the genealogy of the exhibition, Debroise and Medina identify their attempt to shift the paradigm of writing this history away from discussions of international influence (and Mexican conceptualism’s assumed derivativeness) to acknowledge the role of Latin America’s own neo avant-garde.

The catalogue and its numerous essays attempt to resituate artistic production in Mexico within the context of the broader cultural shifts taking place from the 1960s through the 1990s, such as the hippie or jipi invasion, the development of a counterculture, the deinstitutionalization of exhibition practice, the student revolutions, the appearance of conceptual and neo-conceptual art, and the introduction of new media as a platform for artistic experimentation. As the exhibition and accompanying catalogue suggest, intellectual and artistic figures such as Mathias Goeritz, Alejandro Jodorowsky, Alberto Hijar, Juan Acha, Helen Escobedo, Felipe Ehrenberg, Adolfo Patiño, Maris Bustamante, and Lourdes Grobet played as an essential role in this development as the European and U.S. pioneers like Marcel Duchamp, Antonin Artaud, Allan Kaprow, Joseph Beuys, Hans Haacke, Guy Debord, or Marcel Broodthaers. Debroise and Medina do not deny the often-misunderstood globalized condition of Mexico during this period,
but rather seek to identify roots and origins from within the country itself to include within this history.

These authors have acknowledged several causes for the “cultural amnesia” surrounding this period in Mexican art history. The first is the post-1968 generation’s disconnection from the previous generation of artists, those taking part in the Ruptura. While the rumblings of a need for new modes of production began in the 1950s and continued into the 1960s, with the arguments put forth by prominent artists of the modernist generation such as Rufino Tamayo, Carlos Mérida, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, and a new generation of artists including José Luis Cuevas, these artists instigated a period of artistic innovation and detraction. However, these artists most often worked in abstract or neo-figurative painting and sculpture. Alternative methods of art making were not at the forefront of their artistic concerns until the early 1960s, despite a few precursory actions.\(^{15}\)

The second cause is the lack of government funding for artists working in alternative veins and the decline in art collecting during the post-Rupture period. This lack of financial support caused many artists and key artworks of the period to be erased from the cultural narrative (although this break from the institution is precisely what fueled a large percentage of conceptual practice). The omission of radical, contemporary art practice in state museums and state-sponsored exhibitions coupled with an increasingly repressive climate due to the student uprisings of the late 1960s fueled the desire for alternative exhibition spaces and a move towards artist collectives and collaboration.\(^{16}\)

\(^{15}\) See Chapter Two of this dissertation.

\(^{16}\) See Debroise and Medina, 25-26.
Debroise and Medina also indict the lack of survey texts covering the development of contemporary Mexican art and the narrow views of artistic development in the country reinforced by survey-style exhibitions organized inside and outside of Mexico that promoted and solidified a canon of modern Mexican art that was solely reflective of nationalistic concerns or the mexicanism/neo-Primitivist impulse deriving from the early modern period of the 1920s-40s. In canonizing art with a nationalistic impulse, the idea of modern Mexican art being overtly political and/or something exotic (due to a strong emphasis on indigenismo) became the dominant conception of Mexican artistic identity outside—and arguably inside—the country (at least officially.) As Debroise and Medina have noted:

[The 1991 exhibition “Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries”] was accompanied by parallel exhibitions of contemporary art that revealed a correspondence between the image of the nation designed by the Mexican government for export, and the prejudices of mainstream critics interested in certain young painters: both focused so heavily on the Mexicanism that dominated the 1930s and 1940s that they ended up marginalizing the art of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s to the point where those decades seemed never to have happened.  

In the local context of Mexico, Instituto de Bellas Artes (INBA)-sponsored annual or biennial salons that began to appear in 1957 and equally served to reinforce this incompete narrative.

These salons functioned as competitions and were most accommodating and rewarding for artists that produced work capable of being sold in international markets. This largely meant abstract or figurative painting, void of content that would indict the government or address the Mexican social condition in any overt manner.

Beginning around 1968 (and probably earlier), state museums and curators ceased making contemporary art a priority due to a shift away from nationalistic overtones in much of

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17 Ibid. This exhibition was organized by the Metropolitan Museum of art in association with the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura in Mexico.

the work being produced in the country and a marked decrease in government funding. Nonetheless, the precursors to full-blown conceptualism and performance/action art maintained a strong presence after the Ruptura had fizzled out. Figures such as José Luis Cuevas, Manuel Felguérez, or Vicente Rojo, were particularly influential in their movement away from official, state-sanctioned expositions and towards alternative and artist-run exhibition spaces. This freedom from the constraints of adhering to government-supported forums began to foster an atmosphere of greater artistic plurality and experimentation.

Within the heated socio-political climate leading up to the student revolts of 1968, state support for the arts dramatically declined. Debroise and Medina explain that:

…the State simply stopped collecting, and art that the public could not see could not have much impact. From this moment on, those who were crafting local narratives seemed unable to formulate historiographical criteria that could move beyond the limiting ideology of the peripheral Nation-State, caught in a perpetual and neurotic oscillation between periods supposedly open or closed to U.S. or European currents.¹⁹

This binary of being at the mercy of either European/international artistic developments or local (often nationalistic) concerns is a condition that has complicated the role and development of conceptualism in Latin American countries. Some scholars have recently tackled this issue head on and have offered alternative narrative constructions by which the history of conceptualism in Latin America may be told. It is no longer sufficient to conceive of Latin American conceptualism as having arrived late to the Mexican context. I argue that there are compelling local and global contexts that must be considered as this history develops.

A conceptual artist himself, Luis Camnitzer has published several studies on the development and trajectory of conceptual art in Latin America. In Conceptualism in Latin

**American Art**, Camnitzer traces the specific and local origins of conceptual practice and argues that this process cannot be adequately described by the grand narrative of art history. Taking a page from previous arguments made by art historian and curator Mari Carmen Ramírez, Camnitzer suggests that Latin America has its own traditions and conditions that elicit more of an art-historical matrix in which western influence is part of, but not solely responsible for, the genealogy of conceptualism. Camnitzer’s argument is indebted to Ramírez’s constellation model put forth in the exhibition and catalogue *Inverted Utopias*. Ramirez calls for a redefinition of Latin American art history that breaks down ruling hierarchies consistently reinforced throughout Western art history and rethinks those artists excluded from the traditional canon. Using a revisionist methodology, Ramirez identifies six constellations or webs that allow for multiple readings and interpretations that reveal the “relational potential” and “extreme adjustability” of the works. Camnitzer’s revisionist project is to seek the proper terminology, definitions, and historical framework for understanding the particular nature of conceptualism in Latin America.

Reading Latin American conceptualism through its own traditions and not via the established center reveals, in Camnitzer’s estimation, that the “movement” was not about style, but rather a strategy for approaching new forms of art making and is therefore more likely to be interdisciplinary. It is first necessary to discuss the terms “conceptual art” and “conceptualism” in order to fully understand the arguments put forth by Camnitzer. A divide exists between

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conceptual art in the center and in the periphery. In the center (Europe and the U.S.), “conceptual art” has become a label to describe art that privileges investigations of language and ideas, thus fostering a particular aesthetic and suggesting it to be a stylistic movement that easily fits into the linear trajectory of the grand narrative. By employing “conceptual art” as an overarching label, any room for deviation or variance from this canon would be looked down upon.

On the other hand, “Latin American Conceptualism” embodies an artistic development in which strategy and not style provided the unifying ties, thus encouraging interdisciplinary approaches and emphasizing a common concern for the relationship between art and daily life. Camnitzer explains:

The use of ‘conceptual art’ as a blanket terms gives importance to any formal resemblances to conceptual works produced in the cultural centers and ignores how art addresses its audience. Those works that deviate from the canon because they introduce elements (in both form and content) of local interest or relevance are ignored …or as seen as less important. Ironically, it is often those works that are not necessarily accessible outside their primary audience that have a greater local impact and cultural importance. 22

Analyzing the emergence of a cohesive and permeating conceptualism requires an in-depth look at the local and pan-Latin American occurrences that fostered such a development. Camnitzer identifies the first clear centers of a conceptual practice in Latin America. The first were in Argentina, Brazil, and among those Latin American artists working in New York or Paris. The second wave occurred in Uruguay, the third in Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, and Mexico, and the rest following suit. It is significant that Camnitzer identifies a post-1968 spirit of Latin Americanism based on common language, shared postcolonial condition, and belief that any form of hegemonic rule had necessarily to be considered destructive. 23 Similarly, there was a

22 Camnitzer, Conceptualism in Latin America, 23.

23 Ibid. 3.
shared sense of urgency when it came to the conflation of art and politics, where as in mainstream conceptual art, the dematerialization of the art object became the central focus. These shared socio-political conditions encouraged utopian thinking and a strong belief that local political action could affect an entire nation.

Yet this ideology places artists in a peculiar position as their roles as artists and as public citizens become blurred. The division of artist identity and citizen identity was mirrored, according to Camnitzer, by the continuing debates over the political nature of realism vs. abstraction—the narrative quality of realism was believed to facilitate an overt form of agitation and abstraction taking on a more utopian ideology. This perceived dichotomy left artists, like those associated with la Ruptura in Mexico, to try and find alternative means of making art that would escape these pre-existing models and the implications of them.

The dematerialization of the art object is a concern that permeates conceptual art of Europe and the U.S., as well as in Latin American conceptualism. Since Lucy Lippard first introduced the term in 1967, this process has been explained by Camnitzer as a logical continuation of the reductionism introduced largely through formalist models of abstract painting. Dematerialization, as it developed in the early 1960s, served as a vehicle for artists to deemphasize the material concerns associated with craft, leaving the idea or concept as the

Carla Stellweg, the founder of the journal *Artes Visuales*, has also similarly remarked that there was an overwhelming desire amongst artists at this time to connect with their contemporaries working in other countries. This need for connection was what inspired the founding of the journal. Carla Stellweg interview, *Sub-VERSIONES DE LA MEMORIA...60-70...MÉXICO*. DVD. Pilar García and Rafael Ortega, dir. (Mexico City: Centro de Documentación Arkheia, Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, UNAM, 2011), disc 3.

24 Ibid., 16-21.


26 Ibid., 29.
primary concern. Much of the project associated with dematerialization was a desire to reveal explicitly this reduction or erosion, thus leading to what has been labeled process art, a sub-style of conceptual art. But Lippard recognized the limitations of the term “dematerialization” to adequately describe the developments of the conceptual in a heterogenous manner. After her 1968 visit to jury an exhibition in Argentina, she became aware of the “Rosario Group” and their use of conceptual platforms to address radical political ideas, identifying this as a “second branch of access” to conceptual art.

Indeed the strategy of dematerialization took on a different form and was used to different ends in Latin America. As Camnitzer suggests, this process was a logical means to an end in that dematerialization served as a vehicle for artistic—and more significantly, political—expression. The overriding interest in reductionism was not based in formalism, but rather in practicality. By eliminating craft, artists reduced the cost to produce art and made the dissemination of their work more efficient and more accessible. Consequently, this differentiation between dematerialization in the center, versus the periphery, speaks to the unique socio-political condition of many Latin American countries as well as their place within the art historical narrative.

Reliance upon text and the written word as a formal component as well as a conceptual model is an element that cuts across conceptualism worldwide. Claude Lévi-Strauss and Ferdinand de Saussure’s early work on signs and language introduced the notion that since visual art contains signs it may be read like language. These ideas infiltrated artistic circles in France

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28 Ibid., “Preface,” ix.

29 Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin America,* 34-36.
far before U.S. minimalists began incorporating these theories into their works. Camnitzer importantly highlights the close relationship between Latin American countries and the French language as a means of demonstrating a closer parallel with European conceptualism than that of the U.S. In fact Latin Americans became aware of these linguistic theories before artists in the U.S. and realized their implications for artistic practice much earlier.30

While Camnitzer’s model for understanding conceptualism in Latin America is well articulated, he largely only applies it to the art of South American countries.31 There is little treatment given to Mexican artists and few Mexicans are acknowledged as key players in the movement (outside of Mathias Goeritz and Jodorowsky and a brief discussion of the Grupos). This is most likely due to the little amount of historiographical and critical literature available. However, Camnitzer’s definition of conceptualism as something related, but fundamentally separate from “conceptual art,” allows for the Latin American context to enter the dialogue and encourage a history that acknowledges the unique contributions made by Latin American artists.

Maris Bustamante, a member of No-Grupo and a pioneer of action-based art in the 1970s, is one of the few who have attempted to chronicle and interpret the trajectory of conceptualism in Mexico. Like Camnitzer, Bustamante argues for greater consideration of local context and history when discussing the development of conceptualism in Latin America. Bustamante favors the term “non-objectual” or no-objetualismo to describe conceptualisms in Mexico. This term, first coined by Juan Acha, implies new methods for conceiving of, making, and thinking about

30 Ibid., 36.
An example of this integration would be Brazilian concrete poetry and those artists connected to Neoconcretismo, like Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark.

31 In recent years, Argentine and Brazilian conceptualism have received the largest amount of attention in the scholarship. This was facilitated by survey-style exhibitions like “Inverted Utopias,” 2004; “The Geometry of Hope,” 2007; and “Beginning with a Bang!,” 2007 as well as monographs and retrospectives on major figures such as Oiticica, Clark and others.
art that were not aligned with movements already labeled by canonical art history. The Peruvian/Mexican theorist coined the term *no-objetualismo* or non-objectualism to refer to Happenings, performances, actions or other ephemeral practices specifically in relation to an assumed Latin American artistic identity not necessarily linked to U.S. counterparts. Bustamante suggests that from a positivist, Western point of view, Mexican art becomes equal to a disorder or a non-order. It is within this perceived disorder that Bustamante finds what is unique to the development of conceptualism in Mexico. She explains:

> It is precisely in this disorder or “non-order” that I believe lies the crux of the Mexican imaginary. I am noting here what I believe to be an original logic, revived in the artistic and aesthetic Mexican narratives of the twentieth century that had precedents going back to antiquity, which had made it possible, little by little, and through some intricate workings, for other ways of perceiving and imagining reality to come into being.\(^{32}\)

Bustamante makes the rather bold connection that this “original logic” born in Mexico is derived from the pre-Hispanic roots of the country. In this view, *no-objetualismo* reflects the contradictory nature of Mexico’s postcolonial identity as two (sometimes) conflicting worldviews that collided and created binaries like European/Mesoamerican, rationalism/duality, and I would argue, individualism/collectivism, which was one of the most pressing concerns (aesthetically and ideologically) of the Ruptura.

Like Debroise, Medina, and Camnitzer, Bustamante suggests the artists of the Ruptura as essential components to opening the way for the radical and subversive projects carried out by the Grupos. However, Bustamante also acknowledges the significant role Surrealism played in this history as the movement gave Mexican artists permission to express “a-logics.”\(^{33}\)

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33 Ibid.
significance of a concept of a-logics corresponds to the pre-existing construction of Mexican art as “disorder” or as linked to a pre-Hispanic conception of reality. Whether or not we agree with Bustamante’s hypothesis that conceptualism was born out of an acceptance of dualities and disorder, it nonetheless presents a point of view that approaches a post-colonial reading, or at the very least a desire to take a stand against claims of Latin American neo avant-gardism as being derivative, backwards, or otherwise lesser than its European or US counterparts.

While the authors I have discussed thus far all argue for a separate and unique history of conceptualism in Latin America, there remains much work to be done to untangle this history and distinguish the various practices that are often lumped together into a unified vision of conceptualism. While La era de la discrepancia made much headway in gathering together ephemeral materials in an attempt to reconstruct this history, it is merely a drop in the bucket. In the end, the project reads more like a survey text of the period, leaving a need for more in-depth, critical analysis. Moreover, it remains to be seen if the models suggested by Camnitzer and Bustamante may serve as successful interpretive models, as they have not been applied in any specific manner.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

In order to address the impact of early interventions on artists of the 1970s, Chapter One, “Apertures for Experimentation: Early Artistic Interventions by Mathias Goeritz, Alejandro Jodorowsky, and José Luis Cuevas” examines the socio-political events and intellectual debates surrounding the artists involved in the Ruptura and the parallel break generated by interdisciplinary artists of the early 1960s. This chapter identifies and contextualizes several

It should also be noted that many of the writers associated with the Ruptura did in fact work in a-logics and took inspiration from Surrealism. This point is further discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation.
artistic interventions by Goeritz, Jodorowsky, and Cuevas which took place between 1961 and 1967. Many of these projects have never been discussed or analyzed within the context of conceptualism and institutional critique, despite the fact that they clearly served as key points of reference for the artists associated with the Grupos. My analysis of these progenitors will demonstrate that Mexico was in fact not absent from the record of 1960s Latin American conceptualism, as Camnitzer and others have suggested, but took place concurrently with innovations in the Southern Cone, Europe, and the United States. This chapter also demonstrates that these three artists, among many others that could be included, served as a roadmap for many of the Grupos’s implementations of public and institutional interventions as a viable means of artistic production. Of great significance was these progenitors’ understanding of the Happening and Jodorowsky’s own ephemeral artistic projects outlined in his theories on “panic ephemerals” and the possibilities for the collective production of art works.

Chapter Two, “Beyond the Movimiento: Countercultures, Collectives, and Conceptualisms In and Out of Mexico,” addresses in detail the development of a “Mexican counterculture,” the 1968 Student Revolution, the Tlateloloco Massacre, and the ramifications of this tragic event on experimental Mexican artists. The subsequent establishment of the Salón de los Independientes under the leadership of sculptor Helen Escobedo as director of the galleries at MUCA (Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Arte), UNAM is discussed in detail as it provided an important break with the state-sponsored arts support and the university system and provided Mexico with a center for viewing local and international experimental art. Such early alternative exhibitions and spaces paved the way for greater experimentation and lessons learned as the movement towards anti-institutional or institutionally critical work grew in the 1970s. While this chapter addresses direct responses to 1968, I also seek to expand this discussion to consider
forces outside of the socio-political moment such as the continuing interventions by artists such as Cuevas and Jodorowsky.

This chapter also devotes significant attention to the case of Felipe Ehrenberg and his watershed institutional interventions carried out after his move to London in 1968. With a desire to create an environment for artistic experimentation, Ehrenberg’s participation in several artist groups and workshops in England, including Fluxus and the Beau Geste Press, made him a forerunner in employing conceptualism as a means of revealing and educating the public on hidden systems of corruption within government and cultural organizations. He also served as a bridge between radical art being produced in Europe and the local context of Mexico upon his return home in 1974.

Chapter Three, “Institutions, Information, and Intervention in Felipe Ehrenberg and Grupo Proceso Pentágono, 1973-1977,” treats the case of Grupo Proceso Pentágono (GPP), which loosely came together in Mexico in 1973, with Ehrenberg joining in 1974. I examine projects carried out by its individual members (José Antonio Hernández Amezcua, Carlos Finck, and Victor Muñoz) between 1970 and 1977, when the group participated in the Paris Youth Biennial with a controversial installation based on torture rooms and interrogation techniques. Although the artists associated with Proceso Pentágono were decidedly political and polemical, their projects did not rely on graphics in the same way that other Grupos coopted strategies from the Student Movement and even the earlier Taller Gráfica Popular. Rather, they turned to institutions and the public dissemination of information as their formats, frequently utilizing art museums or university galleries as a platform or stage for their critique, highlighting connections between cultural politics and the government agencies frequently responsible for their creation.
Though not exclusively, Ehrenberg (while in Europe) and Proceso Pentágono (in Mexico) actively intervened in the streets and the public, but without the moralistic or hard-lined political charge present in other groups that preferred to identify themselves as “cultural workers” rather than artists. The early iteration of Proceso Pentágono has not adequately been considered within the social and cultural context of XXX. Moreover, Ehrenberg’s scandalous 1973 exhibition, Chicles, chocolates, cacahuates sponsored by the INBA while he was living in England, has not been adequately discussed, particularly in relationship to the activities of his future colleagues in Proceso Pentágono. This chapter examines within a global context the provocative and often unprecedented actions these artists performed, while also considering their connections to progenitors of the 1960s.

Finally, Chapter Four, “PerformanS: Humor and Irony as Strategies for Artistic Intervention in No-Grupo and Peyote y la Compañía” will examine a secondary strain of conceptual practice amongst two groups that share the use of humor, irony, and popular culture not only to critique Mexican politics of the 1970s, but also to probe and subvert existing boundaries of identities, be they national or personal. The U.S./European concept of “Performance Art” was also at the core of these two groups. The term encompasses live artistic events (scripted or unscripted) that were frequently carried out by an interdisciplinary group of artists. The defined genre of “Performance Art” first appeared in the 1960s in the United States, though its roots may be traced back to the Dadaists, the Bauhaus, and to the artists of Black Mountain College. The advent of conceptualism also facilitated the widespread adoption of the

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34 Much of the information surrounding GPP’s actions here are derived from a large compendium (though not a publication) of descriptions and photographs of Proceso Pentágono’s projects carried out between 1968-1991, located in the archives of the Museo Ex-Teresa Arte Actual. Produced in 1992 by three members, Lourdes Grobet, Victor Muñoz and Carlos Finck, it contains over twenty actions carried about by the group, many of which have never been mentioned in any existing literature.
practice by the 1970s. As the pioneering scholar of Performance Art, Roselee Goldberg has explained, by this time conceptual art (which privileged ideas over product in order to evade the market system) “was in its heyday and performance was often a demonstration, or an execution, of those ideas.”\(^{35}\) Although both groups denied having been aware of the term “Performance” before they began staging interventions and performances, in reality they share strong affinities with their international counterparts. According to many artists, including members of No-Grupo, the term “Performance Art” made its way through Carla Stellweg, who was in close contact with an expansive network of international artists, writers, curators, and organizers.\(^{36}\)

An analysis of the groups’ formations and subsequent projects demonstrates that they created an environment for a Pop-infused conceptualism to grow in the 1970s, but one that was in dialogue with other Latin American countries. Significantly, both No-Grupo and Peyote y la Compañía employed new media within their projects (video, radio, and television) not only as platforms for strategic interventions into everyday life, but also as a means of recording their projects without a reliance upon the ubiquitous black and white photos typical of non-object based art.

By retracing the trajectory of conceptualisms, through case studies of ephemeral interventions by Mexican artists this project also focuses on local circumstances and catalysts such as the debate over figuration and abstraction, the shrinking of the gallery system, the introduction of new media and media outlets, and trends towards interventions and performative strategies, while taking into consideration transnational and Pan-American


\(^{36}\) See: Melquiades Herrera, "El Performance, ¿Tradición, Moda, Publicidad o Arte?," Secretaria de Asuntos Académicos, Programa de Difusión Académica, ENAP/UNAM, n.d. (Archivo Ex-Teresa Arte Actual) and chapter four of this dissertation.
exchanges in which these artists participated. It reaches back to the early 1960s to argue that the roots of intervention can be found prior to 1968. While the progenitors of the 1960s have benefitted from a renewed interest in the recovery of conceptualisms, the 1970s is still wanting for the same revision. In bringing to light connections between the conceptualists of the 1960s and the Grupos of the 1970s, strategies of intervention emerge as a key, if previously understudied, link between the two generations.
CHAPTER 1:
APERTURES FOR EXPERIMENTATION: INTERVENTIONS IN THE 1960s

THE PROGENITORS

In 1961, Mathias Goeritz established the “Grupo de los Hartos” (Group of the Fed-Ups), holding a one-day exhibition at the Galería Antonio de Souza with the express goal of denouncing “emptiness in contemporary art.” The only requirement to participate in the exhibition was for each artist to select and self-identify with a professional title, one that began with a vowel. The catalogue for the exhibition played up this strategy by listing the participating artist along with their “professional” titles, but with a silent “h” attached to the beginning, drawing attention to the absurdity and the frustration evoked by the name of the group “los Hartos.” (Fig.1) Goeritz was identified as the “hintellectual” and José Luis Cuevas, the “histrator.” The thirteenth listed participant was a chicken named “Hinocencia” (or “Hinnocent”, in further extension of the wordplay). The chicken laid an egg (or huevo) at the exhibition, which was the only object that was sold. Apparently, the egg was sold to Mexican architect Luis Barragán, only to then be smashed to pieces by a participating artist. Despite the implementation of humor and irony as a strategy for conveying their message of dissatisfaction, the “Hartos” denied any Dada legacy claiming that they were also fed-up with Dada.

37 Luis Camnitzer, Conceptualism in Latin America, 107.
The exhibition included projects by twelve participants including artists Pedro Friedeberg, Jesús “Chucho” Reyes Ferreira and Kati Horna as well as non-artist individuals such as Goeritz’s seven-year-old stepson and his sister-in-law.

Two years later, in 1963, Alejandro Jodorowsky staged a lesser-known yet even more daring spectacle as part of a larger conceptual program conceived of by artist, experimental filmmaker, and long-term collaborator, Gelsen Gas. Gas’s father was the owner of the Deportivo Bahía (balinera) (Bahía Sports Center and Pool) in Mexico City and therefore managed to utilize the non-arts space as a staging for his and his artist’s friends unconventional projects. For the unveiling of a mural entitled Canto al Océano created by Manuel Felguérez for the swimming pool area, Jodorowsky had planned to descend by rope from a helicopter hovering above the pool while reciting “Les Chants du Maldoror” by the proto-surrealist Lautrémond. Several other spontaneous and planned actions occurred along side Jodorowsky’s interpretation of the figure of “Maldoror.” Some took place in dressing rooms near the pool as doors would open and close, revealing quick flashes of couples engaging in sex acts. A platform was constructed in the center of the pool for dancers participating in the event, creating an unorthodox, theatrical “stage set” in an environment that has nothing to do with traditional theater.

However, during the dress rehearsal the day before the performance, the helicopter pilot made a miscalculation, which sent the aircraft too close to the water. This caused the engine to explode and the aircraft to crash into the pool. Jodorowsky was pleased with this accidental event (or the task of cleaning up the accident before the opening was too daunting) and the broken-down helicopter was left in place, serving as a backdrop to the mural unveiling and Jodorowsky’s performance. (Fig.2)

The exhibition and catalogue, Desafío de la estabilidad, made tremendous headway in positioning Jodorowsky and Goeritz among the earliest practitioners of conceptualism in Mexico. For example, Rita Eder’s essay provides an excellent analysis of their shared critique of the pictorial and several shorter essays helped to contextualize Goeritz within concrete poetry,
architectural theory, and religion and Jodorowsky within advancements in theater, performance and film.\(^3^9\) However, there remain many unexplored aspects of these two figureheads of neo-avantgarde practice, in particular their shared use of interventions. Moreover the timeframe applied to the exhibition (it ends with 1967), while necessary, creates limited picture of Goertiz and Jodorowsky’s influence on the the 1968 generation, and these were essential bridges that cannot be left unaddressed.

These two early examples of art interventions by los Hartos and Jodorowsky have been identified as the beginnings of conceptual art in Mexico in several publications, though the contextualization of these projects and their relationship to the following generation (the Grupos) has not been sufficient.\(^4^0\) Both strategies were incubated in a reaction against Dada and Surrealism, address the dematerialization of the art object, provide institutional critique, and question the relationship of art to society. As alternative strategies, they represent two major precursors to art interventions in Mexico: Goeritz’s infiltration and critique of the art institution and Jodorowsky’s desire to break down the barriers between visual art, theater, poetry, and dance through the implementation of his infamous “Panic theory”.

These conceptualist precursors, among others that will be discussed in this chapter, set in motion a series of events leading subsequent generations to discover the potential for conceptualism as a viable artistic path. While Goeritz and Jodorowsky’s actions share certain

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ideological and stylistic affinities with proto-conceptual and conceptual artists of Europe and the United States, the specificity of the contexts in which they were created cannot be overlooked. Despite parallels with Dada, Situationism, or Arte Povera, they are reflections of a particular moment in Mexican history, a moment when tradition was challenged through unprecedented methods and the socio-political climate became intensely troubled towards the end of the 1960s.

It was within this context that the artists of the 1970s were inspired by progenitors like Goeritz, Jodorowsky, and Cuevas began to rally against government suppression and explore new forms and methods that might speak to their unique condition and experience and challenge pre-existing conceptions of Mexican art. Moreover, these earlier actions are indicative of the bias the art market and government-financed art institutions and schools showed towards art and artists that adhered to tenets of the Mexican School.

This chapter focuses on selected interventions carried out beginning in 1961 by Mathias Goeritz, Alejandro Jodorowsky, and briefly, José Luis Cuevas. These three artists represent a small, yet prominent, slice of a constellation of artists who successfully paved the way for utilizing museums/institutions, public space, or mass media as spaces for subversion and questioning, strategies the Grupos would adopt into conceptualism and institutional critique. Most notably, a close examination reveals shared thematic strategies (anti-art exhibitions, performances, a “Trojan Horse” style of institutional critique, and the manipulation of the mass media) that will be directly adopted by Proceso Pentágono, No-Grupo, and others in the 1970s.

The crux of this chapter lies in the illumination of the specific, local circumstances unique to Mexico, such as a conservative institutional climate and increasing government censorship, that demonstrate that Mexico was a part of, and not an exception to, the existing
narrative, an "accepted history" as Maris Bustamante, member of No-Grupo, references in the following:

We know that ‘accepted history’ indicates and proves that it was in Europe where conceptualisms began. We know the chronological formulae: avant-gardes, Futurism, Dadaism, conceptualisms. But although it may appear as one more drive…it is still arguable that in our country the conditions were favorable for the appearance of non-objectualisms on their own and not through transculturation. It may have been even that given the a-logical non-European events present here, we, from Latin America, managed to influence Europe.\textsuperscript{41}

Though Bustamante and others have attempted revisionist approaches to the history of conceptualisms in Mexico and beyond, this chapter does not aim to dispel nor uphold one particular or “true” version of this history. Rather, it presents a critical and contextual analysis of key projects that demonstrate Mexican artists desire to break with the stranglehold of the Mexican School of Art and in order to argue for the significance of intervention into institutional spaces as a key strategy that is inherited by the Grupos of the 1970s.

Many of the projects in this chapter are only beginning to be known outside (and sometimes within) the Mexican context. Moreover, interventionist strategies among certain artists of the 1960s served as a roadmap for artists associated with the Grupos and their shared use of this practice demands further analysis. It was not solely the crisis of 1968 and a shrinking of resources that drove artists to turn to art interventions more readily, but also an investment in the critique of hierarchies and power structures that drove both cultural institutions and the gallery system. Interventions in the 1960s and 70s afforded artists the unique platform for exposing the interdependency of artists and institutions as a metaphor for the local political context.

RECONSIDERING THE RUPTURA AND A MEXICAN NEO-AVANT-GARDE

This chapter takes the concept of artistic rupture as a point of inspiration and departure, primarily because the interventions presented all share some discursive relationship to the Mexican art movement known as la Generación de la Ruptura or the Generation of the Rupture. Beginning in the late 1950s and continuing into the 1960s, a break with established methods and venues for cultural production occurred that was driven by younger literary figures and visual artists in Mexico City. In fact it was Octavio Paz who labeled this trend the Ruptura movement for its break with Mexican muralism and the "Mexican School of Art" that continued to cast a looming shadow in all corners of the cultural sphere, from the art schools (particularly the Academy of San Carlos and La Esmeralda), to state-sponsored cultural institutions, and the international commercial market.

Concurrent with the work of radical artists like Goeritz and Jodorowsky, abstract, geometric, and neo-figurative artists were the most visible on the contemporary Mexican art scene. They were understood to be a logical evolution beyond (or more reductively a break with) the “Mexican School of Painting” begun by the Muralists, yet most of the artists under this umbrella used both traditional formats (painting and even murals) alongside more experimental practices. The dominance of abstraction exemplified by artists such as Manuel Felguérez and Vicente Rojo, and neo-figuration (called nueva presencia in Mexico) including Arnold Belkin, José Luis Cuevas, Alberto Gironella and Francisco Icaza continued to be supported and promoted by cultural institutions, though their relationships became increasingly contentious as the Ruptura diversified and the political climate changed. (Fig. 3-4)

As others have pointed out, dubbing this period of Mexican art a rupture is not entirely accurate. As Brian Nissen one of the artists associated with the movement has explained:
And later to call and be called [the] generation of rupture, which many of us were a part of... it was not a rupture because we all agreed. [This] is something that has been very badly expressed. It was, let us say, an aperture... international trends that were happening not only in Mexico, but I believe it is absurd to continue calling it the generation of the rupture. ⁴²

Indeed, Ruptura artists rejected muralism not only for being illustrative and didactically nationalistic, but also for its contradictory dependency on government commissions and state-sponsored institutions when the revolutionary aspirations of the movement had been ossified and institutionalized by the 1950s. But, as Luis Carlos Emmerich has recently expressed, their rebellion against muralism was more in reaction to the continued presence of second and third generation muralists whose localized themes and subjects had nothing to do with the International trends young Mexican artists were invested in. ⁴³ This characterization of the Ruptura as a phenomenon specific to Mexico and to individual expressions by individual artists is partially to blame for the misunderstanding over Mexico’s supposedly late arrival at conceptual tendencies logic of this sentence unclear and unclear how it follows from thought of previous sentence.

The Ruptura generation better understood the failures of post-Revolutionary ideology and programs and therefore the many failures of muralism itself, but this did not lead them, as is often recounted, to abandon interest in collective or collaborative work in exchange for a return

⁴² “…y después llamar y llamado generacion Ruptura que estuvimos muchos de nosotros, que no fue una Ruptura porque todos estamos de acuerdo, es una cosa que he dado muy mal expresado…era digamos un aperture. Corrientes internacionales que no solamente pasaba en Mexico…pero yo creo que esa generacion a quedado nombrado generacion de la Ruptura es absurdo.” Brian Nissen in Sub-versiones de la memoria...60-70...México. DVD. Pillar García and Rafael Ortega, dir. (Mexico City: Centro de Documentación Arkheia, Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, UNAM, 2011), disc 3 (Salón Independiente, 1968-1971, moderator: Pilar García; participants: Manuel Felguérez, Francisco Icaza, Brian Nissen and Carla Stellweg).

to the isolated artist alone in a studio. As is explained in this chapter, most Ruptura artists frequently worked collaboratively and often across disciplines and mediums. Art historian James Oles has characterized the “movement” in the following:

Given their undeniable interest in abstract currents abroad, it might be best to think of this as a generation focused on opening up Mexican art to international currents: an aperture rather than rupture. Whether preferring non-representation or neo-figuration…these young artists all sought attention in museum exhibitions, the annual or bi-annual salons established by INBA in 1957, and commercial art galleries like Prisse (1952), Proteo (1954), and Antonio Souza (1956)…

The artistic styles employed by Ruptura artists may at first seem disconnected from any type of conceptual practice or anti-institutional tendencies, particularly given their dependency on cultural agencies and commercial galleries. However, this generation was highly significant in that they began to conceive of a third way; an alternative for the trajectory of contemporary Mexican art and one that would take on a decidedly independent spirit.

Despite many of these visual artists’s propensity for engaging in abstraction or interiorismo (both of which followed international trends and which was heavily critiqued at the time), Ruptura artists have been misunderstood much like the Grupos, leading to an over simplification of the relationship between the two generations of the 1960s and 1970s. Many of these Grupos progenitors are typically categorized as abstract or geometric painters and sculptors working collectively to break from the stranglehold of Mexican muralism, despite their


These galleries were located in the notoriously “bohemian” Zona Rosa neighborhood located just outside of the historic center of Mexico City, which is discussed later in this chapter. Antonio Souza and Proteo were perhaps the best known of the commercial galleries, especially for their tolerance of experimentation. As is also discussed later in this chapter, the cosmopolitan character of the Ruptura also owes a great debt to Mathias Goeritz’s tremendous interest and communication with French conceptualists like Yves Klein and the Nouveaux Réalistes, or later Daniel Buren, who utilized the commercial gallery space as a site of critique. The initial commercial success —limited or not— of Ruptura artists is a marked difference between the even more extreme lack of a private art market post-68 that was inherited by the Grupos.
individual explorations into theories of perception, psychological states, formalism, or phenomenology. And despite many of their propensities for radical artistic actions, aimed at openly criticizing Mexican politics and social norms, Ruptura artists and writers ironically became favorites of cultural institutions like the INBA and received not only support, but also accolades, from the government and corresponding cultural institutions through their salon-style and biennial art competitions. However, the characterization that Ruptura artists happily ignored the complicated relationship between their art and Mexican cultural institutions and art schools is an entirely reduced picture.

Luis Camnitzer has provocatively stated the following in relation to the concept of artistic ruptures in broader terms:

Mainstream conceptualist movements have been both a form of rebellion against, and consequence of, receding art movements...This aspect of rebellion (and therefore rupture) serves to identify the movements from within...A new movement breaks away from the past, presents a new and unexpected paradigm, but, oddly enough, also manages to continue a heritage as an inevitable, predictable development. This feat is achieved by rearrangements and the smoothing of categories with strange tools like the labeling of some forms of expression as "protomovements."[^46]

From this, we might begin to reconsider the role of the Mexican Ruptura in development of conceptualism in Mexico and particularly in the realm of institutional critique and the stage may be set for expanding the definition of what constitutes the Grupos. As Camnitzer’s above quote invites us to consider, perhaps there was no phenomenon, no sudden explosion that caused Mexican artists to start working in groups or collectives in the 1970s. In fact, as this chapter proves, the artists of the Grupos followed trails already forged by their teachers and mentors.

[^45]: The complicated relationship between the INBA and radical artists is a theme throughout this project, though it is discussed in detail in Chapter Three. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the INBA and its main cultural center, the Palacio de Bellas Artes, continued to serve as a stage for debate both intentionally and unintentionally, particularly due to their hierarchical exhibition policies and formats.

[^46]: Camnitzer, Conceptualism in Latin America, 27.
from the 1960s, creating a constellation of experimental Mexican artists, rather than a linear narrative to explain the erasure of early conceptual tendencies.

By the early 1960s, Mexican artists stood at a crossroads, one in which it had not yet been decided whether to go the way of collapsing or emphasizing the relationship between art and viewer. In all of the rhetoric surrounding the Ruptura and the general rejection and critique of Mexican muralism during the 1960s what has been lost (at least in the case of Ruptura, and following them, the Grupos) is exactly that the preceding movement had provided the exceptional circumstance or “unique condition” that helped spur conceptual art in Mexico; artists had a tradition of Modernism to dissolve and fight against, a condition more akin to U.S. conceptual art (born from Minimalism) than conceptual art and conceptualisms of the Southern Cone, favored by most current art historians.

Rufino Tamayo (who stood apart from his Muralist colleagues in his decidedly apolitical work that veered towards abstraction) and Octavio Paz served as the guideposts and strongest defenders of the Ruptura circle against many critics and other artists most strongly committed to values associated not only with Muralism, but also with Modernism in particular. Though it has certainly been overlooked by many existing histories of this period in Mexican art, literary scholar Juan Bruce-Novoa significantly notes that the Ruptura artists were certainly aware and well-versed in the tenets of International “high modernism” but “…like other young artists in other world capitals felt part of the hip counterculture coming out of London and New York,” an association that would grow ever more important into the 1960s.47

While the Ruptura movement is most often identified as a visual arts movement, the “aperture” they afforded would not have been possible without the aid and direct collaboration of

artists with young writers of the time. Some of the many progressive writers associated with the movement were Carlos Fuentes and Juan García Ponce who utilized their completely independent journal *Revista Mexicana de Literatura* to expose Mexican audiences to some of the most significant international writers of the time including Herman Miller and James Joyce. More significant to this discussion is that they also were among the first to publish theorists and writers influential to international art movements including Maurice Merleu Ponty, Herbert Marcuse, Malcolm Lowry, and Jorge Luis Borges.

The *Generación de la Ruptura*, as an artistic movement, has not frequently been discussed within the context of the Ruptura as a literary movement, which is surprising considering how closely painters and sculptures were working alongside forward thinking and radical writers. Artists and writers began to experiment with forms of abstraction and individualism as a means of distancing themselves from nationalism and populism and also to critique and rebel against existing methods of cultural distribution and the institutions (museums, galleries, literary journals, print media, the Mexican government) that continued to support art that expressed a certain *mexicanidad*.

These literary circles were responsible for the creation of the most progressive cultural center of the era, la Casa del Lago (which still exists today), and under the guidance of writer Juan José Arreola (1918-2001) where they created collaborative projects such as the radio program, *Voz Viva Mexico*, which acted as a cultural journal and audio archive and was an early attempt to utilize mass media to the benefit of culture at large. The writers associates with these new independent journals closely affiliated themselves with the Ruptura artists, often reviewing their shows, defending them against “old guard” critics, dedicating issues to Ruptura artists, collaborating with them to produce journal covers, graphic materials, and even stage sets and
scenery for their theater productions. Indeed, Juan García Ponce wrote and published the first book dedicated to Ruptura painters, *Nueve pintores mexicanos* in 1968.\(^{48}\)

José Luis Cuevas is perhaps the most well known and the artist most strongly identified with the Ruptura movement and, for a time, the *enfant terrible* extraordinaire of the Mexican art world. In 1955, he published the anti-muralist manifesto, "the Cactus Curtain" in the *Evergreen Journal* that has come to serve as the emblematic text of the movement.\(^{49}\) In it, Cuevas uses the fictitious artist "Juan" as a rouse for exposing the failures of the Mexican cultural world, specifically targeting the continuing indoctrination of young artists into the "Mexican School" by the art schools. Young Juan, having been trained at the art school La Esmeralda, struggles to learn that this national school of art, was not only limited and limiting, it had become harmful: "With such a formula, all is solved: it works equally well for portraying a man with a bandanna, an Indian woman selling flowers in the market, a worker in the oil fields…"\(^{50}\) Cuevas was likely referring to artists such from the recent past like Diego Rivera and especially David Alfaro Siqueiros and to his own contemporaries whose works reflected this antiquated, fictitious, and regressive portrayal of contemporary Mexican culture.\(^{51}\)

\(^{48}\) Bruce-Novoa, 149.

\(^{49}\) José Luis Cuevas, “The Cactus Curtain,” *Evergreen Review*, 1959. Reprinted in Patrick Frank, ed. *Readings in Latin American Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 187-93. In her recent archival analysis of the relationship between Cuevas and Gómez-Sicre, Claire Fox has presented compelling evidence that this article (and other texts by Cuevas) may have been ghostwritten by Gómez-Sicre. This is a significant revelation when considering the Cuevas’s obsession with his own notoriety as an individual artist, as is discussed later in this chapter. See: Claire F. Fox, “Chapter Three: José Luis Cuevas Panamerican Celebrity,” in *Making Art Panamerican: Cultural Policy and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 149-159.

\(^{50}\) Cuevas, “Cactus Curtain,” 188.

\(^{51}\) “En su artículo, Cuevas ridiculizaba a la Escuela Mexicana; la sustitución del hierro soviético por el mexicanismo nopal no sólo se refería al encierro en sí misma sino al orientación estalinista de su principal covero, David Alfaro Siqueiros…,” see Emerich, “La Ruptura y sus aspiraciones.”
Juan (a kind of stand-in for Cuevas himself) eventually happens upon magazines that proved "there are artists in other countries too," despite the fact that "Juan had not had access to books on art of other countries either at school or in the public library, much less the Palace of Fine Arts."\(^5\) Here, Cuevas/Gómez-Sicre nod to the Palacio de Bellas Artes as the symbol of old-guard Mexican art, an important fact that will be elaborated upon in Chapter Four of this dissertation. Towards the end of the manifesto, Cuevas summarily declares, "What I want in my country's art are broad highways leading out to the rest of the world, rather than narrow trails connecting one adobe village with another."\(^5\)

Though Cuevas was frequently criticized for having overly capitalist interests (particularly given his subsequent domination of the Mexican media through celebrity status), because he believed in the internationalization of Mexican art and in free experimentation. Cuevas’s continued international commercial success despite his outspokenness, speaks to this underlying desire for openness and contemporaneity that many Mexicans, not solely the artist, believed in and sought out during the early 1960s. While painting and sculpture often dominated their practices, they nonetheless kept a window to the outside world propped open, despite an institutional and commercial bias towards art that continued the legacy of Mexican Modernism.

In his earlier works, this took the form of deeply introspective drawings and paintings addressing esoteric (and frequently European) themes, writers, or artists, such as in his ubiquitous series on the subject of Franz Kafka. (Fig.5) But soon after the publishing of “The Cactus Curtain,” Cuevas would begin to push the boundaries of the Mexican cultural community as the political climate became increasingly complicated and the artist grew increasingly

\(^5\) Cuevas, “Cactus Curtain,” 189.

\(^5\) Ibid., 192.
frustrated at his community and its institutions continued reliance on the ghosts of Rivera, Siqueiros, Kahlo, and others. As is discussed later in this chapter, in 1966 Cuevas would finally set the "cactus curtain" ablaze and effectively shift the trajectory of Mexican art with what might be deemed a radical intervention into public space (and is at the very least a an attempt to dematerialize the mural as art form) with his *Mural efímero* or *Ephemeral Mural*, an exercise in conceptualism that the artist first carried out in 1961 in association with Mathias Goeritz.

**MATHIAS GOERITZ AND THE INTERNATIONAL NEO-AVANT-GARDE**

Mathias Goeritz is best known for his work in sculpture, architecture, and public art and having made great strides in resisting the Mexican School mentality in favor of embracing a new avant-garde, one that would re-inject art with an emotional and spiritual component, as was the primary goal of iconic works like his *Messages* from 1959. (Fig.6) Along with Wolfgang Paalen, Goeritz was among the first to re-establish strong ties to European and U.S. avant-gardes after 1940, as he actively exchanged ideas and publishing writings with Yves Klein, Jean Tinguely, and other European contemporaries. Like Cuevas, Goeritz was increasingly discontent with the narrow mindedness he perceived amongst most of his Mexican contemporaries by the mid-to-late 1950s.

In 1955, resentment was growing over the number of foreign artists working and being exhibited in Mexico. As art historian Francisco Reyes Palmas has noted, Goeritz, along with others, was pinpointed by Siqueiros as a potential "amigo del imperialismo yanqui" (a friend of Yankee imperialism.)

> 54 While it is true that the German-born artist not only maintained but

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sought an international presence and connections (he was friends with artists ranging from Daniel Spoerri to Louise Nevelson, to Sheila Hicks), he was also highly critical of much of the Modern tradition.55

In the spring of 1960, Goeritz staged what can be labeled an artistic intervention at the Museum of Modern Art in New York on the occasion of the opening of Dada artist Jean Tinguely’s “self-destructive” installation, Homage to New York. Goeritz, who was in New York for his own exhibition at Carstairs Gallery, utilized Tinguely’s show as a stage and foil for his own project, which consisted of the artist standing at the entrance of MoMA, where he distributed copies of his manifesto, “Please Stop!” In the manifesto, which Minimalism scholar Gregory Battcock identifies as being “reactionary” and “very much out of touch with the times” Goeritz denounces the perceived need for “instability” present in works like Tinguely’s in favor of “cathedrals and pyramids” and a “meaningful art.”56 As art historian Jennifer Josten has explained, while his anti-Tinguely statement appears to reject Dadaist instability in favor of anti-Dada “static values,” in fact, what Goeritz proposed was that the contemporary reevaluation of Dada must also take into account the mystical sensibility embedded within Dadaist irrationality.57 This distinction, that Goeritz did in fact embrace the irrationality present in Dadaist tendencies and recognized its potential for future artistic production, is particularly compelling given the importance of disorder in Jodorowsky’s Panic theory, which is discussed later in this chapter.

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57 Josten, diss, 243.
The distinguishing of the neo-Dadaist practice Goeritz proposed has been successfully elaborated through Josten’s analysis of Goeritz’s relationship not only with Tinguley, but also with other European artists. Most pertinent to this discussion is Yves Klein, whose artistic trajectory also bears comparisons to that of Alejandro Jodorowsky. Both Goeritz and Klein came of age (artistically speaking) in the 1950s, a moment when a post-war emphasis on internal and individual themes was increasingly prevalent worldwide. Yet by the early 1960s, they were consistently evoking conceptual strategies to combat this new homogenizing of the arts. In reaction to this type of characterization of foreign art and artists, Goeritz, and his equally significant art critic wife, Ida Rodríguez Prampolini (b. 1925) fiercely advocated for a way out of the tired, yet still continuing, debates over figuration and abstraction. Like many Ruptura artists, he demonstrated a desire to bring an international presence to the Mexican cultural scene.

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58 Goeritz and Prampolini both maintained regular communication with European and U.S. artists through their publishing their own writings and criticism, but that of other artists they wished to promote in Mexico. Prampolini and Goeritz produced numerous articles on both Mexican and International art and theory in publications like Sección de arte, Arquitectura México and México en la cultura, a section of the periodical, Novedades beginning in the late 1950s and continuing into the 1960s. Jennifer Josten, “Mathias Goeritz y el arte internacional de nuevos medios en la década de 1960,” Readymedia: Arqueología de los medios e invención en México, ed. Karla Jasso and Daniel Garza Usabiaga (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes / Laboratorio Arte Alameda, 2012), 118–32

There is also compelling evidence for an imagined relationship between the work of Klein (particularly his Anthropometries performance of 1962) and Jodorowsky’s panic ephemerals. Jodorowsky was also known to poke fun at Klein, even referencing his body paintings in an infamous scene from the film The Holy Mountain (1973) featuring an art factory or laboratory, managed by the character called, Klen. Also see: Medina, “Recovering Panic,” in La era de la discrepancia, 101.

59 “This interpretation, whereby the individual artist was endowed with the capacity to make supremely important decisions in paint or clay, was the one that reigned in postwar France at the time that Klein was developing his practice—as it also did in Mexico during the first decade of Goeritz’s residence there.” Josten, PhD diss, 318.

60 Oles, 343.

Ida Rodríguez Prampolini is (perhaps) the sole representative in Mexico of the new form of art criticism emerging in reaction to formalism. See also: Jennifer Josten, “El arte contemporáneo en la encrucijada de La era atómica. La crítica de Ida Rodríguez Prampolini, 1959-1964.” Contrapunto: La revista de la Universidad Veracruzana 5, no. 13 (2010): 33–44.
through the production of art history and by bringing international exhibitions, conferences, and a greater critical presence to the scene with his writings. Curiously, Goeritz and Prampolini were openly hostile towards the two movements that first attempted to truly break with the Mexican School: the Ruptura and Nueva presencia (as Prampolini dubbed it) despite the fact that some of these artists (notably Cuevas) actually participated in Goeritz’s projects or were otherwise supported by the artist on other occasions.

While Goeritz's work can often appear austere—he was working with monochromes and advocated for an "emotional architecture"—he also possessed a biting, critical side that frequently found its way into his more experimental projects. This may easily be felt in the artist's previously mentioned renegade action, the exhibition of "los Hartos" at the Antonio Souza Gallery in 1961, an event that served as a watershed moment in the fight to break with the Mexican School. Though Goeritz engaged in the intervention of a commercial rather than institutional space with this action, it was the first radical and publicized intervention into the art system to have occurred in early 1960s Mexico. As Goeritz became integral to the emergence, validation, and acceptance of alternative forms of art production, it is significant that he did toy with the possibilities of artist groups and the need for the direct disruption of the existing cultural

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62 Goeritz and Prampolini strongly disliked art that fell under the rubric of the Ruptura, despite the fact that Goertiz helped these artists (he hired Cuevas and Felgüérez to teach at the Universidad Iberoamericana in 1957). See Josten, “Los Hartos en el contexto de los Grupos de vanguardia.” They were critical of their focus on self-promotion and failure to distinguish themselves from international trends. The breaking point came when a group submitted a proposal to found the “Museum of Contemporary Art of Mexico” for the 1961 São Paulo Biennial, a project the artists had no intention of fulfilling, according to Prampolini, see Josten, diss, 346. Prampolini and Goertiz also targeted nueva presencia for its perceived rejection of abstract art and promotion of figuration as the superior style. They were also criticized for supporting Siqueiros after he was imprisoned for “social dissolution” by President López Matos in 1960. The clause of article 145 (1947-70) of the Mexican Penal Code, which criminalized social dissent, was a symbol of the arbitrary repression by the Mexican government and its repeal was included among the demands of the student groups in 1968. For more detailed explanation on this relationship, see Josten, diss, 345-347.
system in order for new art forms and ideas to emerge.63

FED UP!: LOS HARTOS, AND THE ANTI-EXHIBITION

Most texts on conceptual or non-objectual art in Mexico acknowledge Goeritz's position as a figure that opened paths if not exactly towards the dematerialization of the object, at least towards lessening the primacy of the object and the strict definitions of disciplines, something the exhibition by “los Hartos” makes evident. Unlike many of the early actions/events staged by Jodorowsky around this same time, Goeritz’s status as artist, critic, and curator, coupled with his marriage to Prampolini, meant the event by los Hartos was fairly well documented in the press. The gallerist Antonio Souza was a primary proponent of radical art in this period, showing Ruptura artists like Lilia Carrillo and Manuel Felguérez in the late 1950s. But by the 1960s, as Jennifer Josten notes, “the Galería de Antonio Souza was soon synonymous with the Happenings and exhibitions of new art that he and his Mexican and Mexico-based friends, including U.S. artists Bruce Conner and Sheila Hicks, devised.64 Drawing from the international scope of their friends and colleagues, Goeritz and Prampolini were beginning to reimagine the potential in platforms ranging from print media to Happening-style events to brashly critique the Mexican School. The rebellion of the Hartos begins the conceptual impulse that connects all of the interventions discussed in this chapter.

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63 Felipe Ehrenberg has claimed that Goeritz as one of the most influential figures to his practice, particularly for his ability to being demanding and rigorous and for his emphasis on drawing and radical theories on art and architecture, see: Guillermo Gómez Peña and Felipe Ehrenberg, “How Does One Reach Manchuria?,” in Manchuria, 194. As has Maris Bustamante, “Conditions, Roads, and Genealogies”, 138-39.

64 Josten, diss., 325.
In 1960, Goeritz produced a preceding exhibition/event at the Galería Souza, El Realismo de Mathias Goeritz, that could potentially also be considered as an early form of artistic action or intervention in connection with the growing international neo-avant-garde: this event paralleled Arman’s Le Plein, of which Goeritz was aware. See Josten, “El arte en red,” 118–20.
Both Reyes Palma and Josten have suggested that Goeritz’s desire to form an artists’ group grew out of his interest in European counterparts such as the Nouveaux Réalistes or Group Zero, rather than any reinvestment in the Marxist and socialist interests in collectives adopted by the muralists. In the tradition of many artist groups, the Hartos published a manifesto upon the occasion of the gallery event, entitled *Los Hartos: Otra confrontación internacional de hartistas contemporáneos* or *The [H]artos: Another international confrontation of contemporary [h]artists*. In the manifesto they proclaim:

> We are fed-up with the pretentious imposition of logic and reason, with functionalism, decorative calculation, and of course with all the chaotic pornography of individualism. We are fed-up with the glory of the day and the latest fashion, with the vanity of ambition, with bluffing and with artistic jokes, with the conscious and egocentric subconscious, with inflated concepts, by extremely boring propaganda, by the “isms” and the “ists”, figurative or abstract.

Like Jodorowsky and Cuevas, who are discussed later in this chapter, Goeritz and the *hartos* proposed ways out of the tired and increasingly insular debates of figuration and abstraction with a flat out rejection of continued artistic categorization. But theirs was also a strong statement of rejection towards the commercial gallery system, much like what was taking place in France, with artists like Klein. As Josten has explained, this was not a minor development in the artist’s critical thinking; rather, “Goeritz attempted to more directly confront the contradictions of his positions and his own participation in the contemporary art market; ultimately, this would lead to his retreat from the commercial gallery sector altogether.”

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67 Josten, diss, 314.
commercial gallery system would also have much broader implications in the Mexican context as artists of the later 60s and the 1970s faced a cultural landscape with no option for gallery support, as is discussed in the following chapter.

As Ida Rodríguez Prampolini fortuitously described, the event was a radical act and one that might not have been extraordinary in Paris or New York, but in Mexico:

Had, in effect, desacralized an environment ruled by artists and critics loyal to the Mexican School and counterpointed by artists with international affiliations who advocated for an adherence to abstract tendencies in our visual culture that were beginning to take hold in the Western world.68

As was briefly mentioned in the introduction, the Hartos exhibition opened on November 30th, 1961 with non-artist participants exhibiting “work” alongside the artists. Aside from the chicken, [h]innocencia, these included an arrangement of fruit put on display by the [h]agricultor or farmer; an “action painting” by Goeritz’s seven year old stepson Octavio, the [h]aprendiz (student); and a leash designed for children, the contribution of Octavio’s nanny the [hinstraiz] (governess).69 (Fig.7) Goeritz interjected a clear reference to the concept of performance as several actions were staged in an attempt to transform the gallery opening into spectacle as in addition to the staged distribution of the manifesto; attendants at the opening were invited to sign a pledge of allegiance to the Hartos, signaling a shift towards the collapsing of art object, event/performance, and audience.70

The Surrealist painter, Alice Rahon, in an act that Josten identifies as a “spectacle,”

68 “Este “acto radical e inusitado” que, en opinión de Ida Rodríguez Prampolini, hubiera pasado desapercibido en París o Nueva York; en México, en cambio, tuvo en efecto desacralizador en un medio regido por artistas y críticos de arte fieles a la Escuela Mexicana de Pintura y contrapunteado por artistas de filiación internacionalista que abogaban por adhesión de nuestra cultura visual a las tendencias abstractas que comenzaban a imponerse en el mundo occidental.” Híjar, Frentes, 149.

69 Josten, diss., 134.

70 Ibid.
purportedly smashed the chicken’s egg, purchased by the architect Luis Barragán, during the opening festivities. In addition to the already radical art contained within the gallery, Goeritz included a musician, Prampolini’s sister, playing the [h]oboe section of Ilya Chamberlain’s *Sinfonia en B♭ (La Harta).* (Fig. 8) The opening at Souza quickly devolved into what Prampolini described as the aftermath of a party worthy of Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita.*

As Josten insightfully surmises, “In denying the object its auratic power and shifting an emphasis to art as a service, the “los Hartos” exhibition displaced or dissolved the idea and value of art from the object into the space of human and object relations.” One clear tendency towards the dematerialization of the art object and one of the earliest applications of the concept of the ephemeral, was seen with José Luis Cuevas. His contribution was *Vision panoramica de las artes plásticas (Panoramic Vision of the Plastic Arts),* a "mural", which was described in one newspaper article as "exactly blank." (Fig.9) This early radical act by Cuevas was clearly an attempt to combat and even satirize the stranglehold of muralism and the Mexican School by simply drawing a graphite square on the gallery wall and labeling it with the title of the work.

Cuevas’s invocation of the ephemeral served to destabilize the monumentality associated with the mural format. This simple, graphite demarcation is neither the scale of the traditional mural, nor does it frame any actual painting. Moreover, as is seen in the installation photo by Katin Horna and taken at the event, the juxtaposition of Cuevas’s “blank” mural with Friedeberg’s three-legged table, and small works by Asta and Goertiz, the mural has been brought down several notches in the institutional hierarchy of state-sponsored art. (Fig.9) There

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71 Josten, “Los Hartos.”

72 Josten diss., 344.

are no grand historical narratives, political heroes, or scenes of revolution in Cuevas’s work. The
commercial gallery wall becomes the subject of his “mural”, a deconstructed mural that will only
exist for the duration of the Hartos event and cannot be purchased as an original. While Cuevas’s
project does not constitute an art intervention, I would argue that it is significant to this
discussion for demonstrating the potential for the ephermeral to debase and destabilize precisely
the institutional and market forces artists, such as the Hartos, were attempting to circumvent.
Moreover, this work presents parallels to developments in U.S.-Euro conceptual art in that, as
Josten has noted, it was a “proposal that art resided not in the moveable object but in the space
in which it was exhibited”.  

Cuevas’s ephemeral mural, alongside the entire exhibition of los Hartos made plain that it
was the dawning of a new era, one in which the dematerialization of the object or at least the
questioning of its supposed aura became the vehicle to escaping commercial gallery circuits and
dependency on cultural institutions. Within the local context of Mexico City and within the
trajectory of Cuevas’s career, this first ephemeral mural was very much a foreshadowing of what
was to come as institutional and gallery support decreased exponentially after 1968. The strategy
of the ephemeral would also resonated strongly with artists, such as Alejandro Jodorowsky,
who were concerned with defining new futures for art and culture and that would reflect a spirit
of social progressiveness. As the 1960s unfolded, the ephemeral would also serve to engage
another tenant of conceptualism—artist, object, and viewer relations— and no other artists of
this time exploited the limits of this strategy than Jodorowsky and his circle.

PANIC IN MEXICO: ALEJANDRO JODOROWSKY

Several events in Mexican art history, including the one staged by “los Hartos”, have

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74 Josten, diss., 343.
been labeled as the first interventions and conceptual projects in Mexico. And perhaps none more so than the early projects by Jodorowsky discussed here. Continuing in line with the conceptual framework of this project, with Jodorowsky I turn not to identifying points of origin/originality, but to identifying several key events that clearly made a lasting mark on the Mexican art community. Almost immediately upon his arrival from Paris in 1960, Jodorowsky stood at the center of a large network of artists, actors, dancers, theater directors, filmmakers, etc. hungry for access and exposure to radical art coming out of Europe. Many of his earliest colleagues were already associated with the Ruptura (Lilia Carrillo, Manuel Felguérez, Alberto Gironella, etc.) and many others, such as Gelsen Gas, would go on to be leading figures in experimental arts.75

Jodorowsky’s scandalous artistic output operated at the extreme fringes of Mexican cultural production in the 1960s and he continues to be an iconic figure of countercultures. Using Panic theory in a variety of mediums, he aimed to destroy all existing definitions of art, theater, poetry, language, and dance, resulting in his engagement with mime, film, theater, comics, and action art, among other genres. While it is nearly impossible to describe or define the Jodorowskian body of work in generalized terms, certain elements prevail across the mediums he engages, including violence, destruction, sexuality, existential and spiritual quests, chaos, anarchy, among many others. These thematic preoccupations have, over a sixty-year career, been expressed through numerous channels, though today he is best known for his feature length films (El Topo, 1970 or The Holy Mountain, 1973), comics, and graphic novels. Jodorowsky’s near mythic status as a countercultural figure may easily be attributed to the multiple controversies

75 Despite the contemporaneous development of Goeritz and Jodorowsky’s desired break with traditional art practices and systems of distribution, Goeritz was less than impressed with Jodorowsky’s early productions, as Rita Eder has insightfully discussed in her essay, “Two Aspects of the Total Work of Art: Experimentation and Performativity,” in Desafio a la estabilidad…., 65-70.
surrounding his work, but more often than not, Jodorowsky invited controversy as it served to shock and disturb the masses and hopefully into action.

In 1965, Jodorowsky published *Teatro pánico (Panic Theater)*, which defined a new artistic theory he began developing upon his arrival in Mexico City. (fig. 1.11) The first physical manifestations of what became Jodorowsky’s “Panic theory” were largely improvised, one-time events and interventions called *efímeros pánicos* or Panic ephemerals. The artist-performer claimed this radical art form would: …have the task of finding expression through concrete means, overcoming both figuration and abstraction in order to incorporate to their universe any kind of materials and actions that are called non-theatrical. Everything is theatrical and nothing is.⁷⁶ This proclamation, that “everything is theatrical and nothing is”, was akin to artistic anarchy in the increasingly repressive cultural climate of 1960s Mexico. Jodorowsky's panic ephemerals assisted in the emergence of institutional critique and what would later be dubbed Performance art.

Jodorowsky produced at least twenty-seven Panic ephemerals between 1961 and until about 1970. Most of them have no designated title, no date (or conflicting dates), no documentation, or they are only known to exist through the memories of the artists who participated in them.⁷⁷ As it is beyond the scope of this chapter to identify and address all

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⁷⁶ Alejandro Jodorowsky, *Teatro pánico* (México: Era, 1965), 12. This 1965 publication features some of the only known photographs of the San Carlos Ephemerol. In addition to these photos, as well as several panic fables or stories suggestive of “scripts” written by Jodorowsky, the book is also illustrated with drawings by José Luis Cuevas.

⁷⁷ Film footage from a later 1965 ephemeral, *Sacramental Melodrama*, which took place in Paris, is the only known film of Jodorowsky’s early productions, see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNKnheP4y0, min. 6:33, accessed December 11, 2011. The multi-part “Happening” was the result of a collaboration between the original Panic movement founders, Arrabal, Jodorowsky, and Topor. The footage, alongside the few extent documentary photographs of the earlier pieces, gives us a sense of what the panic ephemeral experience was meant to be. By 1965, it becomes evident that Jodorowsky’s tactics for shocking audiences, like San Carlos, have been taken to
twenty-seven ephemerals, I will address those efímeros that made a particularly strong mark not only on Jodorowsky’s own generation, but also on those that would comprise the Grupos.

Amidst the growing Mexican countercultural movement beginning in the early 1960s and the subsequent repression of artistic questionings of social mores and cultural nationalism, I argue Jodorowsky’s interdisciplinary approach and outlandish ephemerals demonstrate that 1960s Mexico was not an artistic wasteland as is often relayed. Nor were radical artists of this era simply regurgitating shared global impulses, as some histories have suggested.⁷⁸

The Chilean-born artist’s emphasis on collective production and social awareness opened the door for post-1968 artists to reinvest in collective artistic production, free from the legacy of Revolution-era art practices. In fact, an attack on the general Mexican School of Art, like los Hartos, became an integral aspect of Jodorowsky’s ephemerals, through intentional and serendipitous means. Artists associated with the Grupos have also frequently cited Jodorowsky’s influence. Felipe Ehrenberg of Grupo Proceso Pentágono has explained:

> The effects of Jodorowsky are very deep, so deep they are often [misunderstood]. Jodorowsky, as much as they do not say it, generally affected art in Mexico in an indescribable way…The effects of Jodorowsky on me were immediate because I was so young, I am from ’43,…[he] affected people still being pulled by the center [and] we managed to find our own voice.⁷⁹

new extremes. His section of the event is filled with highly sexualized imagery (the females and many of the male participants are nude or nearly nude), live animals (including the sacrificing of two geese), and he also threw live frogs out into the audience.

⁷⁸ There are a number of comprehensive histories of 1960s and 1970s Mexican art that never mention Jodorowsky or any alternative practitioners in favor of perpetuating the long-held myth that abstract and geometric painting and sculpture dominated and conceptualism never entered the equation until the 1990s. It has largely been the work of Mexican scholars to recuperate this lost trajectory of conceptualism in Mexican art and have been particularly influential to this author’s project: Maris Bustamante, Olivier Debroise, Felipe Ehrenberg, Pilar García, Sol Henaro, Cuauhtémoc Medina, Mónica Mayer (and Pinto Mi Raya), Álvaro Vázquez Mantecón, and Carla Stellweg, to name a few.

⁷⁹ “Las repercusiones de Jodorowsky son tan profundas, y por lo profundo son erradas. Jodorowsky, por mucho que no se diga, afectó de manera indescriptible las artes en general en México…Los efectos de Jodorowsky en mí fueron inmediata, porque yo era del ‘43…afecta a gentes que, aún arrastrastrados por el
As was indicated in the introduction of this chapter, existing literature has identified Jodorowsky as an anticipatory figure for what is frequently categorized as a “second wave” of conceptual art in Latin America, the chronology that erroneously places Mexican conceptual art as developing sometime between 1975-1980. Artist Luis Camnitzer has curiously mentioned proto-Happenings enacted by Jodorowsky before he left his native Chile for Paris in 1953, but never mentions the progenitor again, even within his brief discussion of conceptualism’s (supposedly) belated arrival to Mexico.⁸⁰ The seminal text *Inverted Utopias* claims that Jodorowsky, along with other Latin American proto-conceptualists, worked “generally in isolation.”⁸¹ While this might be true for some of the artists Mari Carmen Ramírez identifies, Jodorowsky was anything but isolated in the 1960s. In fact, I argue that he was one of the most significant forces in the introduction of conceptualisms in Mexico.

How the ephemerals were actually produced or constructed (in material and theory) and their political and cultural consequences have not been adequately examined beyond superficial relationships to the rise of a U.S/Mexican counterculture and in respect to Panic theory itself. The ephemerals were truly political acts. They directly attacked religion, Mexican nationalism, and political corruption in the public and cultural sphere. Through their production, Jodorowsky laid the groundwork for the rebirth of collective and interdisciplinary artistic practice that flourished in 1970s Mexico. I argue that the Panic ephemeral’s critical relationship to contemporary art schools, galleries, and institutional systems served to legitimize the need for a dialogue among artists themselves and collaboration to develop systems of support for their medio, logramos imponer voz propia.” Ignacio Maldonado Llobet and Lourdes Sánchez Puig, “La Osadía Jodorowsky, los primeros happenings latinoamericanos,” (Thesis, Universidad Iberoamericana, 1994), 43.

⁸⁰ Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin America*, 85; 146-47.

work. More than just a desire to take the theater out of the theater, the ephemerals served as one of the first models for disrupting (both physically and metaphorically) spaces that were dedicated to the production of culture. Accordingly, I address the Panic ephemerals within the larger culture war that was already brewing in Mexico upon his arrival.

Jodorowsky found his way to Mexico City in 1960 when the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes invited the young performer to present a workshop on mime at the institute. Though Latin American himself, Jodorowsky had been living in Paris at the time and had been studying with Marcel Marceau and was actively participating in Surrealist circles. Upon his arrival, the artist came to understand the benefits of working in Mexico as compared to France—as he perceived it—where he felt unions and bureaucracy consistently stood in the way of projects being completed. While in Mexico, Jodorowsky stayed in regular contact with his fellow Surrealist defectors in Europe: Fernando Arrabal and Roland Topor. All three artist-writers had worked in a Surrealist mode but grown frustrated with Surrealists circles. As has Jodorowsky described them, “they were men in ties that talked about politics and not art, they were bureaucrats.” In his estimation, the Surrealists saw the movement as a culture, but one that had grown increasingly rigid and regulated under the guidance of figures like Andre Breton. Put more directly by Jodorowsky: “Breton had given a sense of respectability to Surrealism….he didn’t like science fiction…he didn’t like rock music.”

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82 “eran hombres de corbata que hablaban de política y no de arte, eran burócratas…,” Interview in Maldonado Llobet and Sánchez Puig, 51.

83 According to Alan Glass, Breton and his wife were present at the 1965 ephemeral Jodorowsky staged in Paris, where they fled the venue horrified after having been sprayed with the blood of the chickens Jodorowsky sacrificed on stage (Alan Glass, Interview with the Author, August 14, 2014, Mexico City).

anxious audience in the Ruptura artists as Mexican art had also long been defined by its connection to the movement.\textsuperscript{85}

In response to these conflicts, Jodorowsky immediately began to engage what little experimental theater scene Mexico had to offer, putting on productions of Samuel Beckett (Theater of the Absurd) and Antonin Artaud (Theater of Cruelty), with whom he had worked with in Paris.\textsuperscript{86} Jodorowsky’s early productions, while certainly within the realm of experimental theater, point towards his desire to violate the assumed roles and spaces of traditional theater productions. Additionally, this is demonstrative of his desire to eliminate ties to the bourgeoisie and attempt “…to place the audience on the verge of crisis.”\textsuperscript{87} In doing so, the audience would be compelled to act, become aware, be healed, or embark upon some other type of transformation. The cold and unsurprising reality was that general Mexican audiences were less than prepared for this type of radical experimental theater and the government had no tolerance for Jodorowsky's antics (they frequently shut down productions shortly after their premieres or before they could even be performed). It is this very aspect of Jodorowsky's early career, his

\textsuperscript{85} Rita Eder has recently suggested a direct connection between Jodorowsky’s employment of surrealist experimentation through visuals and texts and the development of the ephemerals. While compelling, I would argue that the ephemerals represented a break with Surrealism and a desire to supercede the movement, despite his employment of surrealist strategies. Her analysis provides compelling evidence of the critique of the pictorial in Jodorowsky’s Panic theory. See: Eder, “Two Aspects of the Total Work of Art…,” in \textit{Desafío a la estabilidad}, 75-81.

\textsuperscript{86} Antonin Artaud published the manifesto for the “theater of cruelty” in 1932. This was directly influential to the development of the happening as well as the Panic ephemeral and is discussed here later. Of equal significance was the “theater of the absurd,” a term developed in 1961 to describe a group of playwrights and authors including Beckett, Jean Genet, and Fernando Arrabal. Jodorowsky’s first foray into Mexican experimental theater was inwith a production of Beckett’s \textit{Endgame}. It was met with tremendous resistance and criticism, particularly by the press. Jodorowsky has explained: “they called Beckett a dog, a son of a bitch” and “everyone disapproved and hated it, critics, everyone,” treating both Jodorowsky and Beckett as if they were degenerates, see: \textit{La constellation}, DVD.

\textsuperscript{87} Cuauhtémoc Medina, “Recovering Panic,” in \textit{La era de la discrepancia}, 98.
enfant terrible image, was what leads many Mexican artists to be unavoidably drawn to the possibilities Jodorowsky's ideas presented.

Jodorowsky’s constellation of influences and parallel developments is vast, but for the purposes of understanding the seeds of the Panic ephemeral, I limit my discussion to the influence of Artaud and the relationship between the efimero, the Happening, and Performance art. Violence and destruction as filtered through Artaud served, in Jodorowsky's estimation, to dissolve the boundaries between audience and performance. Most every aspect of Panic theory resides in, and directly addresses, the significance of liminal space in society, artistic production, sexuality, politics, etc. What Jodorowsky proposes with Panic theory and its ephemeral expression is something that is not theater, not performance, and not exactly Happening. It is precisely concerned with the simple statement: taking the theater out of theater. But how this might actually be achieved through artistic expression is something that was of great importance to his work in the 1960s.

For these reasons, Arrabal, Topor, and Jodorowsky formed grupo pánico in 1962, but the group was not to be the start of any type of movement or school and despite the fact that numerous artists in Mexico would begin to affiliate with the group across the 1960s and into the 70s. Collectively they believed that injecting the notion of Panic into the equation (one already laid out by predecessors like Bertolt Brecht, Beckett or Artaud) a new path would emerge. Not only does Panic signal the violence, hysteria, or absurdity that is modern day society, Panic was meant to recall the Greek god Pan, a multiple god and well-suited for his associations to the arts, eroticism, and paganism. At the heart of Panic theory is a desire to transform all that was once theatrical into the everyday, to strip away all elements so that the once passive audience is forced to confront what was once the performer. Like many contemporaneous experimental projects
being produced by groups such as the Living Theater (founded 1947) in New York City, Panic theory similarly reinforces and requires collective effort on the part of the artists and the audience. In this vein, the efímeros are part performance, part sociological experiment. Cuauhtémoc Medina has insightfully described the culture surrounding the “Panic movement” as being “…defined most of all by a rejection of the cool and controlled notion of ‘experimental art,’ favoring instead experience itself, which is joyful but wears you out.”

There has been a justifiable focus on Jodorowsky’s film career (as well as his expressions of Panic theory in writing, comics, and ephemeral projects) to the hippie movement and countercultures, both in the United States and Mexico, such as in Eric Zolov’s book *Refried Elvis* (1994) or in the numerous monographs covering his film production. It would be short-sided to view Panic theory as having grown out of countercultural movements in any direct manner as Jodorowsky remained relatively detached from associating himself with the hippie or *jipismo* movements of the local or Northern variety. His aesthetic of shock originated in surrealism and developed through Panic theory, which catapulted the artist to cult-figure status once he began to produce his films. Though the U.S. beat poets have a notorious connection with

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90 Though Jodorowsky was not directly interested in what would be deemed “hippie”, he did often include jazz and rock musicians in the Panic ephemerals, an act that (particularly in the Mexican context) was highly subversive and political. Beginning in the early 1960s, underground rock clubs became the first targets of repression and brutality by the government. Jodorowsky is also frequently linked to Psychedelic culture, primarily for the imagery he created in his films and comics. For an excellent analysis of the Mexican counterculture and the psychedelic, see: Chapter Two of this dissertation; Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis*; and Medina, “Recovering Panic”.
Mexico, and Mexico City in particular, there is little evidence to suggest their presence marked Jodorowsky’s early years in Mexico, despite some loose conceptual and stylistic affinities, including a proclivity towards Zen Buddhism and other spiritual practices. It is beyond the scope of this specific project to discuss Jodorowsky’s engagement with the spiritual and psychological (or psicomágia as he terms it) to any great length, but it is a thematic constant in his oeuvre that necessitates a brief mentioning.  

As artist and contemporary of Jodorowsky, Felipe Ehrenberg suggests, Jodorowsky was not much of a philosopher in the early 1960s. However, his spiritual journey began to pick up speed in Mexico. Beginning in the mid-60s, he began to study and practice a kind of blend of alchemy, mysticism, Frommian psychoanalysis, and Zen Buddhism. Notably, he became a disciple of the wandering Japanese monk/healer, Ejo Takata. While Jodorowsky’s continued self-mythologizing might lead one to believe this aspect of his artistic career to be somewhat extraordinary or even radical. Within the broader cultural context of the hippie or countercultural movement in 1960s Mexico City, it is easy to see why, despite his constant agitation of the cultural sphere, Jodorowsky became a very popular cultural figure and is now viewed more as a guru or healer. Jodorowsky as philosopher or mystic (i.e. when he became heavily involved in Tarot) did not present itself as a strong trajectory until the 1970s. But Jodorowsky’s discursive

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91 Jodorowsky’s continued blurring between life, performance, and ritual and his continued presence as a kind of international guru, has understandably lead to a tremendous amount of attention paid to this aspect of the his career. His somewhat dubiously constructed autobiography is frequently cited. See: Alejandro Jodorowsky, The Spiritual Journey of Alejandro Jodorowsky. (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2005).

92 Felipe Ehrenberg, Interview with the author. Mexico City, 22 April 2012.

“healing” did not presuppose any engagement with specific societal ills in favor of a kind of Kantian approach that lead to his consistent use of universal concepts.

Frequently highlighted as the beginning of what would come to be considered Performance art, it is significant to note that most artists and art historians are reticent to label the Panic ephemerals as Performance, though they clearly identify them as precursors and as Angelica García has explained, “unquestionably transgressed the theatrical scene.”94 Maris Bustamante has claimed that the panic ephemeral is a “direct descendant of the Happening, but is more structured.”95 This might neatly be accounted for by Panic theory’s strong roots in the theatrical tradition and because the term/movement called Performance art (as a another expression of conceptualism) had yet to be coined. I would concede that labeling Panic ephemerals as Performance or even Happenings is perhaps a fallacy. And while I do not seek to prove whether or not this is true, the very fact that this form of expression evades categorization and definition is precisely the goal of Panic theory.

Cuauhtémoc Medina has convincingly differentiated ephemerals from Happenings in that the former stems from Jodorowsky’s “theatrical heterodoxy” rather than from the latter’s expansion of visual art into action. The concept of the ephemerals came to dominate Jodorowsky’s artistic production beginning around 1961 or 1962, when he was attempting to find a means of escaping the censorship that had previously held up his productions, but more significantly as a means of breaking from the “figurative” and “abstract” modes of traditional art

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95 Bustamante, “Conditions, Roads, and Genealogies,” 138.
and theater. ⁹⁶ These very same debates were becoming central to concerns among Jodorowsky’s fellow artists in Mexico, albeit primarily in the plastic arts, as is discussed in the following section.

Allan Kaprow’s near mythic coining of the term Happening occurred in 1957—and we may reasonably assume that Jodorowsky was aware of this concept given his years spent in Paris around this time and directly preceding his move to Mexico City—but Jodorowsky’s concept of the Panic ephemerals may be distinguished from the Happening in several ways: the efímeros were meant to be therapeutic and the evocation of Panic could instigate a transformative process. Initially the ephemerals took the form of shows that occurred only one time (much like the U.S. Happenings) and relied solely on a schematic script that allowed for the inclusion of improvisation. Significantly, these loose scripts were mostly inspired by the quotidian, but had the goal of radicalizing daily existence using violence and transgression. ⁹⁷

Central to the creation of an ephemeral was for the theatrical scene to be dissolved and that they never be repeated. But most significant to this discussion is Jodorowsky’s insistence that the only aspect of theater that should remain a component in the Panic ephemeral is the elimination of the traditional dramatic text, which in this case the text could easily be supplanted with idea/concept: “All that remained of the theater was the text. If you removed the text from the work of theater, then theater was liberated”, or paraphrased: removing the theater from the theater. ⁹⁸

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⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ “Lo único que quedaba del teatro era el texto. Si tu salías del texto del la obra de teatro, el teatro se liberaba…,” Interview with Jodorowsky. Maldonado Llobet and Sánchez Puig, 63.
Most any type of material or found object could potentially be utilized in an ephemeral, but according to Jodorowsky there is a preference for organic materials, among which he lists in *Teatro pánico*: membranes, paper, eggs, old clothes, chickens, cows, bottles, rats, bones, wood, liquor, etc.\(^{99}\) The materials listed are not only mostly organic, they are also impermanent, utilitarian, and/or disposable. In their masters thesis, Ignacio Maldonado Llobet and Lourdes Sánchez Puig have described the use of objects in the ephemeral as being like “furniture” or “receptacles” for the Panic man.\(^{100}\) The objects are purely a means to an end and have no inherent symbolic, aesthetic, or cultural value once the efímeros ends. Like ritual objects, they are not to be reused or recycled. Many of the improvised sets and props that were utilized in the efímeros were created in advance of the action or during the action, but not all of the ephemerals necessarily retained this connection to the theatrical spectacle.

**PANIC PARTY: THE EPHEMERAL AT SAN CARLOS, 1963**

Here, I turn to two 1963 ephemerals: one at the Academy of San Carlos and the other—referred to as *Canto al océano* (*Song to the Ocean*)—at the Bahía Recreation Center. Both were one-night events in which the artist intervened into public spaces and created simultaneous improvised actions that frequently utilized nude women, live animals, violence, sexual acts, and religious imagery. Though both 1963 actions are often mentioned, and some documentation has been reproduced and exhibited, there has not been sufficient analysis of this action or explanation as to why has it has recently come to embody a previously under-acknowledged


\(^{100}\) Maldonado Llobet and Sánchez Puig, 67.
turning point in Mexican art. Through the analysis and contextualization of these two ephemerals I will argue that Panic theory facilitated and legitimized conceptualisms, institutional critique, and the later developments of Performance art and non-objectualism, as tools for political resistance and subversion in post-1968 Mexican art.

The culturally political aspects of Jodorowsky (both theater, art and film) tend to be overlooked by most literature despite his direct referencing of contemporary Mexican politics throughout his work during the 60s and early 1970s. This was not only due to the censorship Jodorowsky experienced himself, but also to the increasing repression of perceived radicals as the country grew increasingly divided between conservative and so-called youth cultures (countercultures). Around 1961 or 1962, Jodorowsky began producing experimental theater productions in collaboration with many of the Ruptura artists and writers, such as the 1961 staging of la ópera del orden. (Fig.10) Sponsored by the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, the happening-style production was Jodorowsky’s first under the rubric of Teatro pánico. Lilia Carrillo, Manuel Felguérez, Alberto Gironella, Fernando García Ponce, Vicente Rojo created the sets. Many of the participants of La Ópera del orden would be integral participants in later panic ephemerals and in Jodorowsky’s films. This would be the artists’ first real lesson in censorship; the production was shut down by the authorities for the presence of anti-Catholic imagery- he has explained it was because he placed a photo of the Pope on the drum kit used by the rock band

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though officials were already suspicious of Jodorowsky’s activities.102 The first panic ephemerals were then spurred by the artists’s inability to work within the confines of normal establishments. The preliminary ephemerals were called *Panic fiestas* and were conceived as a “fusion of *fiesta* and show” with the goal of dissolving the theater all together.103 All walks of life were invited: prostitutes, intellectuals, artists, politicians, actresses as a means of creating an “explosive cocktail party” just to observe the reactions of the attendants.104 Neither frivolous nor simply bohemian, Jodorowsky organized the parties with artistic intention that eventually led to his development of the efímeros. Through the shock of chance encounters and exchanges of across all kinds of spectators, a type of therapy would be induced at the efímeros. In participating in the Panic party, the common man is transformed into a “Panic man”.105 As one participant recalled:

…the parties weren’t only for drinking or to see who fucks whom in the bathtub. It went far beyond that, he knew how to organize people in a social game and people went with it; many of Alejandro’s ideas also came from this...


103 As was made evident in several sections presented in the 2014 exhibition *Desafío a la estabilidad: procesos artísticos en México 1952-1967* organized by Rita Eder for the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC), there is compelling evidence to support the analysis of the “Panic Party” in relationship to the growing phenomenon of parties as a format for artistic experimentation, particularly in experimental film during this time. I am also grateful to film curator and historian, Israel Rodríguez, for reiterating this connection.

104 “cóctel explosive”. Maldonado Llobet and Sánchez Puig, 48.

105 Drawings by Cuevas were his interpretation of what was the Panic Man.

106 “la[s] fiestas no eran solo chupe ni a ver quien se coge a quién en la tina del baño, iban much más allá, él sabía como organizar a la gente en un juego social, y la gente lo seguía, y de ahí surgían también muchas de las ideas de Ale[j]andro.” Maldonado Llobet and Sánchez Puig, 48. Significantly, Luis Urías has suggested that the structure of the ephemerals were meant to be like jazz, with each individual reacting to create a collective production (Luis Urías, closed-door session at the Primer Seminario de Investigación y Curaduría: Tecnología, medios audiovisuales y experimentación artística, Centro de la Imagen, Mexico City, October 29, 2014).
The Panic parties were like experimental labs from which Jodorowsky could casually observe the reactions of the spectators. The parties were the springboard to begin the ephemerals as the chance actions at the parties validated Jodorowsky’s desire to create intentionally provocative environments and situations.

In 1963, Jodorowsky staged his most heavily attended ephemeral on October 23rd at the Academy of San Carlos. Given the conservative nature of the art school at the time, it is somewhat surprising that Jodorowsky was allowed to produce anything in association with the institution. But as recent interviews with students of the school, among them Ruptura artists, they were more than keen to bring Jodorowsky into the unofficial curriculum. As will be demonstrated, the San Carlos efímero is arguably as much of a watershed intervention as that by the Hartos into the commercial gallery circuit.

San Carlos was founded in 1785 as Latin America’s first institution for the study and development of artistic practices. Responsible for centuries’ worth of promoting European methods, the academy became a hotbed of revolutionary art activity beginning around 1913, when students demanded that the school adopt a more modern approach to art thereby assisting in the birth of Mexican modernism. The local and international success of the Mexican modernists led to the eventual indoctrination of the Mexican School of Painting at the school (an ideology that retained roots in the tenets of the 1810 and 1910 Revolutions) and San Carlos would remain entrenched in this mentality well into the 1960s.


108 Oles, Art and Architecture in Mexico, 138-45. The Academy of San Carlos exists today as the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas (ENAP), part of the UNAM.
There were also economic factors that played an important role in artists moving away from their dependency on government financing. While the 1950s saw the economic boom known as the “Mexican Miracle” under PRI rule, there was a growing labor uprising and Mexican society was becoming increasingly divided over and skeptical of the government’s ability to retain any progress promised by the end of the Revolution. As Eric Zolov has explained,

[The] PRI positioned itself to be seen as synonymous not only with the Revolution but—in adopting the national colors as its own and underwriting all celebratory discourse of the nation—with national identity itself.”109

It was precisely amidst this increasing repression and subsequent questioning of authoritarian practices that had led many of the Ruptura artists to begin breaking with traditional art forms and San Carlos was a center for these growing debates.

By 1963 when Jodorowsky's ephemeral was staged, arguments surrounding the merits of figuration and abstraction had begun to extend into the artist’s more political concerns. San Carlos was officially against the development of new styles or practices (particularly those derived outside of Mexico), yet the students and some sympathetic professors began to expose themselves to alternative methods on their own, distributing self-translated texts, holding afterhours meetings and workshops, often hosted by artists outside the academy, such as Jodorowsky.110 Given the conservative nature of the institution, it is surprising that the controversial artist, responsible for the scandalous and censored La ópera del orden, would be invited to the school at all. But the curious students, hungry for exposure to more experimental

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109 Zolov, 7.

110 Interview with Jorge Perez Vega, Sub-versiones de la memoria, DVD, disc 1.
practices, lobbied for Jodorowsky’s presence as part of the annual parties they would throw at the school.\textsuperscript{111}

While there is little to no documentation of the Jodorowsky’s ephemerals, a series of photographs of mysterious origins are included in the 1965 book, *Teatro Pánico*.\textsuperscript{112} (Fig.13-14) This group of twenty-seven images, documenting many of the numerous actions staged for the event, were taken by a spectator. In a letter dated April 28, 1964, a man identified simply as “Rafael” writes to Jodorowsky (Alexandro) explaining that he wanted to share a letter he had sent to a lady friend and apparent love interest, “Margarita,” in Rome detailing his impressions and recollections of the delirium that was the San Carlos Ephemeral.\textsuperscript{113} This serendipitous documentation not only presents us with the summarily important visual documentation of an event that was never intended to be recorded, but also provides a rare, first-hand account of the spectator’s experience of an ephemeral as “Rafael” recounts his reflections on each of the accompanying numbered snapshots. Here, I will analyze in detail a selection of the concurrent “scenes” which took place at San Carlos to provide a more complete description of the event, as has not been adequately attempted elsewhere.\textsuperscript{114}

The central patio of the Academy was the location for the event, with students and other attendants both seated on the floor and standing on foot. According to Pablo Leder, an actor who frequently worked with Jodorowsky, there was never an actual script, just loose ideas (a

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\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{112} While I do not discuss the event in detail here, Jodorowsky staged a panic ephemeral, along with actions by Arrabal and Topor in Paris in 1965. *Melodrama sacramental* is the only ephemeral for which there exists film footage. This documentation reveals clear parallels between this later ephemeral and the descriptions and photographs of the 1963 ephemeral at San Carlos.

\textsuperscript{113} See “Documento Pánico,” in *Teatro pánico*, 73.

\textsuperscript{114} Not all of the actions described in the text are accompanied by images.
schematic) and certain physical materials that were provided in advance of the action.\footnote{A “postscript” or perhaps addition by Jodorowsky featured at end of the letter is a list of participants: Carlos Acosta, Erika Carlsson, Mercedes Carreño, Roberto Comenares, Philip Fagan, Manuel Felguérez, Gelsen Gas, Bernadette Landru, el Monstruo-Monstruo (the Monster-Monster), Marta Prendes, Eduardo Nava, Sergio Rendón, Miguel (aka Mickey or Miqui) Salas (son of cultural promoter Antonio Salas Anzuères and drummer for the rock band, Los Angeles Negros (formed 1962) and Los Huracanes (1963); Valerie-Jean Trumblay (later wife of Jodorowsky and star of films such as El Topo), and Luis Urías (Jodorowsky’s long-time assistant in Mexico, artist, actor, writer, and musician).} He explains:

...we met at 7:30 in San Carlos and when we arrived there were 500 eggs, 200 kilograms of flour, cages, drinking straws...there were things, there were elements; with those elements we began to create a spectacle; everything was improvised...\footnote{Interview with Pablo Leder, in Maldonado Llobet and Sánchez Puig, 63. While Leder explains that he participated in the event, he is not included in the list of participants documented in Teatro pánico.}

According to “Raphael,” the only “stageset” or backdrop for the event consisted of a grouping of trashcans of many sizes, painted black and assembled into an instrument resembling a jazz drum kit, upon which the drummer Mickey Salas played during the event (Fig.15); an old, “but beautiful,” piano; a wall “more or less in the center of the scene, adorned with tortillas”; a panel covered in bolillos or bread rolls (Fig.16); and a wall covered in canvas and painted white, which would be used by Manuel Felguérez to create an ephemeral mural entitled Humanísimo (Very Human), discussed in further detail later in this section. (Fig.\footnote{“Documento pánico,” in Teatro pánico, 74.} 117 To the right of this was a “very strange instrument” meant to imitate a harp (Fig.17).\footnote{The introduction of haphazardly constructed, experimental instruments are a hallmark of the grupo pánico, with Luis Urías having largely been responsible for their introduction into the Panic ephemerals, explaining that they held a kind of class or workshop to create instruments inspired by concrete music and experimental composers such as Stokhausen (Luis Urías, Seminario, Centro de la Imagen, Mexico City). Urías, heavily invested in experimental sound and music, would also construct instruments for the grupo pánico’s only official “band”, Las Damas Chinas (1970) who presented several improvised public performances in addition to performing in Jodorowsky’s staging of Zarastustra. Playing what mostly resembled a form of concrete music, they performed at the universities and eventually producing a} According to Luis Urías, the harp he

\footnote{116}
constructed was called the *cornicordio*, a combination of pipes, a small bathtub, and a horn, designed so that when it was played, the music would come out of the ass. (Fig. 18)\(^{119}\)

The delirium that constituted the ephemeral began when Jodorowsky, wearing a sharkskin suit, stood before the audience and made the short statement: “I am an artist, not someone that came to teach your ass. If you want to say something, come here, into the light.”\(^{120}\) According to Rafael, he then proceeded to deliver a “diatribe” against traditional theater and announced the formation of the *grupo pánico*.\(^{121}\) After this “presentation”, a series (four or five) of attractive women dressed in corsets or dresses and then five or six men adorned with capes, fangs, and tools for torture paraded out as Jodorowsky announced their names with concrete music being played in the background.\(^{122}\) At the end of the line, a figure called the “Monster-Monster” appeared, “covered in a dog skin and horned helmet, he carried a white dove in his

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\(^{119}\) Luis Urías, closed-door session at the Primer Seminario de Investigación y Curaduría: Tecnología, medios audiovisuales y experimentación artística, Centro de la Imagen, Mexico City, October 29, 2014.

\(^{120}\) “Soy un artista…no alguien que venga a enseñarles el trasero. Si quieren decir algo, vengan aquí, a la luz.” Jodorowsky quoted in “Documento pánico,” in *Teatro pánico*, 74.

\(^{121}\) Ibid.

While the *grupo pánico* already existed in some form (his circle with Fernando Arrabal and Roland Topor in Paris) before arriving in Mexico, according to Urías, Jodorowsky decided to officially form a group during a 1962-63 visit to Chihuahua for an unrealized theater production. This is also when Urías first met Jodorowsky, who then encouraged the younger artist to move to Mexico City to work with him (Luis Urías, Seminario, Centro de la Imagen, Mexico City). Their numerous collaborations in theater, film, and ephemeral projects would continue well into the 70’s with Urías having acting parts in the film *The Holy Mountain*, in addition to designing several of the sets for the film. He also had a role in the early stages of conceptualizing Jodorowsky’s (now notorious) unrealized film production of *Dune*.

\(^{122}\) “Documento pánico,” in *Teatro pánico*, 74.
hands that was desperately flapping its wings.”123 While the group of girls and men danced the twist, “…the Monster-Monster walked to the center of the scene where he bit and killed the little animal. Later, while dismembering [the bird] with a bloody mouth, he uttered bestial sounds.”124

After this violent event, the scene was cleared and Jodorowsky emerged again to present a “poet by a very strange name” (Gelsen Gas) who was dressed in the guise of a bodybuilder (clad in nothing but bikini underwear, “muscular and beautiful”) and wearing what appears to be a mask and wielding a pickaxe. (Fig. 18) “Rafael” explains that he had a mirror (“the narcissim of the traditional poet”) and later a large glass container filled with hearts and other bloody viscera (“the sentiments expressed by traditional poetry”). Gas proceeded to create a concrete poem “before the very eyes” of the audience and then destroying the mirror.125

The delirium only grew as many more participants and actions, from Urias crawling under a table on hands and knees while shouting repeatedly, “I like Ike!” (Fig.19), to the violent destruction of female mannequins (Fig.19), a participant dousing himself with milk (Fig.20), groups dancing the twist, and a beautiful female participant who wandered the scenes while emphatically denying her guilt only to land in a barber’s chair and receive a very close haircut (Fig.20).126 According to the “Documento,” the ephemeral came to a close with the completion

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123 “cubierto con una piel de perro y un casco con cuernos, llevaba una paloma blanca en las manos que batía desesperadamente las alas.” “Documento pánico,” in Teatro pánico, 74.

124 Caminó hasta el centro del scenario y ahí, a mordidas, mató el animalito. Luego lo descuartizó mientaras, con la boca ensangrentada, profería ruidos de bestia.,” ibid.

125 “Se retiraron todos y quedó de nuevo solo Alexandro solo, quien presentó a un poeta de nombre extraño que realizaría ante nuestros ojos un “poema concreto” and “recargó el espejo en el botellón y, de un furibundo y preparado golpe, los destrozó,” Documento pánico,” in Teatro pánico, 74.

126 Ibid., 75-79.
and presentation of Felguérez’s mural, *Humanísismo (Very, Very Human)* and the collective destruction of the piano.

It is necessary here to draw further attention to Felguérez’s pointed critique of muralism through the use of the ephemeral. Like Cuevas before him, the abstract painter decided to use the concept of the ephemeral mural for his component of the San Carlos event. Here, Felguérez used a blank wall and a live female model to create his “mural” in a live action. He covered the woman with fabric strips and then painted her entire body, fixing her form to the previously blank screen. The implication is that the inevitable removal of her physical body will result in the destruction of the mural. The live presence of the model might also be interpreted as a critique of muralism’s aspirations of social mobilization—her figure has been fixed or trapped by muralism and it is only with her physical removal that the mural is activated. If muralism had promised to serve the Mexican people, then Felguérez and Jodorowsky not only expose this fallacy, but also destroy preconceived conceptions of the mural as form and symbol. In the Panic ephemerals, muralism—in its anti-muralist form, be it abstract, ephemeral, or destructive—serves as a stand-in or symbol for the larger cultural debates and frustration of post-Mexican School artists.

Jodorowsky’s destruction of the piano at the end of the event, only one year after George Maciunas’ infamous 1962 destruction and three years before Rafael Montañez Ortiz’s series of piano destructions as part of the 1966 Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) in London, ended

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127 Both Cuevas and Felguérez continued to probe the potential of the “ephemeral mural” format well into the late 1960s, including Cuevas’s 1968 billboard intervention in the Zona Rosa of Mexico City, which is discussed in detail in following chapter of this dissertation. Felguérez would create his own ephemeral mural this same year, which was documented by the filmmaker and fellow Jodorowsky collaborator, Rafael Corkidi.

128 I am grateful to Anna Indych-López for suggesting that Felguérez’s action might be viewed as a commentary on muralism’s failure to truly instigate widespread social change.
the ephemeral with a truly violent action.\textsuperscript{129} Upon Jodorowsky’s call, all of the participants grabbed what tools and weapons they could find, then collectively turning on the piano. According to “Rafael’s” description, they then doused the piano in alcohol and lit it on fire and then Jodorowsky began to roast chickens over the open flames.\textsuperscript{130} (Fig. 20) After this, he walked to the center of the scene and explained that he did not know when the ephemeral began or when it would end, but that it would end here. After the audience streamed out of the building, Rafael explains the sad ending to the night—a large group of poor neighborhood children ran onto the scene then devouring the leftovers (the chickens, the bread, the tortillas) of the destruction.\textsuperscript{131} The accidental event of the children entering the space created by the ephemeral, indeed brought art directly in confrontation with daily life, but without offering options for resolution. The element of chance, introduced through the creation of panic or chaos, opened the space for an interaction to occur between groups of people that most likely would never occur within the walls of a cultural institution.

The significance of Jodorowsky’s intervening into the most traditional and oldest art school came at moment when many young artists were struggling to find new forms of expression, but were continually met with antiquated teaching methods that perpetuated the Mexican School of Art. In the case of Jodorowsky, the binary of figurative/abstract could be replaced by the theory that “there are two kinds of violence: creative and destructive.”\textsuperscript{132} If the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[130] “Documento Panico,” 79.
\item[131] Ibid.
\item[132] \textit{La constellation—Jodorowsky}, DVD.
\end{footnotes}
San Carlos ephemeral served as a metaphor of the destruction of the institutionalized art school and the Muralist tradition, then his intervention at the Bahía recreational center might be deemed an act of creative violence.

THE EPHEMERAL FOR *CANTO AL OCÉANO*, 1963

Upon the invitation of his friend and fellow experimental filmmaker, Gelsen Gas (b. Mexico, 1933) Jodorowsky was tasked to create an ephemeral work for the unveiling of abstract painter Felguérez’s mural, *Canto al océano* at the Bahía recreation center, which was owned by Gas’s father. (Fig.23) This fortuitous opportunity, made possible by Gas’s family status also sets an important precedent for the generation of the 1990s. Many of the numerous alternative spaces that appeared were reliant upon those artists who came from a certain amount of financial stability, such as was the case for La Panadería (founded by Yoshua Okón and Miguel Calderon) and Temístocles 44 (established by Haydee Rovirosa in an abandoned home owned by her family).

The fact that his event would be carried out during the opening of a public pool is most likely why Jodorowsky was able to carry out his jolting event in Mexico City before 1200 attendants. In addition to the unveiling of the mural, the spectacle was also to feature

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134 Bustamante, “Roads, Conditions, Genealogies” 139.
projections by Jodorowsky’s then wife, Dorotée Harten. As opposed to Felguérez’s ephemeral mural at San Carlos, the more conventional, Canto al océano mural was entirely abstract and comprised of over twenty-eight thousand oyster shells that Felguérez collected from local markets. (Fig.24) As conceptualized by Gas, Dorotée’s experimental films were projected on the surface of the mural, creating an activated space or backdrop to Jodorowsky’s performance with the dancers taking place in the pool.

Jodorowsky ephemeral for Canto al océano, like at San Carlos, consisted of many actions taking place simultaneously, with Jodorowsky remaining at the center of the action. Felguérez’s mural was located near the changing rooms for the swimming pool and accordingly, Jodorowsky made use of the unusual setting by installing a series of floating balsawood platforms upon which members of a local ballet company performed improvised ballets with title such as “Oh, pulpo de mirada seda!” and “Fanfarrias metamorfseándose en queso camembert.” Within the changing rooms themselves, Jodorowsky placed semi-nude or nude couples. Throughout the efímero, the doors opened and closed, revealing said couples as the engaged in sexual and otherwise salacious activities.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Jodorowsky planned to arrive at the event by helicopter, descending by rope onto a central platform constructed in the pool. He was to be

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135 Luis Urias, Closed Door Seminar, Centro de la Imagen, Mexico City, 2014.

136 Felguérez’s Mural de hierro (Iron Mural) installed at the Cine Diana, Mexico City in 1962 has been called the first truly abstract mural in Mexico. Like Canto al océano, it was composed of found materials: screws, iron rods, nuts, and scrap iron. Jodorowsky also created an ephemeral for the unveiling, a more theatrical performance he titled Poema dinámico para un inmóvil de hierro (Dynamic poem for an iron Inmuble), see: Angelica Garcia Gómez, “Manuel Felguérez and Alejandro Jodorowsky,” in Rita Eder, ed. Desafio de la estabilidad, 111. Jodorowsky There, he recited one of his poems: “una moral de hierro, una moral de encierro…” (“a morality of iron, a morality of imprisonment…”), see Silvia Cherem, Trazos y revelaciones (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003), 146.

137 According to the program for the event, see: Fig. 1.14.
dressed like the god Pan and as he made his arrival he would begin to recite Lautréamont’s *Les Chants de Maldoror*.\(^{138}\) However, during the dress rehearsal, the helicopter pilot made some kind of miscalculation and crashed the aircraft into the pool area, exploding the engine and sending the propellers flying. (Fig.2) No one was injured and due to time constraints (and most likely Jodorowsky’s pleasure with the spontaneous and destructive event), the helicopter was left in place, serving as a spectacular backdrop for the event. According to Raquel Tibol, there were also “huge tubs, one filled with ketchup and the other filled with noodles and from within these tubs [the dancers] covered their bodies with these things while music was playing…”\(^{139}\)

*Canto al océano*, Felguérez’s mural, was a political statement against the Mexican School of Art and an attempt at redefining painting within the Mexican context. (Fig.24) But Jodorowsky’s ephemeral instigated an attack on not one, but two movements that had come to over-characterize the Mexican artistic identity. By throwing dance, theater, mural painting, music and poetry into a blender, the result was an explosion of Muralism and Surrealism’s role in defining what constitutes an artistic form as expression. Jodorowsky’s literary selection for the efímero is apt in that Lautréamont employs a non-linear narrative coupled with violent imagery and subject matter to address issues of nihilism, iconoclasm, morality, and religion; themes and ideologies that are at the core of the Panic ephemeral. Jodorowsky’s ephemerals demonstrate a radical departure from the overwhelming post-War cultural focus on the personal and the

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\(^{138}\) *Les Chants de Maldoror* is poem-novel written by Comte de Lautréamont (Isidore Lucien Ducasse) between 1868 and 1869. Lautréamont was directly influential to the development of European Surrealism, particularly in the work of Artaud. Baciu has explained that Lautremont was a “patron saint” of many leftist circles of artist in Latin America at this time, see Stefan Baciu, “Beatitude of the Border: Latin America’s Beat Generation,” *Hispania* 49, no.1 (December 1966), 737.

\(^{139}\) “…y había unas enormas tinas, una de salsa catsup y la otra llena de tallarines, y los mismos, dentro de esas tinas cubriéndose los cuerpos con esas cosas, mientras sonaba música…” Llobet and Sánchez Puig, 76-77.
individualist expression in mainstream, post-Muralist Mexico. The ephemerals prove that for Jodorowsky and the grupo pánico, the personal may indeed be political and that individual expression is political. This key aspect of Jodorowsky’s body of work is often overshadowed by concentrations on mysticism, utopia, or spiritual healing. The significance of the government’s emphatic selling of abstraction, and individualism as the future of Mexican art, against the background of growing political tensions and social revolution, ignited Jodorowsky’s political side enough for him to frequently confront this issue in the efímeros.

In the rapidly shifting cultural landscape and increasingly violent climate of 1960s Mexico City, Jodorowsky’s magnetic persona and willingness to go to all extremes for artistic liberty attracted a great number of followers. But it was Jodorowsky’s relationship to his Mexican contemporaries and emerging art students that characterizes the Jodorowskian legacy within the visual arts and solidifies the essential part conceptualism played in the unofficial history of pre-1968 Mexican art. Bustamante has stated in reference to Jodorowsky's Panic theory that:

[He] clearly lays out the structure behind non-objectual attitudes and proposes to conceptually dislodge theater and painting from the place they occupy…and bring them together into a conceptual a-disciplinary space. From this proposal stems what he then called 'concrete aesthetics,' where these disciplines acquire a new 'reality' value within the imagination, that is to say that fiction is eliminated, and thus what happens in the presentations (when representation disappears) also happens in reality during the performance of the action.¹⁴⁰

What is most remarkable and makes the case for Jodorowsky as a compelling progenitor for post-68 alternative art is that his intentions were always to shock, provoke, and create scandal as much as they were to heal, soothe and transcend the public. Jodorowsky could not have foreseen the panic that would ensue leading up to the tragic events of 1968 and its aftermath. But, Panic

theory—in its violence and in its ability to heal through open expression and acceptance—resonated strongly with the next generation of artists who struggled to rise from the ashes of the Student Movement and the Tlatelolco Massacre.

**JOSÉ LUIS CUEVAS AND THE EPHEMERAL MURAL, 1967**

I choose to return to and conclude this chapter with José Luis Cuevas as he serves as a bridge between the Ruptura’s agenda to disrupt and challenge existing systems of cultural diffusion and the re-adaption of these strategies by the Grupos, particularly the use of ephemeral interventions into public space. But the context in which Cuevas created his first ephemeral mural for the Hartos and the context of 1967 Mexico City were dramatically different. Cuevas, Jodorowsky, and Goeritz were all key players in the development of what Cuevas dubbed, the Zona Rosa (Pink Zone) neighborhood, because it had become a hot bed for experimental artistic activities thought since the days of the The Zona Rosa, which is discussed in the following chapter in greater detail, eventually turned into the hub for both the Mexican counterculture and *jipismo* (hippie-ism) throughout the 1960s. The neighborhood hosted an unusual mix of intellectuals, writers, artists, young local and North American hippies, street vendors, commercial businesses, cafes, rock clubs, as well as art galleries. Figures like Goeritz, Cuevas, Jodorowsky, the writer Carlos Monsiváis, and many others contributed to this burgeoning bohemian scene.

Eric Zolov describes this haven of radical thought as a cosmopolitan but ultimately touristic center of Mexican counterculture aimed at expressing an “avant-garde aesthetic”, one that would present a modern, progressive, and liberated image of Mexico abroad, but the reality
was far from this utopian vision. Medina has justifiably argued that while there were countercultural and hippie movements taking place internationally, and while the U.S.’s co-optation of Mexico as a “receptacle” for utopian living undoubtedly shaped the Mexican version jipismo, the Mexican counter-culture was unique in many ways and not just an emulation, it was a subtle mixing of local and international trends, much like the art scene. Whether artists working in the Zona Rosa exhibited overt stylistic affinities associated with the counterculture or not, the social movement would begin to foster a more aggressive attitude among artists struggling to find their own voice as 1968 approached.

Cuevas and Gómez-Sicre’s solution to the problem of the Mexican School in 1955 was simple: "...it is the true, universal Mexico, open to the whole world without losing its own essential characteristics." But by 1967, the term "ephemeral”, though most strongly associated with Jodorowsky, had been firmly absorbed into the art world vocabulary of Mexico and rising tensions between the government and the people pushed Cuevas to expand his attack against a culturally repressive climate. In this year, Cuevas executed another much larger and much more politically charged ephemeral mural, Mural efímero No.1 (Ephemeral Mural No. 1). For this action, Cuevas rented out a billboard space, for which, along with a team of hired, commercial sign painters, he would create a temporary “mural.” (Fig. 25-26) An extension of his earlier project with “los Hartos”, Cuevas again directly attacks muralism, but now he will also implicate Mexican society’s relationship to mass media by introducing an aspect of spectacle to the work.

141 Zolov, 111.
143 The critique of consumerism (specifically in Mexico) was also of great importance in the work of No-Grupo and less obviously in Proceso Pentágono, as they often turned towards mass media outlets as the
In an interview, Cuevas explained that the context that precipitated the execution of a second ephemeral mural was the inauguration of muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros’s *Poliforum Siqueiros*, a fully integrated monument to plastic experimentation, and his desire to poke fun at artists that took themselves seriously.\(^{144}\) However, he was also inspired after having watched the 1950 Judy Holliday film, *It Should Happen to You*, while he was in New York for his solo exhibition *The World of José Luis Cuevas*.\(^{145}\) A story of a naïve, aspiring actress who rents a billboard on Columbus Circle to advertise her own name in the hopes of becoming a star.\(^{146}\) Inspired by this amusing intervention into pubic space, Cuevas initially attempted to create his own mural in Times Square, but due to the overwhelming cost and demand for space, the artist settled on the center of Mexican consumer culture, the Zona Rosa.

Cuevas self-financed the rental of the billboard space located at the intersection of Londres and Genova streets in the Zona Rosa and hired housepainters to create the majority of the work.\(^ {147}\) (Fig.27) The mural took him one week to complete and was scheduled to remain installed for one month and then be destroyed, though he did offer to sell the work for an

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\(^{144}\) Cherem, 106 and opening commentary from the news piece: Accessed March 5, 2013. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-vcEB38b98](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-vcEB38b98).


It should be noted here that in this interview, Cuevas mistakenly remembered the title of the film as *Born Yesterday* and this has erroneously been repeated since. See: ibid.

\(^{146}\) Ibid.

\(^{147}\) “I united various spectacles to form a 24 meter painting like Picasso’s “Guernica” and I instructed a house painter that he was going to be the one to paint. The muralists live on, like a provocation.” “…uní varios espectaculos para formar un cuadro de 24 metros como el ‘Guernica’ de Picasso y dirigí a un pintor de brocha gorda para que él fuera quien pintara…Los muralistas lo vivieron como una provocación.”, see Cherem, interview with Cuevas, 106.
exhorbitant $20,000.\textsuperscript{148} Exchanging the grand walls of the Palacio Nacional, the San Idelfonso, or any government institution with the commercial billboard, Cuevas effectively revealed the complex relationship of muralism to the institution and his ideas stood in direct contrast to the government’s parallel attempts to sell muralism as Mexico’s contribution to Modernism.\textsuperscript{149} But, his inspiration drawn from Hollywood movies, speaks to larger issues regarding the growth of consumer culture in Mexico and the Zona Rosa as the most visible site for fashionable and young Mexicans to circulate.

The unveiling, which in many ways serves as the true art piece, occurred on the 8\textsuperscript{th} of June, 1967. A short news piece, directed by Manuel Barbachano Ponce, documented the unveiling and demonstrates Cuevas's adept manipulation of mass media and his obsession with his own cult of personality — in reaction to and ironically, standing in line with the muralists— which warrants a detailed discussion here. The film depicts large groups of young, fashionably dressed Mexicans gathering to witness the artist’s spectacle.\textsuperscript{150} Against a soundtrack of rock music, the camera pans across a large group of young faces in wayfarer sunglasses, mod suits and mini skirts at the Zona Rosa street corner under broad daylight. As sunset approaches, the crowd thickens as do the number of cars, photographers, and other neighborhood passersby contribute to a still growing audience. Yet the crowd is not comprised of the jipis so often associated with the Zona Rosa during the 1960s; rather the crowd is decidedly cosmopolitan in appearance, a testament to Cuevas’s own desire to internationalize the closed-off Mexican

\textsuperscript{148} Coffey, 74.

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.

This documentary footage describes the event as both a “generational act” and “a sign of the times,” language that echoes characterizations of Mexican youth culture and the rebellious spirit of the Zona Rosa. The footage reveals the staged nature of the event as the scenes depicted appear more like a movie premier than an art opening. Once darkness set in, the camera shows Cuevas taking the stage before his ephemeral mural and standing high above the crowd. Dressed in a hip dark sport coat and skinny tie, the camera bulbs flash over the artist’s grinning face as he presents his public with a new work. By his side is a fashionable young woman, donning a leather miniskirt, paired with a sweatshirt featuring a portrait of the artist and his signature.

Behind him is the mural: the top register of the billboard features Cuevas’s own overblown signature and an image of a football player “signifying aggression,” as Mary Coffey has noted. The inclusion of this image suggests the influx of U.S. products and fashions into Mexico, metaphorically ushered in by one of the country’s most beloved sports. But this is contrasted with political imagery. In a more typical Ruptura fashion, the bottom register of the “mural” contains images of victims of nuclear war, positioning them in a manner recalling the great existential criticism of the Spanish Civil War, Picasso’s Guernica, serving as a reinforcement of the artist’s contention that the mural was meant to critique those artists that

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151 The impact of the hippie invasion and the growth of underground rock music are discussed in the following chapter as it relates to non-objectual artistic practice leading up to and during 1968.


153 Coffey, 73.
“took themselves too seriously” or had lofty socio-political goals for their work.154 But upon closer analysis, what dominates the mural is Cuevas himself. As was frequent in the entire trajectory of his work, he includes a self-portrait as artist, which slightly overlaps with his gigantic canvas, which dominates the composition.

In her analysis of the 1967 ephemeral mural, Mary Coffey contends that this project “best embodies” the 1960s Mexican art world’s collective, “[doing] away with even the rhetorical commitment to engaging with the public or fostering collective change” in favor of explorations of personal style and investigations into existentialism.155 But why does Cuevas then utilize the mural format in conjunction with imagery and the opening spectacle that essentially promoted himself? Is Cuevas critiquing the artist-celebrity and the artist activist by embodying an exaggerated characterization of these identites? Or is he shunning the conception of the artist-genius, in a manner akin to Warhol and other Pop artists, as critique of the aura of the art object and the commercialization of the art world?

One answer may be found in the fact that Cuevas did not physically create much of this mural nor did he provide concrete evidence of his hired worker-collaborators beyond the photographs by Hector García for Look Magazine demonstrating his oversight of their progress.156 This lack of acknowledgement points to Cuevas’s at times uncomfortable and complicated relationship to the changing cultural landscape and to his own need for individual recognition which often overshadowed his artistic innovations. We might account for Cuevas’s

154 Coffey, 73.
It is reasonable to assume that Cuevas also intentionally inserts reference to the grand master of Western Modernism, Picasso, which is particularly compelling given Diego Rivera’s connections to the artist.

155 Ibid.

156 García, “New Artistic Strategies: the Case of José Luis Cuevas and His Mural efímero,” in Desafio a la estabilidad, 513.
use of the ephemeral format as a means of combating the monumentality of muralism, a literal toppling of the revolutionary goals of the movement. But I would argue that the evocation of the ephemeral also speaks directly to his engagement with experimental artists that preceeded him and the power that interventions had redefine public art and public space.

It is significant to reiterate here Cuevas’s willingness to obfuscate the contributions of other artists or collaborators, such as was the case for “his” seminal article “The Cactus Curtain,” which was ghostwritten by Gómez-Sicre. I would also argue that this might account for his desire to approximate himself with the circles of Goertiz, Jodorowsky, and Gurrola, while retaining his individuality, such as was the case in his participation with los Hartos and his illustrations for Jodorowsky’s *Teatro pánico*. I would argue, as Pilar García has begun to, that Cuevas’s accelerated use of the ephemeral, and of the art intervention in particular, was primarily spurred not just as a stand against muralists, but as an extension of his circulation in the cultural landscape of the Zona Rosa. Given the earlier projects of Goeritz, Jodorowsky, and Gurrola, he clearly observed that the intervention format was understood as scandalous and spectacular and therefore capable of catapulting him to cult-figure status.

Whether it was intentional or accidental, the *Mural efímero* conflated these issues of consumerism, celebrity, and muralism in order to address larger (and local) socio-political concerns by utilizing the ephemeral. Coffey has described how the mural “…anticipat[es] the

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157 See chapter one of this dissertation.

158 Pilar García has recently pointed to connections to the improvisational nature of Jodorowsky’s ephemerals and to Cuevas’s desire to participate in Gurrola’s “Dom Art” movement, which bears comparisons to Nouveau Realisme and Pop Art, see: “New Artistic Strategies…”, 513.

159 García’s excellent analysis begins to point to the significance of the ephemeral and connections to preceding projects, but does not consider the artist’s repeated use of the format (with the Hartos in 1961 and again in 1968 as part of a collective mural on the UNAM campus which is discussed in the following chapter.
reconceptualization of citizenship that would take place in the 1990s…” as the artist “…conceived of his public as consumers.” But this was not solely a critique of capitalist consumerism targeted at the invasion of foreign commodities and advertising culture and the local hunger for it. Rather, Cuevas (perhaps inadvertently) also calls into question the packaging and sale of information by the Mexican government who were positioning and exploiting the visual arts for purposes of propaganda, which the PRI was particularly adept at accomplishing.

With the action Mural efímero No.1, Cuevas successfully collapses public/institutional space; the artist in studio vs. the artist as mythic figure (a path already tread by Jodorowsky years earlier) and questions the social and monetary value of muralism and its associated celebrity. As No-Grupo member Maris Bustamante has explained, actions like the ephemeral mural and Cuevas’s love for manipulating mass media, led him to become, “perhaps the only visual artist who attained popularity typical of movie actors, boxers, and famous TV characters.” What was so significant about the Mural efímero was precisely that it "[framed] the Zona Rosa as a geographical space where artists and writers could circulate…” an natural extension of his "…conceptual determination The Cactus Curtain (La Cortina Nopal)…”

Though the ephemeral mural might not have presented an ideological “third way” in the manner of Goeritz and Jodorowsky before him, Cuevas was “deliberately nihilistic, with the

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160 Coffey, 73-74.

161 Bustamante, “Conditions, Roads and Genealogies”, 140. This manipulation of celebrity, like Jodorowsky, appears as a point of reference in No-Grupo, as is demonstrated in chapter four of this dissertation. In 1979, No-Grupo created a multifaceted project in conjunction with a solo-exhibition/homage to Cuevas at the Museo de Arte Moderno entitled, Return of the Prodigal Son. Cuevas’s continued use of mass media outlets as a stage for his artistic actions was of particular significance for No-Grupo as is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

162 Ibid.
destruction of the object, a literal emblem of his desire to kill Mexican muralism.” 163 And while his criticism or desire to obliterate muralism is contradictory in that he appears to blur the lines intentionally between individual/collective and monumental/ephemeral, this project demonstrates a reverberation of theories put forth by Goertiz and Jodorowsky. Their critical approaches to the redefinition or even the destruction of the art object and its systems of circulation now entered into the dialogue with imported consumerism and the growing taste for U.S. popular culture. Though Cuevas never abandoned painting or drawing, he shut the door on the arguments that had preoccupied the Ruptura and its associated movements with his entry into the arena of art intervention. And it was not a painting by Cuevas, but rather the destruction and negation of the art object (the mural), that solidifies his position as a harbinger of conceptual art and serves as a viable trajectory for exploring the relationship between art, public, and institutions, all themes that were of increasing concern to artists as the political landscape dramatically shifted as 1968 approached.

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163 Coffey, 74.
Chapter 2:

BEYOND THE MOVIMIENTO: COUNTERCULTURES AND CONCEPTUALISMS INSIDE (AND OUTSIDE) MEXICO, 1968-1971

The global and local movement towards democratic values in 1968, which was met with widespread resistance, suppression, and violence, undoubtedly served as a major catalyst for the birth of the Grupos and the accelerated turn towards socially-engaged art after the Tlatelolco Massacre. Though this would seem a natural conclusion given the reduction of material and financial resources for artists and the repression of democratic freedoms at the hands of PRI president Gustavo Díaz Ordáz (1964-1970), it is nonetheless an oversimplification of the cultural wars that began long before 1968.

As was suggested in the introduction of this project, the standing narrative surrounding Mexican conceptualism suggests a cause and effect model, treating all radical artistic strategies of the 1970s as an extension of the specific socio-political rupture in 1968. There has been an erasure of the strong connections between conceptual projects and artist groups of the late 1960s and the Grupos after Tlatelolco. For example, the seminal and frequently referenced catalogue *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origen, 1950s-1980s* declares that, “since the 1920s, the identification and subsequent institutionalization of the legacy of Mexican muralism with the state, significantly stifled the emergence of experimental artistic production until well into the 1970s.” Ramírez cites a 1980 article by Mexican art historian Rita Eder as supporting evidence that in Mexico there was a “retardataire logic on artistic developments” and that the “late appearance of abstraction” and a long dependency on muralism (either in the form of alliance or detraction) ultimately “delayed the emergence of alternate forms of artistic production” until the
arrival of the Grupos.\textsuperscript{1} Despite the presence of a remarkably strong and internationally diverse counterculture in Mexico since the late 1950s, no mention is made of its impact on Mexican artists’s use of conceptual strategies.

This chapter challenges this narrative and looks beyond the student and workers movement in 1968 to question how and why the use of conceptualisms and interventions became more prevalent around this time. What were the forces outside of daily political reality that shaped and influenced artists in and around 1968? What connections might be discovered between artists responsible for watershed events such as the Salón Independiente and the emergence of the Grupos in the following decade? And what impact did stylistic developments such as geometrismo and kinetic art have on artists of the 1970s?

There was no sudden explosion of artist groups and collectives forced by the events of 1968, but a successful continuation of art interventions and institutional critique. These developments were fostered through a shared understanding that the very institutions they fought could become a viable platform for exposing their frequent hypocrisies and corruption. This could also serve as a mirror for Mexican society’s growing distrust of systems of communication and the information they provided. As will be demonstrated here, the progenitors discussed in the previous chapter had already set the precedent for utilizing ephemeral interventions as a form of


It is necessary to note the somewhat derogatory language used here to describe Mexico’s role in the history of conceptualism. Ramírez repeats the notion that other countries, particularly Brazil and Argentina, experienced an earlier, more “avant-garde” and “international” art scene, while Mexico was locked in local battles over the merits of figuration and their supposedly “late” abstraction. Ramírez also fails to clarify how Mexico demonstrated a “retardataire logique” when the Southern Cone examples she provides took place concurrently or sometimes even earlier than Argentine cases such as Roberto Jacoby and Tucuman Arde (1968). They celebrated for their developments in illuminating the political and social value of art, but Mexican counterparts such as Goeritz, Jodorowsky or the Salón Independiente are never mentioned, despite their direct impact on the arrival of the Grupos. the Mexican case.
critiquing systems from within while either avoiding or utilizing the harsh censorship that began to envelope cultural production of this period.

To begin to broaden our understanding, this chapter contextualizes the continuing development of intervention and institutional critique leading up to the events of 1968 and its aftermath, by highlighting the significance of several satellite forces (both rooted in the concept of the “anti-institutional”) that also shaped this trajectory: the development of the counterculture, the growing debates and discontent amongst art students within their academies, the institutional domination over salons and biennials, and the growth of international art circles inside and outside of Mexico.

The first force is the continued search by artists for an international dialogue and exposure to, particularly, the European neo-avant-garde, just as Goeritz, Jodorowsky, and the members of the so-called Ruptura had already spawned. The cultural revolution of the 1960s, which also fueled the momentum of the student and workers movement, equally influenced and supported artists invested in subverting the culture systems from the inside. As will be explored in this chapter, the significance of Zona Rosa, the neighborhood that had already supported the “bohemian” scene inhabited by Cuevas, Goeritz, Jodorowsky and others, would only increase as the jipi movement gained steam and repression became a daily reality for many.

The second, the formation of the Salón Independiente (SI) in 1968, was a significant step in testing the boundaries of Mexico’s cultural institutions and educational system particularly through their employment of the anti-exhibition or “non-exhibition” strategy, one that would be repeatedly employed by the Grupos. Moreover, the SI challenged the provincialism that is often

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2 Roddy Hunter and Judit Bodor have pointed to curator Richard Demarco’s use of the term “non-exhibition” in his essay for a 1970 exhibition he curated at Edinburgh College of Art, *Strategy: Get Arts*, noting the premise that the artists should respond to the university art gallery as “an art object in itself.” Hunter and Bodor identify strategy as a “Beuysian” approach to pedagogy. See: Hunter and Bodor, “The
associated with Mexican art of this period by actively encouraging international connections and fostering the adoption of “foreign” artistic practices. The chapter concludes with an investigation into the early interventions of one SI member and countercultural figure, Felipe Ehrenberg, who moved to England in 1968 and would become a linchpin in the development of the Grupos and conceptualisms in Mexico.

THE MEXICAN COUNTERCULTURE AND JIPISMO

To begin to understand why conceptualisms, particularly ephemeral interventions, became increasingly anti-institutional and underground requires an in-depth inquiry into under-recognized but crucial cultural and artistic events leading up to the fury of 1968. Over the course of the 1960s, Mexico experienced a widespread youth movement spurring the creation or the sense of “instant utopias” analogous to this type of phenomenon in San Francisco or New York. Yet few past attempts at contextualizing the Grupos have acknowledged the impact of the countercultural movement and the invasion from Mexico’s neighbor to the North of hippie sensibilities, rock music, and Beatnik writers despite their importance within the larger culture wars of the period.

The progressive center of the Zona Rosa was not only home to the bohemian circles of Cuevas and others, as described in the previous chapter, but it also embraced and supported

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4 While they will not be discussed in detail here, a fascinating range of artists and writers lived and worked in Mexico City during the late 1950’s into the 1960s from William S. Burroughs to Bruce Conner.
jipismo and la onda, the utopian playground of supporters such as Carlos Monsiváis and José Agustin. But influences from the North, as described in the previous chapter, made the cultural scene’s relationship to local conditions complicated. Zolov has explained that,

Transnationalism introduced the possibility of selecting among multiple reference points in the reconstruction of one’s national as well as individual identity. In this way, transnationalism becomes intimately linked with postmodern identity-formation strategies and the forging of a popular nationalism from below.\(^5\)

The countercultural and underground movements embodied and made visible the breakdown of traditional Mexican values; many of the same participants of the Student Movement also strongly affiliated with jipismo (“hippie-ism”), a movement that was as affected by the local condition as it by the influence (and influx) of North American hippies arriving in Mexico.

Beginning in February 1968, government forces called the judiciales began to systematically “clean up” Mexico City by targeting jipis and other countercultural forces, particularly foreign, U.S.-bred hippies finding their utopian Eden in the more affordable country south of the border. The influx of North American hippies brought forth a mixing of avant-garde imports and local, often indigenous, traditions. In an ironic turn, as Zolov notes, the mestizo youth of Mexico were copying gringo hippies who were already copying the indigenous clothing, accessories, lifestyles, and more significantly, some indigenous groups’ use of hallucinogenic drugs in the countryside of the capital.\(^6\) Despite the confounded origins of the Mexican jipismo, Zolov notes the extraordinary power hippie culture (and their rock music in particular) had on “opening a psychic space for dissent among Mexican youth”, one that directly


\(^6\) Zolov, 110.
confronted and rejected the strong hand of Mexican Nationalism as defined since the Revolutionary period.  

The perceived importation of the Mexican counterculture from the U.S. was reinforced by the explosion of English language rock and roll, shielded against the general acceptance that Mexican youth had their own struggles and concerns and out of their discontent with a repressive social structure and a government that was fighting hard to maintain a international face of democracy and free-society, despite a very different experience felt by Mexico City residents. Zolov has summarized:

As Charles de Gaulle had famously discounted the possibility of student unrest in France, so too did Díaz Ordáz reject the likelihood of protests in Mexico, even as capital cities around the world began to feel the reverberations of the Paris uprisings and the ‘Prague Spring.’

In reaction to a push by many art curators and critics and under pressures to present a cohesive national culture at the impending Olympic games, abstraction, and particularly Geometrism, became a central focus for institutional programming in the last half of the 1960s despite the proclivity for more experimental modes among many established artist of the Ruptura.

Cuauhtémoc Medina has hinted at the complex relationship between radical art and the counterculture at this time:

…Some facts make Mexico’s counterculture a phenomenon with something more than just ‘local color’. Above all, it was not a simple case of immediate and indiscriminate appropriation of the ‘new wave’ from developed countries, a view held by left-wing writers, including Carlos Monsiváis, with respect to rock and roll as well as other forms of underground culture.

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7 Zolov, 111.
8 Ibid., 119.
9 Medina, “Recovering Panic,” 139. Monsivais, along with experimental writers and poets such as José Agustin, championed the style and literary movement known as la Onda.
Medina’s re-introduction of the *local* into this discussion serves to disrupt conventional understandings that Mexico merely served as the “exotic other” of the United States, rather than considering local developments for their own merit. And as will become clearer throughout this chapter, there was no singular Mexican counterculture.

Under the administration of López Mateos (1958-1964), the PRI instituted unprecedented measures to crackdown on the average Mexican citizen’s freedom of expression and frequently targeted the growing youth culture and emblems of this movement (including the Zona Rosa itself) as had been proved with the censorship of Jodorowsky’s projects, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Historian Eric Zolov has expertly chronicled how widespread censorship was incited by the growth and popularity of underground rock music clubs in the Zona Rosa and their promotion of English-language rock songs in particular, leading to raids and a police repression.¹⁰

Despite government and societal suppression of the development of a counter-culture or hippie movement in Mexico, there was an undeniable movement towards the agitation and disruption of traditional sexual roles, sexuality, styles of dress, and overall lifestyle.¹¹ Zolov has emphasized a “nationalist gesture” among the youth cultures in and around 1968, explaining that “through the influence of transnational images, music, and actors Mexican youth came to challenge a totalizing discourse of national identity, one that stressed the stasis of an indigenous present and the ‘correctness’ of patriarchally defined hierarchies”, a postmodernist critique of

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¹¹ Ibid.
modern society. While Zolov has successfully proven this through his analysis of the ways in which rock music was created and distributed in Mexico, the challenges presented by these “patriarchially defined hierarchies” were, of course, uniquely felt in the realm of the visual arts and their connections to the Rock music scene were more visible than previously understood.

Though Ruptura artists often benefitted from institutional support and enjoyed priority among their selections for group and individual exhibitions in reality, they continued their artistic experimental trajectories, working together and continuing to produce projects. Moreover the “grupo pánico,” or those artists that worked closely with Jodorowsky, while having visual and conceptual associations with jipismo and the psychedelic, their roots and reasons for exploring these paths was in reality disconnected from U.S. counterparts, despite sharing the Zona Rosa as a space for experimentation. The rejection of traditional moral values and celebration of breaking boundaries had already been given voice by Jodorowsky and others through his Panic movement, and particularly the ephemeral performances, as described in the previous chapter. But the contributions made by Jodorowsky and those more radical Ruptura artists have been subsumed by the events of 1968 and by the linear narrative that denies the existence of conceptualisms before that year. Moreover, these artists had already experienced acts of censorship against their works, such as the staging of La Ópera del orden in 1962.

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12 Zolov, 139, 140.

13 Despite feeling compelled to connect with fellow artists internationally, many artists remained skeptical of influences from the United States (Felipe Ehrenberg has noted his distaste for rock music, particularly covers and reinterpretations of British and U.S. standards by Mexican bands) despite the strong ideological and aesthetic connections, not only in the anti-establishment nature of the musical counterparts, but also in their shared use of public and institutional spaces from within the system.
The “Mexican Counterculture” was also shaped by the earlier presence of figures from U.S. Beat culture who found in Mexico the Surrealist wonderland they had been in search of. In a journal article from 1966, Stefan Baciu attempts to identify early “centers” of Beat or counterculture impulses in Latin America, amongst which he includes Mexico.\(^\text{14}\) Though his discussion understandably is limited to literary circles associated with these movements and not visual artists, he identifies the significance of the journal *El Corno emplumado (The Plumed Horn)* headed by American poet and writer Margaret Randall alongside Mexican poet Sergio Mondragón.\(^\text{15}\) More significantly he notes that cultural figures associated with the publication viewed it as “[the] axis between Mexico and Buenos Aires” and further suggests that the Mexican journal coupled with its Argentine counterpart, *Eco contémporaneo* (1960-69), “…demonstrates that the two publications can be taken as starting points in this [Beat] movement.”\(^\text{16}\)

Significant to this discussion is the fact that *El Corno emplumado* was one of the earliest journals to support the writings by visual artists associated with the Beat movement and eventually those that became closely associated with the “underground” artists groups post-1968. The bilingual magazine often featured illustrations and contributions from visual artists alongside poetry by writers such as Allen Ginsberg, Jerome Rothenberg, José Agustín, and

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\(^{16}\) Baciu, 737.
Octavio Paz. 17 The Plumed Horn as a publication illustrated perfectly the complexity of the Mexican counterculture as it “join[ed] together the mystical worldliness of the Beats, the seduction of the Cuban Revolution, and Buddhism.”18

Coupled with poetry that addressed many countercultural themes of revolution, utopia, and a drive towards experimentation were also their publishing of anthropological, sociopolitical, and theoretical texts on themes such as the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. The magazine was an early attempt to find international lines of communication and was primarily focused on expanding the field of poetry (geographically and otherwise) including contributors and subscribers across the globe, from New York, Cuba and Peru to Spain and Australia.19 It also accepted any and all kinds of submissions from artists to publish illustrative materials in its issues and were selected by Randall herself.20 The artists included in their pages ranged from Felipe Ehrenberg, Juan Soriano, Elaine de Kooning, and Rini Templeton, to an entire issue dedicated to Finish artists. Leandro Katz, Vicente Rojo, Cecilia Vicuña also collaborated with visuals for the journal. At its core was the reworking of not only poetry, but also the relationships between texts, prose, graphics, and art and their implied social reception.

The publication ended in 1969, after thirty one issues, when Randall fled Mexico as the government had come down on the publication for defending the students in 1968 and calling for

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18 Baciu, 737.


20 In a recent talk, Randall also lamented having rejected a submission of drawings sent by Muhammad Ali, (Primer Seminario de Investigación y Curaduría: Tecnología, medios audiovisuales y experimentación artística, Centro de la Imagen, Mexico City, March 2015).
a complete overhaul of Mexican society in the wake of the Massacre. Despite its demise, *The Plummed Horn* was perhaps the most influential publication of the 1960s as it served as one of the only forums for dissenting voices in Mexico while providing a dialogue with allies in similar political situations in other countries.

**JODOROWSKY AND THE INTERNATIONAL COUNTERCULTURE**

Beginning in 1966 and until 1972 Jodorowsky published a weekly comic strip called *Fábulas pánicas* (Panic fables) upon the invitation of editor Luis Spota at the *El Heraldo de México*, one of Mexico’s widely read newspapers. (Fig. 28) While Jodorowsky’s early ephemeral actions intentionally left behind little visual record, the comic strip serves as an illustration of the spiritual restlessness prevalent in those years, which the artist had helped to bring about with is earlier actions. Using a Pop-like, psychedelic aesthetic often touched by the influence of Science Fiction, the “fables” offer a more didactic picture of contemporary Mexican culture than the ephemerals aimed for, while serving as a kind of print intervention into mainstream media outlets, an increasingly viable form of circumventing the system. In one example from February of 1969, a cast of Mexican citizens drawn in a style reminiscent of *The Yellow Submarine* has been assembled haphazardly with speech bubbles radiating from their heads. A heavyset woman proclaims, “How awful it is to be young”; a younger, well-dressed man states, “I hate intellectuals because they don’t bathe”; a finely dressed young woman pronounces, “They help the orphans, but torture their children”; a bearded young man proclaims, “There is no art other than mine.”21 The “punch line”, though not particularly humorous, comes with the figures in the foreground. A young boy, presumably absorbing this overview of society,

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21 “Que feo es ser joven”; “Odio a los intellectuals porque no se bañan”; “No hay mas arte que el mio”; and “No hay mas arte que el mio”.
asks his father (who looks suspiciously like Jodorowsky), “Dad, when does humanity reach maturity?” to which he responds, “When they learn to accept and love the values of others.”

This example not only speaks to Jodorowsky’s observations on bourgeois society, but also his interest in Zen Buddhism and the role of *koans* in modern society, as was discussed in the previous chapter. After all, the endgame for much of Jodorowsky’s work is the *transformation* of society through the healing of the conscious. This, coupled with his psychedelic, acid-tinged aesthetic have facilitated his adoption under the rubric of countercultural cult figure, despite his distancing from the U.S. invasion of hippies from the north who were seeking precisely this type of utopia, but without understanding the very local Mexican context in which these ideas were rooted.

The *Fábulas pánicas* were joined the following year by an equally significant contribution made by the Colombian artist and science fiction writer, René Rebetez, and featuring collaborations with Jodorowsky, Luis Urias, and Felipe Ehrenberg. Upon the invitation of Luis Soto, Rebetz created the *Psicograma*, a melding of illustrations, collage, and text that took advantage of the newspaper’s cutting edge printers that allowed for color separation. (Fig. 29) While technological experimentation was certainly significant, it was with these works that opportunities for intervening into mainstream media sources, unlike independent alternative journals and magazines, became a viable means of bucking the system. While the comics

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22 “Papá, ¿Cuando llega un ser a la madurez humana?”; “Cuando aprende a aceptar y amar los valores de otro”.

23 Artist Luis Urias (also a collaborator of Jodorowsky) aided in the invention of the *psicograma*, see: “Psicogramas,” *La era de la discrepancias*, 107.

24 The importance of artist books, journals, magazines, and comics cannot be overstated with respect to conceptualism and its distribution in Mexico. See: Susanna Gilbert, “Transgressive Networks: Mail Art, Circulation, and Communication In and Out of Latin America” (PhD diss., University of Essex, 2013)
provided one type of outlet for Jodorowsky and others to slip subversive ideas into the mainstream dialogue, Jodorowsky would soon lead the charge to turn this into full-scale spectacle in the arguably more influential medium of television. Like Cuevas and his staging of the ephemeral mural in the Zona Rosa, Jodorowsky too would find means of taking his celebrity status to extremes.

The same year as Cuevas’s mural, in 1967, Jodorowsky staged one of his most controversial actions on live Mexican television in what Medina has described as a culmination of the efímeros pánicos.\(^{25}\) This action also set the stage for later artistic interventions carried out on television. In April, Jodorowsky was scheduled to appear on a talk show hosted by Juan López Moctezuma, a friend, collaborator, and fellow filmmaker.\(^{26}\) Jodorowsky, accompanied by a rock band during the broadcast, proceeded to take a sledgehammer to the piano, destroying the instrument.\(^{27}\) (Fig. 30)

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\(^{25}\) Cuauhtémoc Medina, “Recovering Panic,” in *La era de la discrepancia*, 99. Also in 1967, Jodorowsky collaborated with Juan José Gurrola to produce *Frailes déjà vu*, an *efímero teatral pánico* (theatrical panic ephemeral) in Bogota, Colombia. In what could be classified within the growing tradition of artists walks, Gurrola and Jodorowsky dressed as monks and led a procession from the Hotel Tequendama while singing psalms and as people followed, they [caused a traffic jam]. “En 1967 hizo un paseo junto con Jodorowsky caminando hasta el Hotel Tequendama, vestidos de frailes y cantando salmos, a las pocas cuadras las gentes los seguían descuadrando la circulación.” See: Josefina Alcázar and Fernando Fuentes, *Performance y arte-acción en América Latina*, (Mexico City: CITRU, Ex-Teresa, and Ediciones Sin Nombre, 2005), 150.

This collaboration also speaks to the increasingly strong ties between Colombia and Mexico that would culminate in the watershed 1980 Coloquio No-Objectual at the Museo de Arte Moderno Medellín and organized by Juan Acha, see: chapter four of this dissertation.

\(^{26}\) Juan López Moctezuma (b. Mexico, 1932-1995) was producer for Jodorowsky’s *Fando y Lis* and *El Topo* (1970). He became known as a cult filmmaker in his own right, particularly for his horror films *The Mansion of Madness* (1972) and *Alucarda* (1975). Pánico Productions also included Moisés and Samuel Rosenberg, Roberto Viskin.

\(^{27}\) “Otro efímero destacado se llevó a cabo en 1967 cuando Jodorowsky acompañado por un grupo de rock rompió un piano en un programa de televisión, acción que fue vista por miles de espectadores, Angelica
While Jodorowsky may or may not have been the first artist to perform a piano smashing (indeed officially it was George Maciunas first with the Fluxists in 1962 and the then the first by a North American by New York-Puerto Rican artist Rafael Montañéz Ortiz at the 1966 DIAS Symposium held in London). (Fig. 31) While it is beyond the scope of this project to discuss in detail, the similarities between Jodorowsky’s Panic theory and Gustav Metzger and DIAS artists’ Destructive Art are striking and merit further attention, though direct links between these artists remain unclear.

Nonetheless, curator and art historian Kristine Stiles has explained that:

Affirming art and artists as a cultural force able to shape social and political life, DIAS artists stressed the centrality of art in producing new forms of knowledge, perception, and insight in life. This is not to say that they transformed art into life. Rather, destruction in art introduced destructive processes into artistic vocabulary in order to collapse means, subject matter, and affect into a unified expression for the purpose of commenting directly on destruction in life.

Panic, and actions such as the piano destruction, certainly worked to expose and collapse boundaries between art and life, but within the context of Mexico and Jodorowsky’s own artistic trajectory, his piano destruction would have also implied a goal of providing an opportunity for spiritual healing, not just as critique and commentary of daily existence. Moreover, if we


28 It is important to re-iterate here, that Jodorowsky and the participants of the San Carlos panic ephemeral also destroyed a piano (including dousing it in alchohol and lighting it on fire) as was mentioned in Chapter One of this dissertation. Montañéz Ortiz also performed a ritual killing of a chicken in reference to his Yaqui Indian background and it was documented by an independent news station at the time, see Kristine Stiles, “The Story of Destruction in Art Symposium and the ‘DIAS affect’,” in Sabine Breitwieser, ed., Gustav Metzger. Geschichte Geschichte (Vienna and Ostfildern-Ruit: Generali Foundation and Hatje Cantz Verlag), 47. As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, Jodorowsky had already introduced the sacrificing of live animals (ritual) into the Panic ephemerals as early as the San Carlos action in 1964.


30 Stiles, 42.
consider the piano smashing in tandem with the Panic fables and Jodorowsky’s connection to Surrealism (particularly through his films), the aspect of destruction is tied more to notions of spectacle and audience/artist relationships.\(^{31}\) Like Cuevas’s ephemeral mural in the Zona Rosa, Jodorowski’s piano destruction signaled a new concern for challenging media outlets outside of the immediate art world. The level of spectacle had necessarily been elevated to call attention the increasing social repression and in a context far different than 1960s London.

Towards the end of López Mateos’s presidency in 1960, Mexican Congress passed the Federal Law of Radio and Television. Among other rules set to ensure the PRI’s control of mass media and society’s access to such means, the law states that media outlets must “contribute to the cultural elevation of the population and to conserve its national characteristics, customs, and traditions, the propriety of language, and to exalt the values of Mexican nationality,” essentially everything Jodorowsky and others of his generation sought to destroy.\(^{32}\) The latter half of this law as has been highlighted by Zolov, concerns the evolution of language within the context of repression and censorship; this regulation was, according to Zolov, put into play in response to the supposed youth uprisings caused by rock n’ roll music. As he explains, “Not only were cultural and grammatical transgressions proscribed, but, significantly, so too were defamations of public heroes and, …of religious beliefs.”\(^{33}\) But as Zolov has also poignantly suggested, “The real impact of the legislation was that it exerted pressures toward self-censorship,” a fact that undoubtedly drew students and artist alike to begin to furiously react or retreat into the safety of their socially normative families. Jodorowsky’s destructive action merely created a spectacle to

\(^{31}\) Jodorowsky also performs a piano destruction in his film *The Holy Mountain* where he creates music by hitting the piano with a chamber pot.

\(^{32}\) Zolov, 59.

\(^{33}\) Ibid.
call attention and indeed celebrate their transgressions of societal norms. Much like one of the key scenes from the film *Fando y Lis*, in which a group of slow dancing young “hipsters” participate as spectators of a piano set ablaze before a backdrop of what appear to be architectural ruins suggesting that through the destruction, through the panic, a new order might be created.

The worlds of rock music, the cultural movement *La Onda*, and experimental art would again collide for Jodorowsky in 1968 when he inherited the role of writer and director for the television show *¡1, 2, 3, 4, 5 a Go-Go!* A weekly live program produced by Telesistema that fused rock music with panic ephemeral-style productions, we see the conflation of the Jodorowsky’s Panic theory with the local countercultural youth movements, an intersection that has rarely been discussed elsewhere. (Fig.32) While there is little to no documentation of these live television happenings, they incited an excitement amongst some Mexican audiences eager to participate in the chaotic representation of the culture clashes of the time. Eric Zolov points to a quote from one witness that describes the event:

> Los Dug Dugs explode with Magical Mystery Tour, and we start to paint without any idea of what’s going on…At the guitarists’ feet and wearing a tambourine for a halo, some dude is paying the flute while simultaneously beating a pre-Hispanic drum…Next Thursday at 7p.m. on Channel 5 maybe we’ll again enter the electronic, ephemeral, panicked euphoria.

Programs such *¡1, 2, 3, 4, 5 a Go-Go!* and the piano smashing demonstrate not only that visual artists were actively engaging the counterculture in Mexico, they were also

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34 With respect to the sometimes intertwined worlds of the visual arts and rock music in Mexico, it is interesting to note that DIAS had a tremendous role in the development of Punk music in London, see: Stiles, 57.

35 Zolov, 117.

Los Dug Dugs were one of the most popular and challenging bands of the Mexican rock and roll scene. They are known for having brought the music of the Beatles to Mexico, performing their songs for the first time after spending time in the U.S. They also recorded in New York City in 1968.
actively shaping it, setting a precedent for the extension of artistic intervention beyond the walls of the art academies, galleries, and museum institutions.

The scandal surrounding Jodorowsky would only continue at the premier of his film adaptation of Fernando Arrabal’s *Fando y Lis* (1967) at the 1968 Acapulco Film Festival. Held one short month after the Tlatelolco Massacre there is a certain irony to the film’s roots in Panic theory; as the culture of paranoia and fear increased it would test the limits of how visual artists would cope with and express the changing landscape around them. Like the Panic ephemerals produced for live television, the concept of Panic grew increasingly prescient in Jodorowsky’s work. More touched by his roots in the Surrealist tradition, the film was like an extension of his early experimental stage and ephemeral productions, even utilizing many of the same artists, actors, and musicians. Not only did the imagery include “a nearly naked actress spread eagle on a hill of dead animal parts” and “scenes of extreme violence and gender dysphonia,” he also extended the piano destruction to film where in one scene “a group of finely dressed hipsters slow dance among architectural ruins to the tunes of a piano on fire.”

The film’s shocking imagery was purported to have incited a riot and Jodorowsky began to fear for his own safety in Mexico. While I do not discuss Jodorowsky’s films in great detail

36 The film was preceded by a stage production.


38 In addition to having been produced by Moctezuma, the film also featured Juan José Arreola and René Rebetez in roles. More significant to this discussion, is that many Grupos artists served as extras in the film, alongside their rebel predecessors. *Fando y Lis* narrowly escaped censorship, despite the “ruthlessly draconian” Mexican Censorship Board’s harsh restrictions on feature length film productions, something Jodorowsky avoided by creating chapter titles and dividing the picture into four short films, see: Ben Cobb, *Anarchy and Alchemy: the Films of Alejandro Jodorowsky*, (London: Creation Books, 2008), 49.
here, it is necessary to point to the significance of *Fando y Lis* as a bridge from the early Panic ephemerals to his film. As Media Studies experts Josext Cerdán and Miguel Fernández Labayen noted:

> [The] director finds a way to narrate avant-gardism, performance, experimental staging, and the film to the Pánico movement by means of aesthetics (Topor’s images), narrative (Arrabal’s text), and even the production company’s name (Pánico Productions). Equally importantly, Jodorowsky inserts references to previous efímeros, like the piano burning at the beginning of the film or the blood-drinking sequence.\(^{39}\)

Due to outrage by the press and more conservative cultural figures, the film did not show in Mexico again until 1972. Yet Jodorowsky, like many artists that would follow, recognized the power and benefit of such censorship: “When I made *Fando y Lis* the film industry in Mexico was closed to me. But the scandal it opened doors.” \(^{40}\)

**AUTOGESTARNOS: THE SALÓN INDEPENDIENTE AND THE FIRST GRUPOS**

In a frequently cited textbook history of Latin American art of the 20\(^{th}\) Century, Teresa del Conde explains in the “Mexico” section that:

> During the ‘existential’ years of the 1960s, forms of expression in terms of painting as well as sculpture and the graphic arts in Mexico were as diverse as the

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\(^{39}\) Josext Cerdán and Miguel Fernández Labayen, “Arty Exploitation, Cool Cult, and the Cinema of Alejandro Jodorowsky,” in *Latsploitation, Latin America, and Exploitation Cinema*, ed. Victoria Ruétalo and Dolores Tierney, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 106. While it is likely that the burning piano in the early scenes of *Fando y Lis* was inspired by the Fluxists and his piano destruction on live TV, Jodorowsky has stated elsewhere that he was also inspired by Jerry Lee Lewis lighting his piano on fire at the end of his performances, see: <http://filosofiahoy.es/index.php/mod_pags/mem_detalle/idpag.5623/cat.4073/chk.1a350c181dded1c0711a7d20128f297.html>. The connections (visual and conceptual) between the panic ephemerals and Jodorowsky’s films are plentiful and deserve greater analysis and will be the base for a future project. Moreover, his continued implementation of rock music and rock bands during the 1960s also warrants further investigation.

\(^{40}\) Cobb, 77.
individuals who practiced them: the options included Neo-Expressionism, Post-Romanticism, lyrical abstraction, combine art, etc.\textsuperscript{41}

Here, Del Conde omits any specific reference to the conceptual or performance practices (unless we are to assume they are included in the “etc.”) of Ruptura artists like Arnaldo Cohen, Cuevas, and Manuel Felguérez who regularly exhibited “alternative” works in non-traditionally formatted exhibitions including the Salón Independiente, which will be discussed later in this section.\textsuperscript{42} Del Conde then narrowly summarizes the decade of 1970s as witnessing “a mellowing” of the energies brought forth by the 1960s painters and sculptors and new, young artists “...were stimulated by the national competitions held each year in Aguascalientes as well a by other biennial exhibitions sponsored by the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes [where] all artistic trends were represented…”\textsuperscript{43} Not only were young artists failing to be “stimulated by national competitions”, beginning at least in 1968 they were plainly opposed to exactly these bureaucratic exhibitions, particularly within the context of the massacre at Tlatelolco and the impending Olympics.

By 1968 (and probably earlier), state museums and curators ceased making contemporary art a priority due to a shift away from nationalistic overtones in much of the work being produced in the country, which stood at odds with the government’s desire to present a modern, democratic nation.\textsuperscript{44} The precursors to full-blown conceptualism and performance/action art did


\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 43.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 44.

\textsuperscript{44} It should be noted here that the author does insert a brief mention of alternative artistic forms claiming: “Although conceptualism was practiced by artists working in collective groups to create examples of ephemeral art, especially in the 1970s, there is now a stronger desire among Mexican artists to seek the
maintain a strong presence after the arguments surrounding the Ruptura had fizzled out. They were particularly influential in their movement away from official, state-sanctioned expositions and towards alternative and artist-run exhibition spaces. This freedom from the constraints of adhering to government-supported ideologies began to foster an atmosphere of greater artistic plurality and experimentation. Not only did the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes fail to represent all artistic trends but they also rejected, repressed, and censored works that did not fit the models of geometric, abstract, or neo-figurative painting and sculpture.

In fact, as was previously discussed, artists had already singled out the INBA for its often biased and conservative exhibition practices and regulations. This only worsened as the government’s grip tightened and the Bellas Artes, whom in the past had at times offered asylum for experimentation under certain directors, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter. But, as the clean up of Mexico’s image accelerated leading up to the Olympics, the INBA’s purse strings tightened. Artists again had to look for alternatives, a hot topic among students and professors at San Carlos. The artist Hersúa (b. Mexico 1940), who was a student at the school during this time, has explained that:

…most of the professors were focused on Mexican muralism, which I saw as having nothing to do with me, about the Revolution and everything else...I was more interested in seeing the new tendencies that were happening in Europe that had grabbed my attention, that had some relation to the discontents that I was manifesting, of working in a real space…

45 “…porque los maestros de San Carlos [enfocaron] el muralismo mexicano, que no tenía nada que ver conmigo. No, así la revolución y todo esto…parece mi interes en ver las nuevas tendencias que estaban sucediendo en Europa que me llamaban la atención y que tenía algo que ver con las inquietudes que yo manifestaba de trabajar en un espacio real…”, *Sub-versions de la memoria...60-70...México*. DVD. Pilar García and Rafael Ortega, dir. (Mexico City: Centro de Documentación Arkheia, Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, UNAM, 2011), Disc 2 (*Agrupaciones Artísticas en la Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas, 1963-1971*, moderator: Cuauhtémoc Medina; participants: Arnulfo Arquino, Alberto Gutiérrez Chong, Hersúa, and Jorge Pérezvega.)
In June of 1968, the INBA issued a call for artists to submit work for an exhibition supposedly open to all modes of production being used in Mexico at the time, a showcase of the best of the country. INBA, in many ways served as the official face of Mexican culture as the state-sponsored institution often sponsored these large-scale “expos” to promote contemporary Mexican art. Yet as was most often the case, the official “open” call was suspicious to established Mexican artists who understood that cultural institutions were invested primarily in upholding the official, state-sanctioned face of contemporary Mexican art, one that overlooked or even negated the existence of experimental, progressive artistic practice. This was particularly pressing given the pressures of putting the country’s best foot forward with the impending Olympics.

On August 9, 35 artists, many of whom were also art school professors, signed an open letter asking for a revamping of the initial call for artists and stated their unwillingness to participate if certain “anachronistic guidelines” were not changed. In an interview Brian Nissen (b. London 1939), who held the unique position of having been one of the few insider/outsider artists in the SI, has explained that:

They [cultural officials] always wanted to present what was Mexican muralism, especially abroad they showed what we call the Mexican School, the muralists, or something folkloric. For contemporary art? Well the truth is that they never [promoted] us outside of Mexico…”

46 The protesting artists included Rufino Tamayo, Carlos Mérida, Jesús Reyes Ferreira, Gunther Gerzso, Leonora Carrington, José Luis Cuevas, Alberto Gironella, Rafael Coronel, Enrique Echeverría, Francisco Corzas, and Felipe Ehrenberg.

47 “Fue un reaccion directa a nuestra invitación a; Exposcion Solar, habia un reaccion muy marcada…El otro aspecto es que el apoyo oficial a la cultura en general habia especialmente tenia que siempre quieren presentar lo eran muralismo mexicanos, sobre todo extranjer exponian la escuela Mexicana, digamos, los muralistas, o algo de folklor. De arte contemporaneo? Pues la verdad es que no nos proyectaba fuera de Mexico, no?” See: Interview Brian Nissen, “Salón Independiente 1968-71,” Sub-versiones de la memoria, DVD 3.
Assessing this issue of inclusion, the SI’s open letter contained three major points of contention: the institution’s ignorance of contemporary artistic practice in their decision to divide the show into four parts (painting, sculpture, watercolor, and prints); the awarding of prizes that reinforced the commercial value of works rather than content or meaning; and INBA’s failure to personally invite artists whose careers demonstrated contemporary Mexican art in favor of a blanket, open call. In August, INBA sent out a revamped call as a gesture to prove the legitimacy of the competition; they made acquisition awards rather than monetary prizes, the number of awards was increased, and certain established artists were formally invited to participate. However, only one of the original 35 protesting artists ended up participating in the “Exposición”.

As Pilar García Germenos has assessed, while the artists protesting the Exposición Solar did not directly reference the wave of student movements growing both locally and internationally and their collective protest reflected an anti-institutional cultural climate running parallel to student protests of the 1968 Venice and São Paulo Biennials. This is further supported by a contemporaneous series of letters and articles published by Ida Rodriguez Prampolini and Carla Stellweg which cautioned against the Biennial formats and their supposed open format and signaled the artist’s support by calling attention to their moves towards rejecting prizes and acceptance into such state-sponsored exhibitions. In some ways, anti-institutional rhetoric amongst artists in 1968 might be seen as an extension of the debates begun in 1966 by

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49 This was Jesús Reyes Ferreira who won a prize for his painting Sandía con muerte (Watermelon with Death), a relatively typical example of the painting style international audiences and markets most readily identified with Mexico. See ibid.

50 García de Germenos, “Salón Independiente,” 49.
David Alfaro Siqueiros and others of the “old guard” rather than a direct reflection of the student protests taking place across the country. In fact, as García Germenos suggests, artists working in 1968 by in large bought into the Olympic mania sweeping the country as the multitude of associated cultural events brought into Mexico provided access to theater, music, exhibitions, and dance from across the globe.51

Despite the avant-garde or radical roots of many artists before 1968, Geometrism and abstraction (once vehicles for counter expression) had been subsumed into the vocabulary of Mexican nationalism and given a strong injection of support with the design and programming of the Olympics. Medina has importantly noted that despite its high degree of visibility, Mexican Geometrism helped to cause a certain "amnesia about radicalism," as it ultimately reduced a multitude of burgeoning experimental tendencies into a singular, clearly-defined style, one that ". . . justified the existence of this type of art as a search for harmonic development consistent with urban modernization."52

Beginning in the late 1960s, the criticism of Juan García Ponce and Luis Cardoza y Aragón combined with promoters like director and curator of the Museo de Arte Moderno (MAM) Fernando Gamboa and Jorge Alberto Manrique (then head of UNAM's IIE), coupled with the strong reliance on government funded institutions, geometric abstraction became the institutional cultural symbol of national progress and the most marketable form of contemporary Mexican art.53 As Medina has further described,

". . . the academy defined the movement in terms of the presumed cycles of the 'history of styles', assuming that art history oscillated like a pendulum between the

51 García de Germenos, “Salón Independiente,” 49.


53 Ibid., 128.
irrationality and complexity of the baroque, and the extreme simplification of
classicism or abstraction.\textsuperscript{54}

Mexican geometrism became the next replacement for muralism, the new style that came
to represent nationalism, which scholars such as Medina and Daniel Garza Usabiaga have
astutely identified as being antithetical to many of the ideologies present in the work of the
artists, though they were inevitably co-opted by the general umbrella of geometrism.\textsuperscript{55} Hersúa
was in fact concerned with collapsing the distance between viewer, object, and experience;
Vicente Rojo's interest in seriality and negation of style was as much related to issues authorship
and linguistic conceptualism as phenomenology or questions of object-viewer relations;
Felguérez was already invested in the exploration of structuralist models and the potential
applications for computers in the visual arts.

Other artists like Kazuyi Sakai, Arnaldo Cohen, and Sebastián promoted Geometrism as
an exploration into visual systems (and often linguistic systems) with the good intentions of
democratizing art and the desire to emphasize collective work, or as Juan Acha described, to do
away with the emotionalist concepts in art that have ruled Mexico for almost half a century.\textsuperscript{56}
Ultimately these contributions fed into the existing, solipsistic Mexico City artistic culture rather
than the creation of inroads to new artistic methods. Through its geometric approach, much of
the work fell more in line with trends of the international art market, rather than the social

\textsuperscript{54} Medina, “Systems,” 128.

\textsuperscript{55} Several exhibitions at the MAM (such as Gamboa’s 1976 Geometrismo mexicano: una tendencia actual) also aided the impression that Mexican geometrism was in fact a cohesive movement and, according to Gamboa, the most significant one since Muralism.

\textsuperscript{56} Juan Acha, “El geometrismo mexicano,” Vuelta 1, no.3 (February 1977), 55-57 and Medina, “Systems,” 129.
revolution taking place on the streets of the city. They only made a small step in blurring the lines between accepted artistic practices.

The amnesia about radicalism, as identified by Cuauhtémoc Medina, has led to the erasure or downplaying of the more experimental tendencies among these artists, particularly in the realm of collaborative production and the search for non-institutional spaces for support. Despite the complicated and nebulous definitions of the related “fields” of conceptualism, non-objectualism, and Performance, all three share a pervasive integration of transdisciplinary approaches. Perhaps most significant to the eventual birth of the Grupos was that geometrism became synonymous with contemporary Mexican art of the 1970s and until recently, most literature pointed to the style as the predominate and successful contribution of Mexican artists to the international scene. Though many artists associated with geometrism where embraced by cultural institutions, there was also a clear recognition of the present dangers associated with non-representational art as would be made evident with the Olympic cultural programming and design in 1968. As Mexico attempted to put on their best game face for an international audience, younger more progressive artists—particularly those associated with San Carlos and La Esmeralda— utilized this charged cultural moment to begin the Salón Independiente, organizing their own exhibitions to counter the frenzy of state-sanctioned expos aimed at promoting a singular vision of contemporary Mexican artistic practice.

This challenge also called attention to the problematic nature of competitions or biennials issues that would be carried forward by the Grupos. Felguérez has explained,

One of the most important phrases from the ’68 Movement that was most used was autogestión…that is to say, if the government is organizing this and we don’t want to be with the government, we will autogestarnos. How do we self-gestate?

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Well, in an independent salon, independent from what[?] From official bureaucrats, to simplify.\textsuperscript{58}

Accordingly, the SI was first and foremost to be democratic; it was entirely artist-run and their member selected, annual exhibitions open to all techniques, forms, and mediums and could include international artists. The SI would not award prizes and each participating artist was to receive the same amount of space within the exhibition. The 1968 SI ideologically assumed the position of being if not rebellious, at least anti-academic in the sense that the sought a re-working of an ultimately antiquated exhibition model. It was slated to take place at UNAM, but then forced to relocate to the Centro Cultural Isidro Fabela in the San Ángel neighborhood due to the army’s invasion of the university campus on September 17\textsuperscript{th}. The first SI was finally held two weeks after the massacre at Tlatelolco and included forty-five artists, but many of the most established ones (Cuevas, Rufino Tamayo, Carlos Mérida, and Gunther Gerzso) had already seceded from the group, signaling the complicated nature of considering individual artists as a group or collective, one of the primary challenges the Grupos would face and become divided over.

In the face of what had occurred over the months leading up to the first SI, it is imperative to mention, as Pilar García has, that the SI was conceived apart from the student and workers’ movements: official SI statements never make mention of the events or make evident any political agenda, aside from mostly veiled references to the movement in some of the work that was ultimately included.\textsuperscript{59} In an interview from 2003, Felguérez commented that he felt

\textsuperscript{58} “Una de las frases importantes del movimiento 68 que mas usaban era la autogestion…Habia es decir si el gobierno organiza esto y no queremos estar con el gobierno, vamos a autogestarnos. Como nos autogestarnos? Así en un salon independienten, independiente de qué? De burocraticos oficial, para simplificarm,” Manuel Felguérez, \textit{Sub-versiones de la memoria}, DVD, Disc 1.

\textsuperscript{59} García de Germenos, “Salón Independiente,” 50. According to this catalogue, there are no extent images of the 1968 SI (\textit{La era de la discrepancia}, 78).
“unable” to stand on the sidelines of the Student Movement, but at the same time everyone was being arrested.\textsuperscript{60} Though the SI made no explicit critique of the government, they did link their collective protest of the INBA to the events at Tlatelolco as the ultimate repression of freedom of expression.\textsuperscript{61}

Lessons learned from their first attempt at holding an alternative to the Salón model, organizers struggled with financing a second time around without relying on the existing system of cultural support. As plans were underway for the second installment, the organization became more rigid and bureaucratic. Several unconventional proposals were made to help finance the SI, including an annual art sale in the form of a fashion show. \textit{Moda SI} was to be directed by Gurrola, Jodorowsky, and writer/critic Carlos Monsivaís with Cuevas, Ehrenberg, Felguérez and others slated to design clothing to be presented at a “Happening” style event.\textsuperscript{62} In some ways the conception of such an event might be read as the artist’s recognition of Mexico’s marginalization within the international art scene, but as my previous discussion of Jodorowsky would support, these artists were simply applying previous methods of alternative art practice to a more institutionalized event. \textit{Moda SI} was never realized and the SI became more rigid and bureaucratic in its organization, leading the organization into a state of crisis despite pulling off two more iterations in 1969 and 1970.\textsuperscript{63} However, the proposal of the \textit{Moda SI} remains

\textsuperscript{60} García de Germenos, “Salón Independiente,” 50.


\textsuperscript{62} The illustrations of the design proposals were printed in an issue of the SI’s magazine, which are held in the Fondo Histórico MUCA, Centro de Documentación \textit{Arkheia}, Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, UNAM.

\textsuperscript{63} The second SI traveled to Guadalajara and Toluca in a modified format. The 1969 SI was held on October 16 and organized by artist and curator Helen Escobedo of MUAC. Nearly three thousand people
significant in that it demonstrates the coming together of the *Ruptura* (or “La Mafia”) and the grupo Pánico or “Panic tribe” with younger artists in an effort to circumvent institutional bureaucracy. (Fig.33)

The artists Kazuya Sakai, who worked primarily in geometric painting; Brian Nissen, who largely worked in abstract or assemblage painting and sculpture; and Manuel Felguérez headed the 1970 SI. This SI intended to be more experimental, with a focus on anonymous collective production as the most appropriate means creating a relationship between society and art. In an attempt to avoid pitfalls in financing the exhibition, all of the works had to be constructed from paper or cardboard and were to be created in situ, but there were a few exceptions. Felipe Ehrenberg had been involved in the organization of the SI before fleeing Mexico in 1968. Having studied with Goeritz earlier on in his career, Ehrenberg had already developed and executed some of the first conceptual actions in Mexico that stood in direct dialogue with European conceptualism as is discussed at the end of this chapter.

Because he was based in England between 1968 and 1973, Ehrenberg served as a bridge between radical art being produced in Europe and the local context of Mexico upon his return. As he was living in London during the 1970 SI, Ehrenberg participated in the exhibition from a far with a work of mail art entitled *Obra sin titulada, (arriba y adelante)*/ (Untitled work (*Onward and Upward*)). (Fig.33) Ehrenberg’s piece was an exception among the work included in the 1970 SI for several reasons: it was not produced in situ (not even in the country itself) and it aggressively confronted many socially prescient issues of the day. Unlike the confounding attended the opening. Escobedo will be discussed in more detail in the next chapters, as she was one of the foremost proponents of non-objectual arts in Mexico.

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64 The shift towards individual recognition with group projects did not occur until the Grupos arrived on the scene. This issue of anonymity versus individual ownership was a divisive factor in ideological differences between groups, and one No-Grupo would directly confront.
(though visually interesting) work included, Ehrenberg’s piece represents a fissure in Mexican artistic discourse at the time.

For the third SI, Ehrenberg mailed two hundred postcards from England, where he lived at the time and as is discussed later in this chapter, to Mexico to be installed upon arrival. On one side, the postcards all feature a stamp and an amorphous black shape or a stamp and nothing else. On the reverse of each card was a key, indicating its placement within the overall installation. This participatory act of assembling the piece “like a puzzle on the wall”, resulting in a seductive image of a cropped, nude woman forcefully grabbing her own breast with one hand; in the other she holds a soccer ball reading “World Cup Mexico 1970”. This undeniably political message serves as a critique of the events of 68 that lead Ehrenberg to leave his home country (further emphasized by the repeating British stamps) and demonstrates that not much had changed in the political landscape since then; would the government yet again use an international event to promote a false impression of democracy and freedom to save face on the international stage as thousands of football fans descended upon the city? The official logo that year was a geometrized soccer ball, with the text “Mexico 70” designed in a fashion that eerily quotes from the large-scale graphics and signage program initiated by the Mexican government for the 68 Olympics and designed by Lance Wyman.

As the 1970 SI traveled to the Centro de Arte Moderno in Guadalajara, several artists did attempt to imbue political content and a radical aesthetic into the installation as they once again

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66 The 1970 World Cup was the first to be held in North America and took place from May 31st through June 21st.

made an attempt to create ephemeral murals on the gallery walls and sculptures for the museum’s plaza that were intended to intervene in the urban environment and create greater opportunities to interact with the public. But, dissent was growing within the ranks of the SI as the “collective spirit” and also the panic that was caused by 1968 began to dissipate, leaving the group to struggle to produce large exhibitions collectively.

Although a fourth SI was in the works, it never came to fruition due to internal fissures and disagreements over the trajectory of the organization and the artistic ideologies of members of the “group”. One faction (led mostly by Sakai and Felguérez) signed a mass letter of resignation from the SI as they wanted to continue their struggle against authoritarianism without rejecting existing systems for artistic support and, more importantly, without abandoning a focus on artistic experimentation. The remaining members wanted more direct political action and critique to result from the SI, particularly Vlady, who was particularly concerned over the loss of artistic autonomy, questioning the true independence of the organization. Felguérez had hoped in 1968 that the SI would lead to changes through the concept of “autogestation”, but as Vlady suggests it “emerged from the crisis…as a way to protest conformity and cultural sclerosis…but now, its independence despises anybody else’s independence…”

The SI eventually dissolved entirely in 1971 and before the fourth installment ever got off the ground. There are numerous exhibitions, protests, magazines, leaflets, projects, etc. aside from those related to the SI that could be discussed in relation to 1968 and the birth of the Grupos, but the Salón Independiente perhaps best represents one of the most significant models for the groups to come, that is the use of subversive techniques to infiltrate and critique institutional systems.

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THE MURAL EFÍMERO, 1968

One of the most visible, yet ultimately failed, attempts at repurposing muralism in public spaces (albeit in a subversive manner) came with a project spearheaded by students and a few teachers from San Carlos. The 1968 Mural efímero was, in many ways, emblematic of the problematic strategies enacted in attempts at collective artistic participation and response to the Student Movement, but in the end was nothing more than a reiteration of the failure of the Mural movement’s democratic goals. However, as Vázquez Mantecón has stated, the mural facilitated a shift in artists’s attitudes towards their production, “turning them to the production of specific works through collective action.” Collective artmaking had become a cornerstone of muralism, though these projects largely de-emphasized the hands of many workers due to the cult of personality associated with los tres grandes. As Manuel Félgueres has recently stated, by this time, artist of his generation were not “against muralism” but rather “against the content of muralism” and by logical extension the official culture of muralism. This institutional focus on singular artist-celebrities like Rivera and Siqueiros led in part to the reconception of collective practices by 1960s. They also took into consideration practical concerns (lack of materials and financing) alongside their echoing the significance of collective action within the context of the student movement.

69 Felguérez and Brian Nissen have both stated that the 1968 ephemeral mural had nothing to do with the formation of the Salón Independiente, they were entirely separate events despite sharing many participants. But Carla Stellweg contends that it could have indeed been an impetus for the SI because it was viewed as a failed attempt at producing a single collective project. See: Sub-versiones de la Memoria…DVD, Discs 2 and 3. However, Luis Urias recently clarified that it was he who included the letters “SI” in one of the central panels of the “mural” was actually in reference to the Chicano movement’s slogan “Si, se puede” and not to the Salón Independiente. This misinterpretation of the “SI” has led to this misunderstanding of the mural as part of the Salón Independiente.


71 “…no estababa nunca contra muralismo, estaba en contra del contenido del muralismo…” See: Maunuel Felguérez, Sub-versiones de la memoria, DVD 1-2.
This action, which took place in August of 1968 as the climate was growing more and more dangerous, was documented by filmmaker Raúl Kamferr in a film by the same name and the project included contributions by Francisco Icaza, Ricardo Rocha, and Manuel Felguérez, among others, such as Cuevas.\textsuperscript{72} (Fig.35-36) Unlike his more insular, art-world specific murales efímeros discussed in Chapter One of this project (in 1961 with los Hartos and again in the Zona Rosa with the 1967 mural), Cuevas, who was by now known for his staunch individualism and notoriety, also became caught up in the growing fever of collective participation, but this time without overshadowing the collective nature of his work with spectacle. Bringing together individual artists to create an impermanent mural seemed doomed to begin as the result was a cacophony of images that, as critic Raquel Tibol recounted, mostly avoided direct reference to the “increasingly tragic” situation.\textsuperscript{73} But what is significant to this study is that the mural was both ephemeral and it intervened within the institutional space of the university. The opening credits of the film feature a hand painting text only to have it run down the glass, ultimately disappearing in emphasis on the ephemeral from the very start.

Historian Eric Zolov, in his discussion of the cultural aspects of the student protests also highlighted the re-signification of muralism within the context of 1968: “At the UNAM, gatherings organized around folk-music performances, political theater, poetry readings, and collective mural paintings all formed an integral aspect of student-movement culture” and has also pointed to their use of Happenings, modeled after the Fine Arts Theater, Berkeley.\textsuperscript{74} While


\textsuperscript{73} Raquel Tibol, Confrontaciones: Crónica y recuento, Mexico City, Samara, 1992 and Vázquez Mantecón, 38.

\textsuperscript{74} Zolov, 122-23, 126.
the presence of students from California in Mexico City might account for this engagement, as has already been shown in the previous chapter, this was a strategy that art students had already experienced. George Flaherty has concisely described that (as artists would later do with the biennial and salon formats) the students utilized the Olympics as a form of Trojan horse for exposing the authoritarian nature of the government:

> Selecting the street as the preferred site for engaging the public was a practical matter for the student movement…but it was also strategic. The occasion of the Olympics had converted city streets, plazas, and other public spaces into a seamless tableau of modernity.⁷⁵

But it is important to highlight also, as Vázquez Mantecón has suggested, that while the ephemeral mural is frequently cited as the first major, collective artistic response to the Student Movement, a preceding action, the *Obra 68* exhibition produced by the Salón Plástica Mexicana, demonstrates how there already existed a schism within the artistic community that was invested in conceptual approaches. *Obra 68* also contained no real reference to the violence occurring in the city, but rather used language based projects (conceptual actions); a protest that became a protest by showing no real work at all.⁷⁶ This action represented a form of artistic critique and protest that stands more in line with European and Southern Cone counterparts than with the didactic and insular recycling of the mural format. Aside from a few exceptions, the work included in the exhibition consisted of statements in support of the students. These were written on the backs of artworks, there “true” contents not visible to the viewer.

The 1968 ephemeral mural in contrast to the Cuevas’s two earlier versions further suggests these diverging paths of experimental art: Cuevas is clearly wrestling with how to stay

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with the times in the face of political conflict and his own contradictions. It was no longer sufficient to make self-referential art that dealt solely with interior or insider responses, yet it was clear that some of the earlier Ruptura artists that had begun to suggest the emergence of a neo-avant-garde now found themselves resorting to their tried and true techniques of abstraction and figuration as a means of political subversion; the dematerialization of the art object was not, in fact, their primary concern. Here, I would argue, the use of the ephemeral served to critique the political climate of the times, and was born out of necessity as much as it was artistic experimentation as was demonstrated with the progenitors discussed in the previous chapter.

After the uprisings and confrontations of 1968, students were faced with an even greater culture of repression as it was difficult to remain hopeful of political change as the Díaz Ordáz administration came to an end.77 Luis Echeverría, Ordáz’s successor, had previously served as Secretary of International Affairs and was widely believed to have been responsible for orchestrating the attack on protesters at Tlatelolco. Echeverría was most likely selected in the hopes that he would continue the economic policies that had brought about the “Mexican Miracle,” but his social policies also would register no significant changes. The new administrations disallowed the congregating of groups in public spaces (particularly targeting young people known as greñudos or “long hairs” and though he would attempt to reach out to students, his goal was primarily aimed at turning their revolution into a new form of Mexican nationalism.)78

77 Zolov, 164.

78 Ibid., 165-166.
HERSÚA AND ARTE OTRO

Medina has previously singled out the artist Hersúa (Hernández Súarez) as an example of the selective amnesia around unconventional and experimental aesthetic approaches, a compelling case given his strong connections to the launching of what is called “los Grupos.” Changes in art school curriculums were also a major factor in shifting focus away from the Mexican School and towards more experimental practices. Just as the artists of the Ruptura continually fought to circumvent a growing cultural xenophobia, students at the ENAP (la Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas) during 1968 (the year when Hersúa began his studies there) also found themselves struggling for exposure to new artistic tendencies but now within an increasingly repressive situation. As has been well documented elsewhere, the first impulses for collective organization among artists occurred before the Tlatelolco massacre, with two groups of art students from San Carlos: Grupo 66 and Arte Otro.⁷⁹

Perhaps it was the obvious flaws of the SI model that encouraged the formation of Arte Otro (Other Art) in 1969.⁸⁰ Four young artists studying at ENAP (Luis Aguilar, Eduardo Garduño, Hersúa, and Sebastián) formed a group with the explicit and straightforward artistic ideology of “…a completely subversive character; it overthrows established aesthetic values

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⁷⁹ There were even earlier iterations of artists groups that formed largely in response to the abstraction/figuration debates of 1966, see Confrontaciones 66. These debates played out at San Carlos where students formed Grupo Rivera and Grupo Siqueiros, which would later spur Grupo 66 and Arte Otro, see Sub-versiones de la memoria, DVD, disc 1. Such early artists groups were particularly significant to the development of the Grupos in that they took their education into their own hands, holding informal meetings at more senior artist’s homes, such as Francisco Icaza or Zalathiel Vargas, where many of the future Grupos artists first met on another, which is discussed in Chapter Four.

⁸⁰ Arte Otro was comprised of its four founding members until 1970, when only Hérsua and Sebastián continued to collaborate. In 1971, the last year that Arte Otro would exhibit, the group was comprised of Hérsua, Francisco Moyao, and Roberto Real de León, all of whom would begin to collaborate with younger artists to form No-Grupo in 1977.
within the Mexican State and as such opposes prevailing social and political system.” Arte Otro was formed in direct response to the chaos, panic, and paranoia that was the socio-political climate of 1968, despite the downplaying of overtly political themes in their projects. But if we speak to a political aspect of the group, it was to come through their refusal to adhere to the existing educational system and to move towards a form of art, a kind of kinteticism, that directly and necessarily required viewer participation, a key component of many of the Grupos projects, particularly in No-Grupo as is discussed later.

As Hersúa explained in a recent interview, while studying at ENAP, he grew increasingly frustrated with the school’s Professors’ continual reinforcement of the tenants of the “Mexican School of Painting,” rather than allowing for an opening up to “new tendencies” taking place in Europe and of which many of these students were becoming increasingly aware. Their resulting projects typically took the form or of ambientes or environmental installations in which they made use of color, abstract sculpture, light and space that were meant to be manipulated by the viewer or required presence for the environments to become activated. (Fig.37) Hersúa explains:

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81 See exhibition brochure, reproduced in “Arte Otro,” La era de la discrepancia, 74.

82 “Por que los maestros de San Carlos [enfocada] el muralismo mexicano que no tenia nada que ver conmigo, no, así la revolución y todo esto a mí resultaba tan ajeno. Parece mi interes en ver las nuevas tendencias que estaban sucediendo en Europa que me llamaban la atención y que tenía algo que ver con las inquietudes que yo manifestaba de trabajar en un espacio real y así fue como participamos en un serie de [gente] en formar el grupo Arte Otro que fue el primer grupo experimental de las nuevas tendencias aqui en Mexico.” See: Sub-versiones de la memoria..., DVD, Disc 1.

83 “Arte Otro,” in era de la discrepancia, 74.
The problematics that we were navigating were how to make the spectator participate in the artistic product. We were not interested in the canvas. For us, the canvas or easel painting was calculated in terms of social function.\(^{84}\)

Given the open spirit amongst the students at the school and their desire to create an environment of experimentation regardless of the school’s official support, Arte Otro took matters into their own hands and began organizing informal, after hours meetings where like minded colleagues could discuss alternative modes of art making and even distribute writings by European artists that they had translated themselves. Moreover, the ENAP, as opposed to other institutional settings in Mexico City, had a tradition of tolerance for experimentation outside of the official curriculum. Students at the time have described their collective desire to change the school permitted things that others would not, including their infamous costume parties (the last of which transpired in 1966) inspired by Jodorowsky’s early “panic parties” and a notorious performance by political folk singer Pete Seeger in 1968, when no other institution would allow him to play.\(^{85}\)

In 1969, Arte Otro held their first exhibition on Friday April 25\(^{th}\) at the ENAP, which included their first projects Primer poema geográfico de América Latina [The First Geographic Poem of Latin America] and Juego de...¿palabras? [A Game of...Words?].\(^{86}\) (Fig.38) Here they installed a series of words on white sheets of paper that were then installed in the gallery. The project was meant as an interactive game, in which a series of poems would be created. This

\(^{84}\) “La problematica que nosotros manejábamos era de hacer participe al espectador en el producto artístico, no les interesabas en la cuadro, para nosotros la cuadro o la pintura de caballete había calucado en cuanto funcion social,” Sub-versiones de la memoria..., DVD, disc1.

\(^{85}\) “San Carlos permitieron los Happenings, y permitia Jodorowsky, permitia los Grupos de filosofía y letras...experiimentos de teatro...cosas que antes no pasaba en San Carlos...” / “San Carlos permitted Happenings, and permitted Jodorowsky, permitted [participation] of groups from [the department of] philosophy and letters...theatrical experiments...things that had never happened before in San Carlos...”, see: ibid.

\(^{86}\) The group also presented at the 1969 Paris Biennial.
work demonstrates, along with the development of the *ambientes*, the group’s strong compulsion towards the use of a linguistic conceptualism as a means of not only engaging directly with the audience, but also more radically to implicate the spectator as an author in the work as they were asked to manipulate a large wall of individual words into a poem in a game of words.

Hersúa arguably presents the best case for why the notion of a homogenous post-68 contemporary art scene is a fallacy: though he is most consistently discussed as one of the leading artists of Mexican geometric and kinetic art, this labeling of his work is reductive as his work continued be a part of the unofficial dialogue occurring amongst radical artists and intellectuals into the 1970s. In 1973-74, Hersúa installed the exhibition *Ambientes urbanos* (*Urban Environments*) in the foyer of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, an exhibition of installations and interventions that clearly grew out of the artist's earlier work as part of Arte Otro and demonstrates the coming together of both Geometrism and conceptualism rather than a strict adherence to any particular school of art. (Fig.39) Moreover, this insistence upon the direct participation of the viewer in the creation or existence of the work of art and in bringing the “urban environment” to the gallery space, would directly impact the trajectory of conceptual art among the *Grupos* as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

FOREIGN INTERVENTION: FELIPE EHRENBERG IN LONDON

Unlike many contemporaries, the career of Felipe Ehrenberg has benefitted from renewed interest in his early career, having had a monographic exhibition and catalogue produced by the Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City in 2008.87 Knowledge of his career has also benefitted

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from his role as a writer, publishing criticism on the Mexican art scene beginning in the mid 1960s. Internationally, his reputation grew due to his participation with the British Fluxists as he founded the Beau Geste Press to create mail art, artist books, and journals that were distributed worldwide. Moreover, Ehrenberg was one of the few ephemeral artists to actively archive his works, leading to the collection of his papers by Stanford University Libraries and the Centro de Documentación Arkheia, Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, UNAM. A closer examination of projects carried out by Ehrenberg shortly before and after his arrival in England in 1968, demonstrates that the artist had already formed a strong kinship with artists across the globe, seeking to conflate or at least draw attention to the relationships between art and daily life.

But I will first turn to several early interventions carried out by Ehrenberg while still in Mexico as they foreground the interventions he would carry out in Europe. In the early 1960s, Ehrenberg worked at the Arts and Handcrafts Center with Manuel Felguérez and was spending time at Casa del Lago and affiliating with Felguérez, Juan José Gurrola, Alberto Gironella, Lilia Carillo, Juan García Ponce and others that were closely associated with Jodorowsky.88 Around this time, Ehrenberg presented several early actions and interventions in Mexico City, which will be briefly mentioned here as background to his eventual abandonment of painting. In 1967, the same year as Cuevas installed his ephemeral mural in the Zona Rosa and Jodorowsky destroyed his piano on live television, Ehrenberg began his first real interventions with the exhibition entitled *Kinekaligraficas* held at the Galería de la Ciudad de México, la Pérgola de la Alameda (destroyed in 1968) located next to the hallowed grounds of the Palacio de Bellas Artes. While the entire exhibition consisted of works on paper and montages, Ehrenberg also staged an

intervention that would set a precedent for the “Trojan horse” style of institutional critique within his body of work. (Fig.40)

The intervention, Por qué pinto como pinto (performance anti-factum) (Why do I paint the way I paint) was staged under the auspices of the ribbon cutting ceremony, traditionally held by the gallery for the opening of the exhibition, and for which Ehrenberg was asked to give a small speech.  

At the ceremony, instead of playing the part of artist celebrating his achievement, Ehrenberg stood atop a stool and explained the art included in the exhibition: an ellipse comprised of individual dots in one room and manipulated Kodak advertisements in another, in a manner meant to recreate an environment of a live audience. He has explained,

So it occurred to me to make some cards reading “LAUGH,” “BOO,” “CLAP,” “FEEL INDIGNANT,” “MUTTER,” similar to those used in live radio to stimulate audience reaction…I climbed to the top of an A-ladder and talked about what I meant by “kinekaligrafías”; about the use—and the sound—of letters and words in my works…Every five, six sentences, I’d lift up the appropriate card…Probably it was then that I realized that if speech and gesture could be so important, what better than to use these elements to build them into the presentation of the work itself.

This intervention was Ehrenberg’s first and caused an epiphany in the artist: he came to understand the significance in revealing the thought and process behind a work of art to the spectator. Moreover, Ehrenberg brings into question not only the relationship between the viewer and exhibition, but also how information about art is distributed with the increasing power of mass media (in this case radio) to shape society’s understanding of art and culture. Here,

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89 Alcázar and Fuentes, 150.

90 I have been unable to locate photographs of the work included in the exhibition.

Ehrenberg had set out on a path to question the boundaries that traditionally separated art from daily life and would begin to search for more answers upon his move to England in 1968.

While in Europe, Ehrenberg further developed a working method that he describes as “…an art of ideas [that] also strives to introduce ‘ethics’ into an existing Western conceptual art equation focused primarily on matters of formalism and self-referentialism.”92 While this previous statement is certainly partially true, Ehrenberg did find fellow burgeoning “Western” conceptualists with concerns that expanded past the navel gazing. Like other Mexican artists, intellectuals, and sympathizers of the student movement, Ehrenberg left Mexico City as tensions climbed just before October of 1968. He first spent a little over a year in London, where he connected with like-minded European, U.S., and other Latin American artists, particularly through shared interests in mail art and artist books with U.S artist Carolee Schneeman, experimental British composer Michael Nyman, fellow Mexican expatriates in Amsterdam, Ulises Carrión, and the Chilean conceptual and mail artist, Clemente Padín.

But his strongest affiliations were with the British Fluxists and Ehrenberg produced several projects as a member of the group. The artist’s conceptual projects carried out in London, stand apart from Ehrenberg’s still stronger preoccupation with the Beau Geste press and investigations into mail art, artists books, and graphics workshops have roots that proceed his encounters with other conceptualists in Europe, the United States, and South America, as he began to produce ephemeral actions in line with the practices (although as means to a different end) of Vito Acconci, Richard Long, or even Jodorowsky and Gurrola with their “procession” in

Colombia. Like Jodorowsky, Ehrenberg has a tendency towards self-mythologizing and living life as art (for him perhaps art really does equal life) and has suggested his admiration for others that followed this path. He was "inspired" by Mexican painter Francisco Goitia's choice to live in a shack near the Aztec canals of Xochimilco and has cited Venezuelan painter Armando Reverón as being the "first real performance and installation artist of the American continent."\footnote{93 See: “Interview with Juan José Gurrola.” Accessed November 9, 2012. http://www.artesonoro.net/GALERIA/Gurrola/EntrevistaConGurrola.htm.}

Reacting from a distance to the escalated violence and tragedies associated with 1968, Ehrenberg’s abandonment of traditional forms of art and his desire to critique institutions gained steam in England, where the socio-political content of his work became more obvious. In 1970, Ehrenberg produced several public interventions as part of collaborations with other artists. Each was well documented and bears the clear mark of influence from conceptualisms experienced in Mexico as well as of new contacts made in London. Two of these actions, \textit{El Pollo del septimo dia (The Seventh Day Chicken)} and \textit{Tube-O-Nauts’ Travels} from 1970 echo the development of the “artist walk” projects of Vito Acconci or Richard Long, which elevated urban interventions by creating work outside of conventional art spaces and utilizing the documentation of these actions as evidence ostensibly to later be displayed. But I would argue they were also demonstrative of Ehrenberg’s desire to reflect daily life within his art. As Medina explains, with these interventions, Ehrenberg “achieved a curious synthesis of many other practices suggesting a metonymic relationship between urban space and the space of the artist’s book,” and continues that “this overlap of the street with the surfaces of writing would become of the constant subjects of Mexican urban interventions in the 1970s.”\footnote{94 Ehrenberg, “1960 y otro poco…,” in \textit{Manchuria}, 156-157.}

\footnote{95 Medina, “Publishing Circuits,” 156.}
For the first of these interventions, he teamed with Richard Kriesche (an Austrian video artist), and artist Rodolfo Alcaraz-Laus to form the Polygonal Workshop in London. *Seventh Day Chicken* was a multi-part project that consisted of street actions and various methods of documentation ranging from film to photography that address a crippling garbage workers union strike in London.⁹⁶ (Fig. 42) As this is one of Ehrenberg’s few projects to have been analyzed in detail, I mention it here briefly in order to highlight the continuing significance of collaboration, intervention, and the ephemeral in Ehrenberg’s body of work. For the action, Ehrenberg and Kriesche drew lines around accumulating piles of trash so that once they were finally removed all that was left was an outline resembling that of a chalk outline at a crime scene. The result of *Seventh Day Chicken* was an exhibition of the documentation (including live garbage) held at the Sigi Krauss Gallery, but their action also stimulated debated on the repercussions of strike on the community.⁹⁷

Despite the clear implications of the project with respect to community issues, Ehrenberg also hints at his concerns over art as ideas and how this type of art could fit or not fit within an institutional framework. The film portion, *La Poubelle: It’s a Sort of Disease*, documents

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Ehrenberg’s earliest intervention in England, *A Stroll in July, or One Thursday Afternoon, or Half a Day in London, or (The) Afternoon, Or…(Topology of a Sculpture)* occurred in 1970 after spending time in New York. It consisted of a walk and was conceived as a “living sculpture” as the artist explored the streets making notes of his movements and activities. He also mailed postcards from multiple locations. The finished “sculpture” could in theory be recreated by a participant by following his work, which was “certified” as a sculpture “by the British Post Office in the form of five postcards posted at various points along the walk.”, see “Felipe Ehrenberg: A Stroll in July…,” in *La era de la discrepancia*, 171.

⁹⁶*La Poubelle* (16 min 48 sec). Accessed March 12, 2012. [http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/felipe-ehrenberg-la-poubelle](http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/felipe-ehrenberg-la-poubelle). The film component *La Poubelle* references intentionally or unintentionally the work of Arman, who introduced the concepts of accumulation and refuse into artistic production, particularly when in 1960 he filled a Paris gallery with trash. Coincidentally, Arman had been in close contact with Matias Goeritz one of Ehrenberg’s early teachers, as was discussed in the previous chapter.

⁹⁷ Kam, 5.
evidence of the garbage piles and their eventual clean up, but spliced with random found footage and voiceovers that, when not Ehrenberg himself, demonstrate a clear critique of bureaucracy and censorship, preoccupations that would grow stronger over the course of the artist’s work in the 1970s.\(^{98}\)

The Polygonal Workshop enacted another significant intervention into the public domain with *Tube-O-Nauts* (1970) for which the artists documented Ehrenberg and Alcaraz-Laus (the “metronauts”) a daylong adventure travelling the entire London subway system. Taking the first train of the day, they then continued to ride until catching the very last train of the day. All in all, the journey lasted eighteen hours and they made twenty-six transfers. The artists took photos and notes, documenting their experiences as they traversed the underground of the city. (Fig.43)

These results were included exhibition, *Fluxshoe*, in the watershed 1972-73 Fluxus.\(^{99}\)

Both *Seventh Day Chicken* and *Tube-O-Nauts* more readily meet the paradigm of life equaling art as the projects both intervened in public spaces in the hopes of calling attention to problems of daily life and how art might bring attention to it, such as heaps of garbage clogging city streets. Or, in the case of the subway intervention, how art might be created through living, by documenting something as mundane as the movements on a subway. But for another

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\(^{98}\) Karen Benazra has analyzed this piece in relation to the changing understandings of the art object and commodity culture, see: “Packaging and Idea: On the Production and Consumption of Conceptual Art,” unpublished paper delivered at 2012 Permanent Seminar, CLAVIS, University of Texas at Austin.

\(^{99}\) *Fluxshoe* traveled across England and included works by the large international network of Fluxus artists. Ehrenberg’s then partner, Martha Hellion, designed the display for the exhibition and Ehrenberg designed and printed the graphic materials that accompanied the show. The presence of Fluxus in Mexico warrants further investigation not only in the case of Ehrenberg, but also Hellion. Ulises Carrion should also be noted here as one of the forerunners of Mexican mail artists. Based primarily Europe he ran the important artists book store “Other Books and So” (1975-78) in Amsterdam. His longterm engagement with mail art, poetry and book making warrants further exploration in the context of the Grupos activities. See: Martha Hellion, *Libros de Artistas (Artists Books)/ Ulises Carrión: Mundos personales o estrategias culturales? (Personal Worlds or Cultural Strategies?)*. (Madrid: Turner, 2003.)
intervention, Ehrenberg would expand his practice of “art of ideas” beyond city streets and social issues to tackle the art institution itself.

DATE WITH FATE AT THE TATE, 1970

One month before the Tube-O-Nauts intervention, Ehrenberg created an action that is most relevant to this broader discussion of institutional critique through artistic intervention without institutional sponsorship. On October 20, 1970 the artist appeared at the Tate Gallery in London wearing a pillow case over his head, with a single eye hole cut out and armed with a tape recorder over his shoulder. (Fig.44) Attempting to enter the museum undercover, the artist was stopped by security and forbidden from entering with his homemade hood. While he initially planned to circulate through the galleries and mock the myopic viewing experience of most museum visitors, the spontaneous confrontation with security ultimately comprised the intervention, *Date with fate at the Tate.*

Ehrenberg produced this event as a “sympathizer” of the International Coalition for the Liquidation of Art, a fleeting extension of Gustav Metzger and John J. Sharkey’s 1966 Destruction in Art Symposium or DIAS.100 DIAS brought together like-minded international artists in a multi-component event or symposium centered on Metzger’s concept of auto-destructive art. His attempt at a 1970 coalition, which included artists Stuart Brisley and John Plant and the gallerist Sigi Krauss, continued the goals set forth by the earlier DIAS. On the morning of October 20th, the Coalition planned a spontaneous demonstration at London’s premier art institution, the Tate Gallery (now Tate Britain).

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100 Felipe Ehrenberg, “Date with fate at the Tate,” *Studio International* 180, n.931 (March 1971), 92-93.
Date with fate at the Tate or “Tate Bait” is arguably the artist’s most compelling contribution to the broader dialogue that was formulating both in Mexico and in England surrounding institutional critique. Gustav Metzger’s concept of Auto-destructive art echoed many of the tendencies amongst radical Mexican artists, particularly Jodorowsky, testing the boundaries of objecthood and the process behind art production. For the 1970 demonstration, Ehrenberg set out to continue a line of inquiry into object/viewer relations through an approach he called the “art of ideas”. As will be explained in this section, Ehrenberg’s liquidation of art into ideas found kinship in Metzger’s call for new modes of art production that would account for the pervasive destruction he saw in society. But in the end, Date with fate at the Tate expanded beyond questions of artistic categories and definitions to expose and problematize the institutional spaces charged with displaying works of art by drawing attention to the growing distances between artist, object, institution, and public.

Ehrenberg connected with Metzger as he was planning the second Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) in 1970. As part of the project, Metzger and the International Coalition for the Liquidation of Art (which included Stuart Brisley, John Plant, the gallerist Sigi Krauss, and others) planned a demonstration to be held at London’s premier art institution, the Tate Museum of Art. Ehrenberg, as a “sympathizer” of the coalition, participated with his own form of intervention. He conceived of his participation as an “anti-artistic intervention”, yet again


102 Felipe Ehrenberg, “Date with fate at the Tate,” Studio International 180, no. 931 (March 1971), 92-93.
signaling the identification of intervention as viable artistic practice used as a means to negate the art object and the realm of the “artistic” through performance.¹⁰³

But before exploring the larger implications of Ehrenberg’s Tate Gallery intervention, it is necessary to revisit in the action in greater detail. What we now know of Date with fate at the Tate has been gleaned (in non-objectual fashion) from the action itself, one documentary photo, tape recordings, and transcriptions of the encounter.¹⁰⁴ Here, it is significant to note two extraordinary aspects of Ehrenberg’s documentation that challenge the “forgotten” nature of Mexican work of this period: first, that the audio recording was one of the first to ever be acquired by the Tate.¹⁰⁵ Secondly, the artist published these transcriptions in the March 1971 issue of Studio International, and accounts of his action appeared in tabloid newspapers like London’s Daily Mirror and within Mexico in the newspaper Excélsior.¹⁰⁶

As the artist has described, his initial intentions were centered on the hood as a device for exposing how little effort visitors expend when engaging with works in a museum:

[The Coalition] were going to hold a meeting at the Tate at one point and I thought, well, if I’m going to the Tate, I’ll perform the way people look at art, which is with one eye, and the rest is...One never really looks at art, LOOKS at it. There’s so much hanging at the Tate that shouldn’t even be there. So just before leaving the house I took a pillow and asked my wife to make a hole, because I would wear it and if anyone were to ask me why, I’d answer that it was a one-

¹⁰³ Issa María Benítez, “Reconstruir el vacío y recuperar el espacio: Ehrenberg conceptual,” in Manchuria, 24.


¹⁰⁵ It is significant that when we consider this project within the paradigms of Latin American conceptualisms presented by other authors, that the intervention did in fact draw attention in Europe and beyond. It was covered in the March 1971 issue of Studio International, tabloid newspapers like London’s Daily Mirror, and within Mexico in the newspaper Excélsior.

eyed look at art!\textsuperscript{107}

But the surreptitious standoff with museum authorities changed the course of Ehrenberg’s intervention—and here his choice of the term \textit{intervention} and not \textit{performance} is relevant, as it maintains a space for chance. He has summarized:

A crowd gathered around us and the cops were called in. The poor custodian was exasperated. He finally asked me “but WHY do you want to come in like that?” I said, “Well, because I’m a work of art”. And that’s where he found the perfect answer. He said: “Well, works of art are not allowed in the Tate unless by permission of the Board of Trustees.” He was right, of course, but with that phrase by a Tate employee, I had been acknowledged as a work of art!\textsuperscript{108}

It is clear that Ehrenberg suspected or at least welcomed the possibility for some kind of reaction to his conspicuous presence as he came bearing a tape recorder to document events. Moreover, if we examine the photograph, we see fellow artist John Plant wearing a conically shaped vest that has been covered in small squares of paper or signs, which read: \textit{CAUTION ART CORRUPTS}. (Fig.45) It would be highly unlikely that the artists could have entered the museum unnoticed.

Cuauhtémoc Medina has pointed out that Ehrenberg first became aware of Gustav Metzger’s 1966 Destruction in Art Symposium (or DIAS) while in England and he was particularly struck by the proposed “need of artists to address the continuing danger of thermo nuclear extermination in a world featuring the ‘coexistence of excess and hunger,’ through forms of art that would contain within them a specific agent of self-destruction.”\textsuperscript{109} Echoing Metzger’s


\textsuperscript{108} Ehrenberg, “Interview with Felipe Ehrenberg at the University of Essex,” 6.

\textsuperscript{109} Medina, “Publishing Circuits,” 156.
call, the Tate Museum, the British equivalent to the Bellas Artes in Mexico City becomes the site of Ehrenberg’s intervention, one that relied (in non-objectual fashion) on action, performance, intervention, sound, tape recordings, and transcriptions of his encounter. (Fig.46) The artist generally explains the confrontation:

A crowd gathered around us and the cops were called in. The poor custodian was exasperated. He finally asked me “but WHY do you want to come in like that?” I said “Well, because I’m a work of art”. And that’s where he found the perfect answer. He said Well, works of art are not allowed in the Tate unless by permission of the Board of Trustees.” He was right, of course, but with that phrase by a Tate employee, I had been acknowledged as a work of art! At that time, statements were works of art… so that was fun.110

But what is significant is that Ehrenberg recorded his interactions with a museum security guard, which was one of the two first audio pieces to be purchased by the Tate museum.111

Once a supervisor had been called up to assist with the issue, the hardline between the museum institution and daily life became all more apparent:

Supervisor: You remove that thing from your face and you may then go through, but not otherwise!
Ehrenberg: Why? Would I ask you to remove your jacket?
S: You are causing a disturbance now by arguing.
E: I think you’re causing the disturbance. If I was allowed to walk in, nobody would be disturbed. You’re causing the disturbance…
S: …it’s already been explained to you that works of art are only allowed in the Tate Gallery by permission of the trustees.
E: I am a Human Being.
S: You…have claimed to be a Work of Art.
E: I claim Mankind, Man, is a work of art.
S: Our trustees have not accepted you as a Work of Art—
S: So therefore we do not…um…intend to exhibit you anywhere.
E: I don’t want to be exhibited I want to see what is exhibited.112

111 The other acquisition was a tape recorded by the German artist, Kurt Schwitters.
112 Ehrenberg, “Date with fate at the Tate,” 92.
Here, it is also necessary to readdress Ehrenberg’s labeling of the action as “intervention” and not “performance.” This may easily be explained (as many critics do) by the fact that Performance had not yet entered the artworld vocabulary. Yet the implications of this distinction are significant in that it allows room for the accidental and the spontaneous and implies that the artist has entered a space that is not normally designated for the creation or display of art. While this is something Jodorowsky sought with the panic ephemeral format, in his case it was to rupture social and artistic categories to inspire transformation while Ehrenberg questions the very nature of art itself by calling attention to and critiquing the space between art and audience.113

Here, I will briefly turn to some of the broader connections Date with fate at the Tate presents when considering the Mexican case alongside DIAS. Like many of the early iterations of artists groups that formed in 1960s Mexico such as Jodorowsky’s international Grupo pánico or even the Salon Independiente (in which Ehrenberg participated), DIAS aimed to reconsider art’s relationship to everyday life, utilizing destruction as a vehicle.114 Kristine Stiles has summarized that

DIAS artists stressed the centrality of art in producing new forms of knowledge, perception, and insight in life. This is not to say that they transformed art into life. Rather, destruction in art introduced destructive processes into artistic vocabulary in order to collapse means, subject matter, and affect into a unified expression for the purpose of commenting directly on destruction in life...115

Metzger and other artists’ conception of destructive art bears striking comparisons to many of the

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113 The term “Performance” (indicating the artistic movement) did not arrive in Mexico until the late 1970s and is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four of this project.

114 The press release issued by DIAS declared that: ‘The main objective of DIAS was to focus attention on the element of destruction in Happenings and other art forms, and to relate this destruction in society.”

goals set forth by Matias Goeritz, one of Ehrenberg’s teachers and a participant in the 1966 DIAS. Though both Goeritz and Jodorowsky also sought a sort of spiritual transformation, DIAS sought the transformation of society through destruction.

The destruction or dissolution of definitions and categories sought by these early advocates of conceptualisms was not only means of liberating art and art forms, it extended in both cases from their recognition for new modes of production, ones that also fostered environments off collaboration. As Kristine Stiles has explained, DIAS artists:

… utilized destruction as a seditious measure to critique conventional aesthetic forms, to expand the material practices and political languages of art and poetry, and to demonstrate the social necessity for artists’ direct engagement in culture as a political force for change. 116

Metzger’s call for “direct engagement in culture” takes form not only in Ehrenberg’s Tate intervention but it pervades his body of work from 1970.

Through Ehrenberg’s interactions with Metzger’s coalition, his investigations into an “art of ideas” take on a more aggressive character. The institutional space and its contents are called into question, making systems normally invisible to museum audiences (boards of trustees, acquisition policies, exhibition politics, community access) transparent and this has been achieved through strategies of agitation.

Agitation and controversy played as equal a role as destruction in DIAS projects, a strategy that Ehrenberg would have been familiar with. As a young artist in Mexico, the daily realities of living under oppressive political conditions had already challenged artists like Jodorowsky to continue to produce their work. Some such artists, Ehrenberg included, would come to embrace controversy as a valid strategy or tactic for producing art, something he would continue to develop across the 1970s and that he surely invited

with his participation at the Coalition’s Tate demonstration.

Confrontation and controversy, expected or not, was not only a daily reality for artists living in Mexico under the oppressive administrations of the 1960s and it was something that had directly shaped the 1966 DIAS meeting. There were many projects at the 1966 DIAS that were considered so inappropriate or outside the traditional bonds of art, that Metzger and Sharkey stood trial for charges of having “unlawfully caused to be shown a lewd and an indecent exhibition”\(^{117}\). This was largely due to one of Hermann Nitsch’s actions as part of the *Orgies and Mysteries Theater* project, which simulated the ritualistic killing of animals. But, as Kristine Stiles keenly distinguishes, Metzger had intentionally drummed up attention for the event, carefully manipulating his role as organizer, artist, and public relations representative, even at the cost of contradicting his own positions and angering fellow artists. She explains:

> [D]espite his [Metzger’s] sophisticated handling of the media, despite his refusal to sponsor the killing of animals, despite his strong efforts to moderate destruction actions for safety, Metzger also invited provocation, celebrated the association of DIAS with anarchists, fed the media with salacious accounts of blood, nudity, and destruction, all the while fully aware of the probability of government surveillance.\(^{118}\)

Surveillance and censorship are hallmark issues in Ehrenberg’s body of work from the 1970s and the artist’s “Trojan horse” style of institutional critique, as Ruben Gallo has already identified it, would become a key strategy among artists associated with the Grupos and particularly Proceso Pentágono, which Ehrenberg would later join.\(^{119}\)

\(^{117}\) Ibid.

\(^{118}\) Stiles “DIAS Effect.”

After these projects in London, Ehrenberg and his family settled in the countryside of Devon. Here, with wife Martha Hellion, David Mayor, and Chris Welch, he began the Beau Geste Press (BGP), which strengthened Ehrenberg’s connections to European art circles and increased his lifelong interest in self-made printing presses, mail art, and artists books, interests he had already cultivated in association with *El Corno emplumado* and in the *psicogramas* of the 1960s, as was previously discussed in this dissertation. This was also the same year in which Ehrenberg created one of the watershed examples of mail art, *Arriba y adelante* for the Salón Independiente III.

Two of the most important publications Ehrenberg produced with the BGP were *Schmuck* and *Pussywillow: A Journal of Conditions*, both produced in 1973. While this dissertation focuses on the conceptual actions produced by Ehrenberg in Europe, Ehrenberg’s direction of an artist run press does have implications within the realm of his performative practice in their shared reliance on collaboration or the collective. Moreover, Ehrenberg has yet again distinguished himself from the acts of collectivization that were concurrent in Mexico. According to their manifesto or mission statement, the BGP was “a way of life.”; they continued: “We exist because you exist. Our activities serve as a link-up, stressing contact between Britain and Latin America as well as East European countries. We are political though not politicized.” Ehrenberg is careful to distinguish his brand of collaborative practice from other movements spreading throughout the world, particularly in Mexico where connections to U.S. culture seemed indistinguishable, though this was also due to Ehrenberg’s own personal distaste for such importations.

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120 Híjar, *Frentes*, 232.
Ehrenberg’s practice clearly benefitted from his time in Europe, an environment that watered the seeds of conceptualism he had sewn in Mexico a year earlier. But for other Mexican artists, local conditions had not changed in the wake of 1968 but they managed to forge new conceptual strategies despite the overwhelming pressures to address their socio-political condition. Like Ehrenberg, those artists particularly close to the Ruptura and the “Grupo pánico” continued to seek political freedoms through artistic freedoms, breaking down barriers between art and life just as Ehrenberg was accomplishing from afar.
Chapter 3.

INSTITUTIONS, INFORMATION, AND INTERVENTION IN FELIPE EHRENBERG AND GRUPO PROCESO PENTÁGONO

After the events of 1968 and the watchful global eye of the Olympics was removed, 1970s Mexico saw the highest levels of police repression and government censorship, arguably in the country’s history. The administration of PRI president Luis Echeverría (1970-76) officially and publically supported democratic movements in other countries such as the Cuban Revolution and even provided a safe haven for Chilean and Argentine dissidents during their military dictatorships. President Echeverría even publically denounced the U.S.-backed military coup in Chile in 1973 in which the CIA helped facilitate the removal of democratically elected president, Salvador Allende, but intolerance and fear reigned in the daily reality of the Mexican people.¹

At home in Mexico, and in a dark twist of irony, an unofficial Dirty War had been launched against any citizen perceived as a radical. The Díaz Ordaz administration had squarely placed the blame on students for the violent events in 1968 and their intentional burial of the massacre and spin control over media outlets reinforced this official narrative despite the living memories of citizens. Accordingly, the subsequent administration of Echeverría, who had served as Interior Secretary under Díaz Ordaz and received widespread accusations of having been responsible for the massacre at Tlatelolco, instituted new legislation that prevented gatherings of groups in public spaces, effectively rendering citizens powerless to mobilize in any visible manner. This not only affected efforts to mobilize in protest, but it also extended into daily life as a person could be picked up and arrested simply for congregating with friends in public, particularly if identified as a garaduño or “long hair”, a clear holdover of anti-jipismo sentiment.

¹ Pinochet then took power, installing a military dictatorship that would last until 1990 and was responsible for the torture and disappearance of at least 3,000 citizens.
Sadly, the *Movimiento Estudiantil* had not instigated major improvements in government-citizen relations and Tlatelolco would not be the last clash between student activists and the government to end in bloodshed. President Echeverría began an anti-insurgency campaign that saw the disappearance of over one-hundred leftist individuals throughout the 1970s. One of the most brutal examples occurred on June 10, 1971 when fifteen students were killed and hundreds wounded after an elite, overseas-trained army unit called “los Halcones” (the Falcons) opened fire on a group of protesting students. Also in September 1971, the Festival Rock y Ruedas de Avándaro—also known as the “Mexican Woodstock”—resulted in chaos and government repression after crowds grew uncontrollable at the celebration of rock and psychedelic music.²

As a result of this oppression, guerrilla groups began to appear both in the urban environment and in the outskirts of the city, spreading conflict across the country. The government and police responded by arresting, imprisoning, torturing, and disappearing “radical” suspects and while this was not carried out on the same level as the military dictatorships in the Southern Cone, they nonetheless engaged in strategies of social control that mirrored the same policies they publicly renounced. The official face of Mexico had little relation to the poverty, violence, and repression most Mexicans were experiencing. It is therefore not surprising that within this context the visual arts began to experience even higher levels of censorship and repression than in 1968 and their opportunities to show in both commercial galleries and cultural institutions further diminished. As Felipe Ehrenberg observed:

> The protective layer of nationalism, which in the first decades of the century had been successfully nurtured by artists and intellectuals as a means to rebuild a country damaged by civil war and had led to enormous government support to education and culture, had crumbled into meaningless official rituals…The arts carbon-copied the situation. Musicians, artists, writers, dancers, [and] thinkers of every sort…drifted along aimlessly. Castaways from government patronage that

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grew leaner as they became meeker, they had been unable to stimulate the official infrastructure required to sustain a cultural production that could satisfy a developing nation.³

However, this did not cause artists to retreat back to creating government approved paintings and sculptures, rather it facilitated more creative approaches to circumventing and drawing attention to these problematic, repressed conditions. I would argue the impulse to form groups among artists was as much a form of rebellion as it was to take directly to the streets in protest.

This chapter will reexamine and challenge previously proposed narratives, such as the rupture of 1968, and explanations for the explosion of artist groups in the 1970s not only within the context of Mexico’s lack of cultural infrastructure as described by Ehrenberg, but also within the longer tradition of “Mexican conceptualism.” Accordingly, I address the most significant artistic debates that served as catalysts for the Grupos to form and make their presence known in Mexico and abroad. This chapter also examines in detail interventions carried out by one of the earliest Grupos, Proceso Pentágono, which continued to utilize cultural institutions, such as the INBA, and biennial style exhibitions as a platform for critique, carrying out actions aimed at challenging definitions of the art object and at exploiting the possibility for artistic expression to expose political abuses and repression of democratic freedoms. Moreover, these examples support an alternative narrative for Mexican art in the 1970s, one that I argue saw a flourishing of international networks and experimentation rather than a shrinking of the neo-avant-garde under difficult political and economic circumstances. This discussion is framed by the developments towards conceptualism and collective practice from the 1960s, carrying the

proverbial torch passed on from progenitors like Jodorowsky and Cuevas to the members of the Salón Independiente, many of whom taught or mentored the artists associated with the *Grupos*.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of how, when, and why the *Grupos* began to form in the first half of the 1970s and why their appearance has come to be understood as an artistic movement and/or phenomenon to examine whether or not this is an accurate picture and to question the current narrative. Here, I argue for overlooked impulses (generated in the 1960s but not necessarily tied to 1968) that also may account for the “sudden” appearance of artists groups. The use of the ephemeral strategies of infiltration in particular achieved even greater relevancy in this new era of repression and censorship and stood in strong dialogue with international developments in conceptual art and institutional critique. For example, and as is described later, Felipe Ehrenberg maintained a significant presence in the Mexican art scene from afar while living in England. With his 1973 exhibition, *Chicles, chocolates, cacahuates…* (*Gum, Chocolates, Peanuts*), Ehrenberg managed to insert his newly adopted theories on art and life (now shaped by his experiences with the artists of DIAS and Fluxus) into the Mexican context while continuing to engage in institutional critique.

Central to my argument is also a reconsideration of actions credited to the artists that would comprise one of the earliest and arguably most influential of the *Grupos*, Grupo Proceso Pentágon (GPP) officially formed in 1976, though its founding members (Víctor Muñoz, Antonio Hernández Amezcua, and Carlos Finck) began collaborating as a group in 1973. The artistic actions carried out by this group serve to expand our understanding of their use of intervention and intentional critique beyond socio-political events. They developed an (arguably) unique form of institutional critique, as identified historian Rubén Gallo, but here I will challenge this contention by framing GPP within the longer history of conceptualisms in Mexico.
Here, I point to two watershed actions that served to disrupt traditional exhibition formats and definitions of art, *A nivel informativo (On an Informational Level...)* (1973) and *Proceso Pentágono*, a project presented at the X Paris Youth Biennial in 1977. Imbedded within this reconsideration of GPP are references to contemporaneous projects inside and outside of Mexico that shared similar points of view, particularly the work of Felipe Ehrenberg, who joined the group in 1976, as well as comparisons and links that have previously not been examined in order to position key projects within a broader history of institutional intervention.

**COME TOGETHER: (MIS)UNDERSTANDING THE “GRUPOS PHENOMENON”**

The timeline for the emergence of the Grupos is relatively nebulous, though it is generally accepted that the phenomenon began around 1972 and lasted until roughly 1982, when most of the groups had already disbanded. In the wake of 1968 and responding to the continued lack of critical artistic dialogue within the contemporary Mexican art market and systems, working in groups or collectives and conceptual experimentation became key tenets of the propositions supplied by the Grupos. Despite the urgency for social change expressed by workers and students during the *movimiento*, little changed in the socio-political landscape of Mexico when the first groups began to emerge.

Alvaro Vázquez Mantecón identifies the following list as the “most important” of the groups, though an exhaustive list of all groups that formed is nearly impossible to reconstruct: Tepito Arte Acá, Proceso Pentágono, Mira, Suma, Germinal, Taller de Arte e Idealogía (TAI), El Colectivo, Tetradero, Março, Peyote y la Compañía, No-Grupo, Taller de Investigación Plástica (TIP) and Fotógrafos Independientes. The groups included here represent the most cohesive and

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arguably most visible examples of collectives that put into action many of the artistic and political theories circulating at the time. Most of these groups grew out of classroom experiences or informal discussions circulating in and around the major art schools in Mexico City: La Esmeralda, the Instituto de Investigaciones Esteticas (IIE) at the UNAM, and the Academy of San Carlos. Some engaged an art related to neighborhood culture, others connected to the Student Movement making posters, banners, flyers, painting walls, they generated popular graphics and were committed and they reclaimed public space to work in the streets and public plazas.

In his “reconsideration” of the Grupos for the La era de la discrepancia catalogue, Vázquez Mantecón highlights that most of the Grupos members were very young (children to teenagers) when the events of 1968 transpired and were therefore more directly responding to events that unfolded in the years after. While 1968 undoubtedly shaped the course of conceptual art in Mexico, I challenge the narrative that all Grupos formed and made work in reaction to these events when in fact these impulses began earlier than 1968 and networks of Mexican artists had already expanded well beyond the geographic boarders of Mexico. Conceptual actions and interventions became increasingly valid and prescient forms of artistic expression in the 1970s as political regimes across Latin America grew ever more repressive and violent. Latin American countries in particular experienced an explosion of conceptualisms around this time, marching towards what some artists and theorists (Juan Acha in particular) would begin to identify as a pan-Latin American artistic identity, or Latinamericanismo. While I do not argue for or against the notion of a shared Latin American artistic identity, this determination is instructive when

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5 Vázquez Mantecón, 197.

6 See: Acha, Juan. “Por una nueva problemática artística en Latinoamérica,” Artes Visuales 1 (Winter 1974), 4-6. Acha is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four of this dissertation.
considering the complicated context under which conceptualisms took hold in Mexico as there were numerous factors, local and international, leading to their unique take on the potential for conceptual art.

This presents an important acknowledgement that the *movimiento de los Grupos* as it is often labeled cannot accurately be described as a *movement* given the sheer variety in ideological stances not to mention aesthetic interests across the groups. The term “phenomenon” has also been evoked to describe the flourishing of groups throughout the 1970s. Writing in 1985, Dominique Liquios explains,

> If...the word ‘phenomenon’ is generally used, it is because it becomes impossible to find a more significant term to summarize artistic manifestations that only have in common certain conceptions of visual production and the collective work this implies.\(^7\)

Perhaps, then, it is more accurate or more useful to consider the Grupos as a series of initiatives emanating from shared experiences and concerns, albeit with dramatically different goals and results. To consider the Grupos as a singular, cohesive movement is not only reductive, it also detracts from the tremendous diversity of platforms and practices present across the groups.

For example, in a 1989 article, Ehrenberg identifies two main trends among the Grupos: those artists that were in dialogue with international movements and then those that coincidently mirrored similar tendencies found in the South America (Hélio Oiticica, Antonio Días, Diego Barboza, Carlos Zerpa, among others):

> Once again these dichotomies reflected the schizoid character of our culture...groups like Marco and Tetrahedro- roughly followed the international vanguard though with curious nationalist twists; whereas groups like Tepito Arte

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Acá and Peyote and Compañía began building a conceptually regional semiotic based on references to common Latin American heritage.8

I argue that while it is tempting to begin to categorize the various Grupos based on shared themes or approaches as the above curators and artists have, there was a schism between those highly polemical groups that considered themselves to be kin to “cultural workers” (and intentionally functioned together more like unions) and those groups that were comprised of individual artists utilizing power in numbers as a means for creating spaces for experimentation and critical approaches to art making, their tendency to group together as much a reflection of international trends.

The Grupos “phenomenon” is most always discussed in terms of the creation and contentious short existence of the Frente Mexicano de Grupos Trabajadores de la Cultura, 1979-1980), an event that suspiciously mirrored problems that the Salón Independiente had confronted years earlier. It is therefore also necessary to begin to re-contextualize those projects that are often discussed as part of the Grupos but that occurred years before the Frente. The actual projects produced by these artist groups have primarily been discussed by Liquios, Alberto and Cristina Híjar, and others as evidence of individual groups’ ideological differences or simply as proof of their existence rather than on their contributions to artistic experimentation in the period. Accordingly, I do not seek to define or redefine the terminology that has been used to capture this period, but rather examine watershed examples of conceptualisms outside of notions of phenomena and movements and within the specific context of their relationship to art as an institution.

8 Ehrenberg, “East and West,” 44.

It is reasonable to conclude that Ehrenberg is referencing the two primary art theorists that directly influenced and worked with many of the Grupos, Juan Acha and Alberto Híjar.
The first comprehensive exhibition of the work of the Grupos took place during June-August 1985 at the Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil in Mexico City and was sponsored by the INBA. Titled *De los Grupos los individuos: Artistas Plásticos de los Grupos Metropolitanos (From the Groups, the Individuals: Plastic Artists of the Metropolitan Groups)*, this exhibition and accompanying catalogue attempted to explain the surge of artists collectives and groups in the 1970s and provide some contextualization of their works. But here, I will return to this early attempt at a comprehensive history as that in it, many of the most important subtleties surrounding the “formation” of the Grupos have been lost, particularly with respect to those groups that maintained a commitment to plastic experimentation that often superseded their socio-political concerns. Indeed, many of the groups’ projects and influences extended far beyond community activism and political protest and into art-centric discourses of conceptualism both local and global.

Only twelve of the multitude of extant or former groups were included in the exhibition, however artist Dominique Liquios began to untangle the differences between various ideologies, projects and strategies in her catalogue essay. Significantly she introduces the notion that there was a first and second wave within the Grupos “phenomenon.” I would argue that the attempt to define a first and second wave or generation within the groups is highly problematic, as many of their chronologies and projects overlap and not all of their work was focused on political objectives, creating what would now fall under the rubric of “Public Art.” Liquios identifies three shared concerns among the groups: the population explosion and urban growth in Mexico City, failure in the educational system, and the increasingly violent and repressive socio-political conditions in Mexico, Central America, and the Southern Cone. I argue that missing from this list is the drive towards experimentation and challenges to existing definitions of art and its

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9 From 1983-1985, Liquios, an artist herself, was a member of the group Atentemente, La Dirección.
related systems, a point that has been lost to focuses on chronological reconstructions and political readings of the period.

Additionally problematic in this early attempt at creating a cohesive history is that the *De los Grupos, los individuos* exhibition focused heavily on those groups that worked primarily in graphics and new forms of mural making. While it is understandable given the need for visuals in an art exhibition, it was also most likely easier to utilize the groups that produced some kind of objects, rather than those that worked in interventions, ephemeral actions, or performances, thereby promoting an incomplete rendering of a Grupos history.

In his book *Conceptualism in Latin America: Didactics of Liberation*, Luis Camnitzer’s analysis of the Mexican contribution to conceptualism is limited in its focus and demonstrates how contemporary histories of this period have tended towards the privileging of Southern Cone artists. In his estimation, the Grupos were subject to a “late dawning awareness of U.S. ‘happenings’ and of an art movement called Fluxus” and he states several paragraphs later that some of “Grupo Pentágonó’s” activities “were more focused on environmental installations and happenings than on conceptualism”, ignoring the happenings produced by Mexican artists of the 1960s and a gross misunderstanding of just one of the many groups that were more than invested in conceptualism.\(^\text{10}\) His inclusion of Mexico appears as an afterthought, as his discussion is not comprehensive and fails to present any historical context or precedent for the Mexican case, despite the obvious presence of conceptualist impulses well before the emergence of the group movement.

Existing literature, such as Liquios’s *De los grupos, los individuos*, frequently cite artist collectives from the post-Revolutionary era as the "models" for the 1970s groups, bypassing any acknowledgement of 1960s progenitors that had also worked collectively (and more importantly)\(^\text{10}\)

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\(^{10}\) Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin America*, 80-81.
served as teachers, mentors, or localized guideposts to the younger artists (Jodorowsky, Felguérez, Hérsua, Ehrenberg, etc.). Moreover, even La era de la discrepancia while visually drawing parallels among these artists through their inclusion of their work in the same space, failed to explore explicitly the smaller threads unifying the two generations. This false parallel reinforces the concept that all of the Grupos took local/community issues to heart and formed solely in response to political and social concerns. While models like the Taller Gráfica Popular (1937-1980s) or the Sindicato de Pintores Escultores y Grabadores (1921-25) might easily compare to certain Grupos (TAI, Suma, or Tepito Arte Aca), as this chapter will demonstrate, many other groups formed in reaction to issues that directly related critiqued the art world and conceptualism was their weapon of choice, their impetus rooted in the local context of the 1960s and not an engagement of Mexican history, which always necessarily means Muralism.

In her early analysis of the Grupos, art historian Shifra Goldman, as explained by Vanessa Kam, comes to the conclusion that because Grupos artists worked with "non-object oriented art forms," they prove their "allegiance to the precepts of conceptual art" as they critique the art systems and art object as commodity, with the overall goal of "demystify[ing] the creative

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11 See: Liquios, 18-19.

12 Debroise and Medina’s work was the first true attempt to shift the history of the Grupos away from this longer historical context. Maris Bustamante (of No-Grupo) has also worked to re-imagine the multitude of potential sources for the development of the Grupos, identifying early 20th century Mexican circles such as the Estridentistas and the ¡30-30! Club as progenitors; see: Bustamante, “Non-Objective Arts in Mexico, 1963-83,” in Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas, ed. Coco Fusco (New York: Routledge, 2000), 225-240 and “Conditions, Roads, and Genealogies or Mexican Conceptualisms, 1921-1993,” in Arte ≠ Vida: Actions by Artists of the Americas, 1960-2000, ed. Deborah Cullen (New York: El Museo del Barrio, 2008), 134-151.
What is curious and ultimately reductive is Goldman's reading of this demystification as being solely related to Pop art and its criticism of commodity culture, when in reality this response was tied to a decade-long development towards forms of production not reliant upon institutional or gallery support. While it is true that several Grupos including No-Grupo and Peyote y la Compañía, did work in what might be termed a “Latin American Pop,” the reading of the Grupos as reflective of a Pop (or at best a neo-Duchampian) impulse Goldman's analysis, while perhaps germane to certain groups or projects, fails to contextualize adequately the increasing use of conceptual strategies and institutional critique among them.

**EHRENBERG’S CHICLES, CHOCOLATES, CACAHUATES, 1973**

Though voluntarily exiled in Europe, Ehrenberg continued to agitate the Mexican art community from afar, interjecting his localized critique into Mexican cultural systems even while working in England. A 1973 solo exhibition in the Galería José María Velasco (INBA) *Chicle, chocolate y cacahuates... (Chewing Gum, Chocolate, and Peanuts...)*, was comprised of an exhibition, several “events”, and an exhibition catalogue created at the Beau Geste Press. (Fig.47) Rather than circumvent the traditional framework of an exhibition entirely — as he had achieved with projects such as *Date with fate at the Tate...* and *Tube-O-Nauts*— Ehrenberg took advantage of more open-minded INBA directors, managing to slip through an exhibition that would test the limits of what a national cultural institution was willing to accept and promote as art.¹⁴

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¹⁴ Ehrenberg has referenced his frustration with the INBA for previously disallowing him to perform nude at the Sala Manuel M. Ponce, Palacio de Bellas Artes, this was not forbidden at the Galería Velasco, see:
When considered in its totality, the exhibition, also referred to as *Variedades garapiñadas*, presented a sort of summation of Ehrenberg’s activities in Europe to date, including documents from interventions carried out in London, his mail art, and experimental graphics. But the exhibition became notorious due to the performances or “events” Ehrenberg created for the project and the eventual censorship of his catalogue at the hands of the Mexican government. Art Historian Issa María Benítez Dueñas explains that the show: “ was really not just a summation of the past, but also a prefiguring of all facets of his future projects: widely publicized, his radical personality criticized the government and the social situation of the moment…”

But more than just criticizing the socio-political climate, I would argue Ehrenberg’s project presents another iteration of his continuing inquiry into the relationships between art and daily life and the definitions of art itself as a means of subverting norms of social contracts and assumed viewer/art/artist/institutional relations. Moreover, GPP, whom Ehrenberg would later join, have claimed this exhibition as highly influential to their development and desire to work with Ehrenberg upon his return to Mexico. Despite having been reviewed in *La Jornada* and the frequent referencing of the exhibition by contemporaneous artists, there is limited and mostly anecdotal literature about this project due to the fact the catalogue Ehrenberg produced was censored as will be discussed later. Surprisingly, this exhibition has never been analyzed in...
respect to Ehrenberg’s production nor the conditions under which it was produced, despite having been called the first exhibition of conceptual art in Mexico.\(^\text{17}\)

In his compendium of documents and descriptions of the Grupos, Alberto Híjar described one of the performances as a kind of transgressive depiction or imagining of the neighborhood life that exists just outside the gallery walls:

> There, candy sellers hawked their wares as the title of the exhibition suggests, while a doormat invited [visitors] to pass through the national colors and a large cloth covered with a series of pornographic prints about Hansel and Gretel where the witch pokes at the boy to see if he is ready for the pot. [The] public entered behind the curtain to look, despite a profusion of commercial signs [warning]: No Touching, No Trespassing, Restricted Area, and Danger. A finely dressed Ehrenberg, stuck in a bucket of polyethylene, fearlessly received all sorts of taunts up until there was a message written backwards and by someone obviously left-handed, he answered in the same way. This was in the 1970s, a conceptual event close to the provocation of the Happening, but without any suggestion or renouncing contemplation.\(^\text{18}\)

As with Jodorowsky’s efímeros pánicos, Ehrenberg’s series of “events” elicit parallels to the Happening, but while distinguishing the actions as something different. I would argue this is due to the decidedly political and institutional focus of actions by Ehrenberg and others during this period.


\(^{18}\) “Ahí, los dulceros vocaban su mercancía que daba nombre a la exposición, mientras un pisable invitaba a pasar encima de los colores patrios y a una gran tela cubría la serie de grabados pornográficos sobre Hansel y Gretel, donde la bruja tocaba al niño para saber si estaba listo para el caldero, con el público entrando tras el telón para ver pese a los profusos leteros comerciales de no tocar, prohibido el paso, zona restringida, peligro. Ehrenberg de etiqueta, metido en un cubo de polietileno, recibía impávido toda suerte de provocaciones hasta que a un recado escrito al revés por un evidente zurdo, respondió de la misma manera. Esto era en los sesenta, un evento conceptual cercano a la provocación del happening sin más sentido que la renuncia a la contemplación.”

Híjar incorrectly states that the exhibition took place in 1971: “Todo esto, luego de la inauguración en 1971 de su exposición Chicles, chocolates y cacahuates en la Galería José María Velasco, en el barrio popular de Peralvillo, cerca del Mercado de la Lagunilla y del legendario Tepito.” Híjar, Frentes…, 511.
One example of Ehrenberg’s early interventions took place at the Galería José María Velasco. The gallery was inaugurated in 1957 in the Tepito neighborhood in the heart of Mexico City as part of a larger project instituted by the INBAL (Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura) to provide greater access to the arts across the city. As has been noted elsewhere, the Galería José María Velasco was unique in that (like Escobedo at MUCA) the gallery’s director from 1958-85, Elena Olachea, promoted the gallery as a platform for young artists. Moreover, the barrio Tepito is one of the oldest sections of Mexico City and home to working class citizens and the largest black market in city. In addition to having supported many *Ruptura* artists in the 1950s and 60s, on September 28, 1973, the gallery sponsored and hosted the watershed conceptual project, *Conozca México visite Tepito*, which provided the bones for what would become the group, Tepito Arte Acá. (Fig.48) The gallery proved to be one of the few outlets of support for experimental art, but as the government funded it, not immune to censorship. As the artist has explained:

> Even though my propositions overflowed established boundaries…I was able to show in a few public institutions, most of them in other states, but only thanks to this or that specific director. Except for the time I startled the INBA with *Chicles, chocolates y cacahuates* (when nothing was photographed and when my work was first censored).

Ehrenberg has noted that he was particularly struck reading of Roland Barthes’s *Mythologies* (1957) soon after the performances or events in association with *Chicle, chocolate y cacahuates*, and was particularly by Barthes finding of meaning in everyday things and that “each object and gesture is susceptible to imposed meanings, and, nothing can resist that

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process.”21 *Mythologies*, a seminal text for postmodern studies, focuses specifically on the “transition from modernist contempt for mass culture to postmodernist valorization of popular culture” through the critique of bourgeois culture.22

Ehrenberg’s continued investigations of daily life aside, the *Chicles* exhibition is, perhaps, more important for what did not take place in the exhibition, but within the invisible realm of the institution, the INBA. One only need consult the following description by Alberto Híjar to understand that the almost-mythic performative aspects of the exhibition were perhaps more important than its actual contents:

Or with the events by Felipe Ehrenberg in the Palacio de Bellas Artes, scandalizing the public with masked men in the vestibule, like luchadores, while in the Sala Manuel M. Ponce he measured his partner Martha to see, for example, how many of his own noses would fit on her extended body, [which was] covered up after the authorities prohibited the display of nudity.23 (Fig.49)

Ehrenberg also measured his wife’s body using his nose, his ears, (counting 31) and his mouth (22 ½) leading Ehrenberg to proclaim:

Look, just like that, here I am doing this. This is also censored. Having hung my work conventionally would publically demonstrate that I have to behave and to be a good craftsmen, lest they quarrel among themselves.24


22 Marianne DeKoven, “Modern Mass to Postmodern Popular in Barthes’s Mythologies,” *Raritan* 18, no.2 (Fall 1998), 81-82.

23 “O con los eventos de Felipe Ehrenberg en el Palacio de Bellas Artes, para escandalizar al público del vestíbulo con enmascarados, como luchadores, mientras en la Sala Manuel M. Ponce medía a su compañera Martha para ver, por ejemplo, cuantas narices de él cabrían en su cuerpo extendido y cubierto ante la negativa de las autoridades de exhibirlo desnudo,” Híjar, *Frentes...,* 511. Her body measured twenty-eight “noses.”

“Another one of the actions purportedly produced for the consisted of twelve luchadores (Mexican wrestlers) milling around the space while holding flashlights; their performance lasted for the duration of their batteries.” Ehrenberg, “Chronologies 1955-1960, in *Manchuria*, 153.

An article that appeared in *Excélsior* the day after this final series of “events” more explicitly refers to the INBA’s censorship and the specific components of the intervention which pushed the institution to the edge (and that uncoincidentally echo some of Jodorowsky’s earlier strategies): After having played a recording for an hour prior to the action, Ehrenberg:

…began to undress, taking out objects while speaking incoherent words that had nothing to do with one another. When he was left only in a bathing suit, black satin, and ensuring that this act had been censored by the INBA, someone began to attach fine threads to Ehrenberg’s body and passed them into the hands of friends in the audience and in the forum. He called this “The Friends”…

But the numerous performances were not the only component of Ehrenberg’s project to garner negative attention from the INBA. The exhibition catalogue, bearing evidence of Ehrenberg’s submersion in the BGP, was distributed in Mexico, however, according to the artist, a government official named Jorge Birbiesca destroyed seventy-five percent of the catalogues for containing newspaper articles featuring the name of Luis Echeverría (and presumably in an unfavorable context and light). Ehrenberg has explained,

I still remember the bitter taste of censorship during those years. Jorge Birbiesca censored my exhibition and destroyed 75% of the catalogues in the office of his boss, Jorge Hernández Campos: it contained newspaper articles —pages on which the name Luis Echeverría appeared.

Censorship became an increasingly prominent reality for artists, musicians, writers, and other intellectuals seeking to produce work that did not fit nationalist discourse. Censorship, particularly under President Díaz Ordaz became one of the first lines of defense for a government attempting to quell growing dissatisfaction and anger over economic disparity,

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27 Ibid.
democratic freedoms, repressive and conservative family lives, and eventually the overhauling of antiquated bureaucracy and organization in the education system.

PROCESO PENTÁGONO BEFORE PROCESO PENTÁGONO

The first iterations of what would later become Grupo Proceso Pentágono (GPP) began in 1973 by Carlos Finck, José Antonio Hérnandez Amezcua, and Víctor Muñoz shortly after the U.S.-backed military coup in Chile. Their collaboration also coincided with the growing, yet still unofficial Dirty War in Mexico leading them to engage a strategy of intervention and infiltration that would serve as an important guiding principle for the artists associated with the Grupos. Proceso Pentágono was, according to Shifra Goldman, anti-establishment by nature, yet there has been very little critical analysis of the group and the extent literature has focused primarily on chronicling its genesis and dissolution, including brief descriptions of their projects as they relate to the local politics of the time, but not necessarily the cultural context in which they were created and with little critical analysis of their projects. 28

Grupo Proceso Pentágono, as it officially became known in 1977, gained and lost members over the years and accordingly, many factual inaccuracies have been published and reproduced. 29 The group loosely formed in 1973 by Carlos Finck, José Antonio Hérnandez


29 Carlos Aguirre, Rafael Doniz, Lourdes Grobet, Miguel Ehrenberg, and Rowena Morales join later. Like Felipe Ehrenberg, Lourdes Grobet is an important bridge figure when considering international networks of conceptualisms. Widely known as a photographer and conceptual and environmental installation artist, Grobet had spent time studying in London (1968-1970) and in Paris (1973-75). Before she made contact with like-minded European artists, Grobet had also been influenced to experiment with these kineticism and installation art through her work with Mathias Goeritz and Manuel Felguérez while studying painting at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City. She first exhibited her environmental installations in 1970 at the Galería Jack Miscrachi, called Serendipiti. For this exhibition, Grobet demonstrated an interest in the use of shock as a strategy for activating her constructed and installations that stood much in line with Jodorowsky's notion of the spectacle and the collapsing of art and life in Panic theory. In a series
Amezcua, and Víctor Muñoz; perhaps the group’s most notorious member, Felipe Ehrenberg, did not join until his return to Mexico from England in 1974. (Fig.50) Ehrenberg was soon joined by others, like Lourdes Grobet, in Proceso Pentágono’s most active years, which lasted until roughly 1980. A frequent strategy of these groups, their origin story is part fact part mythic invention. While Ehrenberg was not part of the A nivel informativo … cycle, his own 1973 exhibition, also sponsored by the INBA, Chicles, chocolates, cacahuates… was absorbed into history of GPP’s founding, purportedly for having shared not only the same physical space, but for Ehrenberg’s critique of systems: “The agency of the [Gallery] José María Velasco [INBA] presented in this 1973…a show of the Neologist (he [included] that, for the record) Felipe Ehrenberg; that was when first contact was made, because he was also challenging systems.”

Of constructed environments that included false oscillating floors, a room with intestine-like pieces of cloth and doll parts hanging from the ceiling, photomontages of military repression, mirrored rooms that imitated literal and psychological detentions, etc., all intended, like Jodorowsky's ephemerals, to shock the audience out of complacency, force them to interact with the space, and also like the 1973 projects of Ehrenberg and Proceso Pentagono, ostensibly gain awareness on a deeper level of the social issues that plaguing contemporary society.

After a solo exhibition of politically charged work at the Academy of San Carlos in 1978, Carlos Aguirre attracted the attention of the GPP members and subsequently he and Rowena Morales began working as part of the group. Amorales, an artist and son of Morales and Aguirre, has recalled: “La asociación de mis padres con este grupo de artistas la recuerdo como uno de los momentos más intensos de mi niñez…Tanto mi padre como mi madre, a raíz de su interacción con dicho grupo, desarrollaron posiciones artísticas que en su momento fueron consideradas brillantes, él en tanto a su crítica intelectual de la historia de la revolución mexicana y su comparación ideológica con los sucesos actuales que condujo estas ideas a un posterior desvirtuamiento…”. See: Carlos Amorales, “Ausentes: Carlos Amorales sobre La era de la discrepancia. Arte y cultura visual en México 1968-1997,” Ramona web. Accessed November 12, 2013. http://www.ramona.org.ar/node/20996.


Once GPP is officially formed, the language surrounding their projects takes on a bureaucratic form, highlighting the intended parallels between their working as a group or artists exposing information that bureaucracies normally do not disclose.
Proceso Pentágono’s relationship to 1960s agent provocateurs has been downplayed or omitted from discussions of their projects. This group in particular has been absorbed into the dominate narrative that views the Grupos solely as an extension of the political crisis of 1968 and not the artistic innovations they mirrored or rebelled against. As is the case for most of the groups, these few texts present at best analysis of only parts of the group’s history and at worst, incorrect facts and a glossing over of the radical nature of their projects and their unique contributions to the global use of interventionist and neo-conceptual strategies. In fact, sociology professor Edward J. McCaughan describes the group movement as being one and the same as the 1968 student movement: he simultaneously suggests that the were “very much an outgrowth of 1968” and their work concerned with “the conditions of urban life in Mexico City”, “the sociopolitical situation in Mexico and Latin America,” and the “revolutionary struggles in Central America and the military dictatorships of the Southern Cone,” and then suggesting that the Grupos represent a historically unprecedented adoption of international conceptual art trends.\footnote{Edward J. McCaughan, “Gender, Sexuality, and Nation in the Art of Mexican Social Movements,” \textit{Nepantla} 3, no.1 (2002), 110.} Unable to reconcile the lack of a coherent Grupos ideology or unified conceptual program, McCaughan concludes that the flourishing of “Happenings, performances, installations and various forms of conceptual art” as a reaction to the \textit{mexicanidad} “associated with the PRI’s hegemony,” thereby ignoring the broader historical precedent the Grupos knowingly inherited.\footnote{Ibid., 110-111.}

There have been some discrepancies published in regards to the date of this exhibition. Benítez Dueñas states that the exhibition took place in 1974 either as a factual error or in confusion that Ehrenberg was still in England until 1974, see Issa Maria Benitez Dueñas, “Reconstructing Emptiness and Recovering Space: The Conceptual Ehrenberg,” in \textit{Manchuria}, 27.
The significance of Proceso Pentágono’s actions throughout the 1970s extend beyond the limiting socio-political concerns often shared by the Grupos post-1968. As will be demonstrated, GPP was equally committed to the continuing use of ephemeral installations and performances both inside and outside official cultural channels built upon earlier efforts by Goeritz, Jodorowsky, Cuevas, etc. and the early iterations of “Grupos” that formed around 1968 to also blow apart institutional control of artistic output and to critique the definitions of art (and the art world) itself. Moreover, the selection of GPP is a practical one when considered in tandem with the overall mission of this project to provide a critical reading of defining case studies of conceptualisms in Mexico as their projects have been better recorded and defended than other groups. What is significant is the primacy of alternative vectors for education outside of the universities and cultural institutions, a continued spirit of collaborative or group efforts that do not share the same political significance of unionization seen in Grupos like TAI or Tepito Arte Aca.

Within the case studies that follow, several themes may readily be viewed as a contiguous of those discussed in the first two chapters: the anti-exhibition or “Trojan horse” style form of institutional critique and the use of ephemeral approaches, but these would take on a more didactic and even aggressive nature reflective of their increasingly repressed conditions as the Dirty War gained steam; kidnappings, torture rooms, and interrogations became the new countercultural revolution for the Grupos artists. Moreover, the group was later joined by Ehrenberg, thus demonstrating his place of significance in bridging not only European conceptualisms to Mexico and vice-versa, but also as transitional figure from the 1960s to the 1970s. By the late 1960’s and into the 1970’s, as Alberro explains, artists sought to “expose the institution of art as a deeply problematical field, making apparent the intersections where
political, economic, and ideological interests directly intervened and interfered in the production of public culture.”

Karen Benezra has recently summarized Proceso Pentágonos “task” as: “…one of artistic investigation and experimentation, positioning itself in explicit opposition to the state’s bureaucratic administration of culture and the formal conventions and liberal ideology it supported.” I would argue this assessment is significant for two reasons: one, is that it acknowledges that the group was engaged in artistic experimentation for the sake of progressing culture, not just as a political reaction and second, it fails to complicate the group’s actual relationship to bureaucratic agencies such as the INBA, ignoring their ultimate dependency on such systems to critique society at large.

Several nods have been made to the importance of artistic development and the relationship between radical artists and ruling cultural institutions in Proceso Pentágonos work, yet none has adequately examined the conditions that lead to the artist’s employment of institutional critique beginning in 1973 and is one of the most significant contributions of the Grupos to the continuation of a Mexican neo-avant-garde. For instance, Benezra has also concluded that while the group itself frequently referenced the seemingly unbridgeable gap between their work and the cultural powers that be, that it is “important to remember that the Groups’ brief history as a cogent movement was also strongly punctuated by its institutional appearances.” However, she singularly points to the 1977 Paris Youth Biennial, discussed later

33 Alberro, 7.
34 Karen Benezra, “Introduction to Felipe Ehrenberg’s ‘In Search of a Model for Life,” ARTMargins 1, no.1 (2012), 120.
35 Ibid. 122.
in this chapter, as the spur for this type of practice, despite the longer tradition of battling cultural institutions in the country even within the groups’ body of work.

In Luis Camnitzer’s brief discussion of Proceso Pentágono, he plainly mischaracterizes and oversimplifies the group’s relationship to conceptualism stating it was “…more focused on environmental installations and happenings than on conceptualism…” and that their usage of materials: “…strings, stones, papers, and drawings of figures…and in later years, they expanded to include photographs and mirrors…” Somehow in Camnitzer’s estimation, the selection of materials precludes their work from truly being part of the Latin American conceptualism canon. Yet Camnitzer fails to draw the connection that many of Tucumán Arde’s projects did employ installations (including string and photographs) as well as street interventions, as Camnitzer illustrates and discusses at length in his two chapters dedicated to the group and it’s “aftermath” under which he unjustifiably places Mexico.

The only pointed, scholarly discussion of Proceso Pentágono’s is an essay by Rubén Gallo, professor of Latin American literature at Princeton, which frames a few of the group’s projects within the context of a globalized, post-War shift towards collective artistic practice. While this focus is understandable given the essay’s inclusion in an anthology dedicated to this very subject, Gallo’s essay also presents a narrow reading of the cherry-picked projects he includes in his discussion. Moreover, there are factual inaccuracies presented in his essay, from erroneously stating that Felipe Ehrenberg was a founding member of the group, to failing to clearly delineate and even misreading the nature of the group’s projects and their relationship to the Mexican artistic context, suggesting that they were merely rejecting the Ruptura.37

36 Camnitzer, Conceptualism in Latin American Art, 81.

37 See Kam, 9.
While Gallo rightly attempts to contextualize the group’s drive towards collectivization within the local Mexican political climate as well as that of Latin America at large in the 1970s, he begins his essay by referencing the long tradition of collective artistic practice (Muralism and the Taller de Gráfica Popular) and while he does make mention of the importance of Student Movement in revitalizing this impulse, he fails to acknowledge examples of artist groups and collaborations (or collectives) that existed before the formation of Proceso Pentágono in 1973 and in some sense oversimplifies the complicated history of Mexican art’s relationship to collectivism across the 20th century. In Gallo’s estimation (as has been the case for other histories of the Grupos), Mexican artistic production between the end of Muralism and the uprisings of 1968 was decidedly apolitical, introspective, and devoid of transdisciplinary or radical impulses. In fact, Gallo only mentions this “in between” period with one paragraph in which he asserts:

During the 1950s and 1960s Mexican artists expressed little interest in collectivism. These two decades saw the rise of the ‘generation of rupture,’ a group of younger artists…who broke with muralism and embraced both abstract painting and the myth of the single author. If murals were painted by collectives, the works of the rupture were painted by individuals; if the former aspired to represent the Mexican nation, the latter focused merely on the painter’s subjective experiences. This shift to abstraction was a return to the Romantic myth of the creative genius. 38

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Ehrenberg has erroneously been identified by multiple sources as having participated in the pre-GPP projects at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in 1973, though this factual error is certainly due to the typically confounded history of the groups. Camnitzer suggests that "Grupo Pentágono" claims to be the oldest of the Grupos, yet he fails to identify when they formed, why they formed, and who its members were. He only refers to Proceso Pentágono as “an enlarged version” of Grupo Pentágono that, “assembled especially for [the] occasion” of the X Paris Youth Biennale in 1977. See: Camnitzer, Conceptualism in Latin America, 80-81.

Gallo’s assessment rests on the group’s “fascination” with collectivism in three themes, which he also argues were shared by all of the groups: “…the celebration of the street, the focus on information, and the Trojan-horse strategy of institutional critique.”\(^{39}\) (indeed they had already experienced the frustration and eventual failure of the Salón Independiente), Proceso Pentágonon attempted to use and infiltrate this system from within, engaging what Gallo likens to a “Trojan Horse” strategy of institutional critique, one he arguably identifies as being original.\(^{40}\)

As will be demonstrated here, that Proceso Pentágonon’s “fascination” with collective practice was not just born out of political/financial necessity, but that these artists were truly invested in exploring new tendencies in artistic production that would push the arts scene further away from the debates surrounding the Mexican School. Moreover, I argue that unlike many other Grupos, Proceso Pentágonon did not function as a collective as the members always maintained individual identities and practices, a factor that not only distinguishes GPP within the standard narrative of the Grupos but also points to the differing ideologies behind producing art within a group framework. As freedom of expression (artistic and otherwise) remained under attack in Mexico at the beginning of the 1970s, the shift towards collectivization or grouping was not only practical for artists (strength in numbers), but also strategic and politically savvy. They explained that,

> [W]orking in a group, that is to say as a collective, was a necessary step to confront both the state’s bureaucratic apparatus that administers cultural life and the elitists mafias which consciously or unconsciously reproduce the dominant ideology.\(^ {41}\)

\(^{39}\) Gallo, 175.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.

\(^{41}\) “Grupo Proceso Pentágonon,” in Hijar, Fréntes, 318.
It is important to acknowledge, as few do, that hardly any of the groups were actually proposing a full break with cultural institutions. Rather, propositions such as those with GPP fall under the category of what Alexander Alberro has designated as a “prescriptive critique of the museum as institution”, one in which “criticism stood outside the objects they criticized, asserting norms against facts—offering judgments from a particular point of view (or criteriological position) seeking to “…radically transform the dominant art institutions.”42

*A NIVEL INFORMATIVO AND THE PALACIO DE BELLAS ARTES AS SITE OF INTERVENTION*

For their first group exhibition in 1973 the Finck, Muñoz, Amezcua, all students at ENAP, engaged a strategy of intervention and infiltration that would serve as an important guiding principle for the artists involved in the group trend and demonstrates a continuation of conceptual modes from the 1960’s.43 *A Nivel informativo* (*On an informational level*) was a multi-part exhibition comprised of installations and actions, which took place over a fifty-day cycle between July 24th to September of 1973 at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, home of the INBA. The cycle was divided into two phases: the first, working with an empty gallery and the second, an exhibition of the sum of their collective actions, installations, and ideas. Víctor Muñoz has indicated that the opening of the exhibition was used to mark the transition from one phase to


another, but it also suspiciously echoes the unconventional manner in which Ehrenberg structured *Chicle, chocolate, cacahuates*...several months prior.\(^44\)

Rather than combating the existing systems of display that were linked to the government by establishing alternative spaces (indeed they had seen the frustration and failure of the Salón Independiente) the artists attempted to turn the system on itself by engaging in what Rubén Gallo identifies as a unique form of institutional critique.\(^45\) Unlike artist groups in the United States that took to the streets after first showing within institutional structures, Proceso Pentágono first acted in the street and utilized these interventions as a means of breaking the museum or gallery open. Infiltration here served as a metaphor for the larger issues facing not only Mexican artists, but the Mexican people who had been dazzled by the idea of a Mexican “democracy”, expansion, modernization, and a global economic presence, and presumably had been lulled into a state of amnesia regarding the dark realities of the political climate.

The Bellas Artes and its surrounding area provided a particularly loaded site for Proceso Pentágono to stage their first interventions, given the institution’s frequently contentious yet often forgiving policies towards experimental art discussed throughout the previous chapters. But here, with Proceso Pentágono the physical site of the Bellas Artes becomes more significant than the institutional framework artists like Jodorowsky or the even the Salón Independiente were attempting to combat. Not only is the physical space a beaux-arts style building that was the last

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\(^44\) “A nivel informativo es un proceso con una duración aproximada de 50 días. Lo hemos dividido en dos fases, la primera, se inicia con la galería vacía, terminando en el montaje total de lo que se presenta. La línea intermedia entre una fase y otra es la inauguración. La segunda fase cubre las actividades y el resumen en la elaboración física. A Nivel informativo es objeto y comportamiento.” in *A nivel informativo*. Exh. Cat. Palacio de Bellas Artes, INBA, 1973.

\(^45\) Gallo, 175. As Gallo notes, Lucy Lippard was the first to identify this form of intervention with respect to “Trojan horse” style projects by activist artists in her article “Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power,” in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984).
great building project of the Porfiriato, but it also houses many important examples of Mexican Muralism. (Fig.51) The building looms large and stands apart from much of its surroundings in the Centro. The marble halls and illustrious appearance of the building have little relation to the busy, congested, and crowded environment surrounding it. The Bellas Artes represented the old guard, like the hallowed halls of some great monument to a Revolution that was never realized.

The Palacio de Bellas Artes (constructed during the Porfiriato, and first inaugurated as a theater in 1934) is built of imported Italian marble, a sugary and behemoth monument was intended to signal Mexico’s economic and social progress at the turn of the century by injecting the Centro with a good dose of European style. But in reality, the project physically displaced the many people that lived in, worked in, or otherwise inhabited the Centro Histórico. This problem grew with the urbanization projects associated with the Mexican “Economic Miracle” (c.1940-1968), which not only changed the physical landscape of the city, but also the manner in which the city was traversed; cars (owned mostly by the wealthy) took precedence over pedestrians (the every day man) as highways were built and avenues expanded.

By the 1973 when *A nivel informativo*... was produced, not only was the physical site historically contentious, the institutional history and contemporary direction of the INBA had become a battle ground for Mexican artists and critics. As was discussed in detail in the previous chapter, in June of 1968, the INBA issued an open call for the “Exposición Solar,” a show intended to showcase contemporary Mexican art during the upcoming Olympic games. Yet the official “open” call was suspicious to established Mexican artists that understood that cultural institutions were invested primarily in presenting the official, state-sanctioned face of contemporary Mexican art, one that overlooked or even negated the existence of experimental,

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46 See Chapter Two of this dissertation.
progressive artistic practice in favor of promoting abstraction, figurative or neo-figurative painting, or work that still made reference to folkloric or nationalistic themes.

Many artists and particularly art students like those in Proceso Pentágono that lived through 1968 felt as if they were being held hostage by the very cultural institutions that were meant to support and protect their artistic expression. As repression of most all counter and subcultures continued, there were even fewer spaces for experimental artists to display their work and few commercial galleries to support them. As Pilar García has assessed, while the artists that were against INBA and shows like the Exposición Solar did not directly reference wave of student movements growing both locally and internationally, their collective protest reflected an anti-institutional cultural climate running parallel to student protests of the 1968 Venice and São Paulo Biennials.\footnote{Pilar García de Germenos, “The Salón Independiente: A New Reading,” in \textit{La era de la discrepancia: arte y cultura visual en México, 1968-1997} (Mexico City: UNAM/Turner, 2006), 49.} This is supported by a series of letters and articles published by Ida Rodríguez Prampolini and Carla Stellweg at the time, that cautioned against the Biennial formats and their supposed open format and signaled the artists’ support by calling attention to their moves towards rejecting prizes and acceptance into such state-sponsored exhibitions. Moreover, due to the heated, violent, and paranoid climate post-1968, many artists that remained in Mexico had come to distrust one another as even the University system was in shambles.\footnote{For an excellent discussion of this issue see the DVD series: \textit{Sub-versiones de la memoria…60…70…México}. Pilar García and Rafael Ortega, dir. Disc 1-2, \textit{Agrupaciones Artísticas en la Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas, 1963-1971}, Centro de Documentación Arkheia, Museo Universitario Arte Contemporaneo, UNAM, 2011.} Under these conditions and despite many 1970s artists’s objections to the INBA, they were often left with little choice but to rely on the institution for even the most basic form of support. But this was not a strictly Mexican problem.
Alexander Alberro has noted that many artists across the globe that employed forms of institutional critique in the 1970s were:

juxtaposing the myths that the institution perpetuates with the network of social and economic relationships that actually structure it [and] they ultimately championed and advocated for the institution...

During the early part of the 1970s, the individual had become of greater concern than the masses within the social conscious, partially due to the disillusionment that occurred after the violence and mass protest of 1968 had failed to change much of the conditions for non-wealthy Mexicans. This mentality induced a further (and most likely intentional) ghettoization of the lower classes by the government itself.

That much of Mexico City’s art and cultural centers had been pushed out of the Centro Histórico and into newer and wealthier areas of the city, like Chapultepec Park and the Pedregal, was not lost on artists. This trend towards the individual or conversely the international/universal was also remained the official face of Mexican art much as it had before 1968: those artists most heavily invested in individual plastic experimentation were championed by the state (whether figurative or abstract), while alternative strategies that sought to directly connect with society or provide political commentary were shunned and censored, a lesson already learned from observing Jodorowsky’s activities and his censoring in Mexico during the 1960s.

Although A nivel informativo exhibition was technically supported by the government as an INBA-sponsored production, the works the group produced were intended to directly confront the veiled dichotomy between the art preserved within and the realities experienced by those existing and living outside the museum and they employed conceptual strategies to do so.

Proceso Pentágono titled the exhibition A nivel informativo... or On an Informational Level..., 49

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signaling a shift in contemporary artistic practice towards conceptualism; a desire to prioritize language over image. The group made plain their privileging of ideas over plastic investigations.

While INBA might have expected a traditionally formatted exhibition taking place neatly within the walls of the institution, Proceso Pentágono had very different plans for the show, which would simultaneously take place outside the Palacio, in an attempt to merge daily life with high art. Much like Hans Haacke’s proposal to expose the corporate investment in the artworld with MoMA Poll for the landmark 1970 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Information, A nivel informativo allowed the artists to function as “double-agents”, capable of simultaneously working within the institution to ultimately expose its shortcomings and failures.

While the execution of A nivel informativo was not entirely collaborative, the artists adopted an approach that relied upon conceptualizing as a group. According to a statement for the exhibition:

[Muñoz, Finck, and Hernández] each presented their results in separate spaces, aiming their formal solutions in the same direction, having the common denominator the challenging of society, of systems…and this had its origin in 1968.”

The work contained within the galleries was meant to activate the space as well as the viewers. Bound and gagged mannequins watching television were installed as a critique of the government with references to kidnapping and torture, but they were also intended to implicate the public in their own political immobilization and increasingly unquestioning compliance with information controlled by the government and distributed through mass communication.

Many of the resulting actions and installations that comprised A nivel informativo...directly comment upon the general ineptitude of bureaucratic and in the most

50 “…presentando cada quien sus resultados en espacios separados, apuntaban con sus soluciones formales hacia una misma dirección, teniendo como denominador común la impugnación a una sociedad, a un sistema…[esa] tuvieron su origen en 1968.”, Híjar, Frentes,322.
extreme cases, the darkest possibilities of bureaucracy left unchecked. What would become GPP was concerned about systems of control in general, but given the loaded historical and contemporary context of his host institution, one cannot ignore, as has surprisingly been the case, the connections to broader trends of institutional critique in the larger culture wars taking place across the globe. As it is beyond the scope of this project to discuss all of the components of the exhibition, a few have been singled out here for a detailed discussion as they are demonstrative of the group’s relationship to their conceptualist progenitors, their contemporaries locally and abroad, and their shared use of ephemeral interventions as a form of institutional critique.

**La mesa blanca, action, Amezcua, Finck, and Muñoz (w/ Guillermo Samperio, Jorge Reygadas, Orlando Menicucci, and Antonio Noyola)**

*La mesa blanca (The White Table) consisted first of an action performed on the opening day of the exhibition in a completely vacant gallery space in the Palacio (the Sala Internacional, then called the Galería Metropolitana). A white desk was placed in the center of the space and was accompanied by element typically found in an office: chairs, a typewriter, ashtrays, sketches and diagrams, files and papers. (Fig.52) Finck, Hernández Amezcua, and Muñoz inhabited the space, talking, planning, sketching and documenting the exhibition that was too occur, a “process” of unknown ends. The emphasis here is on the artistic process, Muñoz has since related the project to “process art”, rather than an attempt at collaboration in the name of political resistance.*

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51 Another installation in the exhibition, *La oficina* (credited to Antonio Hérnandez Amezcua), featured a faceless mannequin bound to a table where he is supposed to be available process official requests.

52 Guillermo Samperio, Jorge Reygadas, Orlando Menicucci, and Antonio Noyola are also credited as collaborators.

The critique here was more related to these artists continuing probe of how information is collected and distributed to the public, particularly in a time of repression not only under dictatorial regimes, but also in Mexico itself. Though the three artists essentially collaborated on the projects that were produced during the “White Table Sessions”, each artist, like No-Grupo would also later, retained their authorship over individual works. In La Mesa blanca, the public was invited to ask the artists for information, but reportedly remained largely bewildered by the suggestion to collaborate.\footnote{See GPP Binder, Archivo Ex-Teresa Arte Actual.} Fellow artists and friends also came by the “performance”, lending their own two-cents to proposed projects.\footnote{Muñoz and Grobet noted the outstanding contributions of Guillermo Samperio, Jorge Reygadas, Orlando Menicucci, and Antonio Noyol, naming them as collaborators.}

One of the more compelling interventions that comprised A nivel... was a graffiti tag or interrupted painting that was created by Hernández Amezcua on a mural sized wall and then installed in the galleries. (Fig.53) \textit{La Calle or Libertad pr...}, (Pr[ovisonal] Freedom) consisted only of text, wall, and bullet holes: the word libertad (freedom) loosely scrawled as if created by a protester on the street, but is then followed by an incomplete word, the letters “pr...” trail off into a dripping mess, presumably suggesting the act of creation was interrupted. Had the text been completed with provisional or “P”rovisional Freedom”), there is a logical connection to the disappearance of dissidents during and after 1968, but it also speaks to the provisional freedoms granted to artists within the context of the 1970s, the occasional freedoms that allowed for exhibitions such as \textit{A nivel informativo} to have taken place.

When considered within the context of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Libertad pr... also somewhat playfully addresses the continued presence of muralism as not only as plastic form, but also as political gesture. Throughout the 1960s and 70s, graffiti and street art were used by
artists across the globe to directly confront the public and the government by intervening in public space. Many of the Grupos such as Suma, had been heavily engaged in tactics of street art after having seen the positive effects of this type of practice within the graphics movement in 1968. Or, for example, in 1969 the rebellious guerrilla group from Uruguay, the Tupumaros set a precedence with their street intervention, *Bala (Bullet)* in which the artists circled and tagged bullet holes made in the walls of the University. (Fig.54) This use of graffiti stands in stark contrast to Hernandez Amezcua’s installation of street art within the confines of the institutional space; he has reversed the scenario, bringing the mural of the street into the hallowed halls of the same institution housing great murals by *los tres grandes* and more.\(^{56}\)

One of the only interventions to take place outside of the gallery walls was Carlos Finck’s *El hombre atropellado (A Man Run Over)*, which simulated a bloody, violent traffic accident on the busy Avenida del Cinco de Mayo in what Gallo describes as an “unorthodox action painting”.\(^{57}\) (Fig.55) A sheet of plastic, doused in red paint was placed directly onto a busy street, parallel to the Palacio. As cars drove by, they left a bloody trail of tire marks in their wake. Several members then asked spectators to describe their response to this event in a single word. Their answers were recorded on pieces of cardboard and arranged on the sheet of plastic and were later displayed inside of the Palacio.

This exquisite corpse representing a collective response by the Mexican people to the rapid modernization of Mexico City and the dangers this process had introduced to the everyday man.

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\(^{56}\) Connections to the critique of muralism become even more compelling give that the installation also bears striking conceptual similarities to a work produced one year prior by the Los Angeles art collective *Asco*. Asco also lampooned the Mural format and its dominance as a cultural signifier in the Chicano context with their interventions at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art and in the streets with *Walking Mural* in 1972 (like Felguérez in 63) and the *Instant Mural* in 1974.

\(^{57}\) Gallo, 171.
Gallo has acknowledged that the use of the street was the most significant focus of Proceso Pentágono’s project as the landscape of the city was becoming decidedly more urban and decentralized. The Parque Alameda is adjacent to the Palacio and therefore had long been an area for families to gather, couples to meet and share clandestine moments, or individuals to sit and read. At this time, it was mostly the wealthy that traveled by car and utilized the new system of freeways and roads that had been transposed over a city whose population was growing at such a fast rate city planners could hardly keep up. The average working person, however, was still dependent upon their own two feet to navigate the immense and congested streets.

Another component of the A nivel informativo... cycle, Finck’s installation El automóvil presented a more didactic critique of the changing urban landscape. A non-functioning car was installed in the galleries before a photomural of the Capital city, tires, and traffic lights; the car whose left-side door appears bullet riddled, had apparently been shot in the very same gallery. This interior installation dialogues with the installation by Hernández Amezcua, La Calle. The significance of directly intervening and engaging with the “man on the street” becomes a driving force in Proceso Pentágono’s work, but it is their desire to move the exchange of information and the dialogue it creates away from those official spaces and into the free, open work that is the street itself.

The Chilean conceptual artist Clemente Padín, a contemporary of GPP, successfully complicates the relationship between the public streets and artistic production, something the actions of A nivel informativo begin to address. He distinguishes between the political retaking of the street and the conceptual project of exposing and troubling codes and methods for

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58 This theme was also addressed by the group in a 1974 exhibition at the MUCA. Entitled Las Ratas, the piece featured live rats inside a scale model of Mexico City.

59 See: Muñoz and Grobet in GPP binder, Archivo Ex-Teresa Arte Actual.
distributing information beyond cultural signs, particularly those linked to the “urban”, to the museum, and to the gallery:

What is needed is to interfere with these expressions, especially their codes, and put them in the position to express contemporary problems. Not the way the current cultural system that manipulates symbolic expressions to perpetuate their structures within society by freezing the communication surrounding empty significations: the culture of “already taken”, of the Museum, the public library, the concert hall, the Institutes of Artistic Teaching (both public and private), etc.

Communication and the distribution of information were at the heart of much of the A nivel informativo exhibition, as has already been mentioned, and the explosion of mass media and the Mexican government’s monopolistic control over it was acutely addressed in Hernández Amezcua’s installation La Tele (The TV). Comprised of plaster human figures placed in rows of seats, their gazes fixed on a television monitor placed before them. At the back of room was a corridor constructed of mesh, which allowed visitors to view the television for themselves and allusions to the printed press on the walls and columns made from stacks of accumulating newspapers.  

Here, the museum as an institution is brought into dialogue with information as media, a theme that would grow more prescient and more obvious with the group’s first true collective work for 1977’s Pentágono, discussed here later.

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61 “Frente a un monitor de televisión, espectantes figuras de yeso acomodadas en una butaquería miran en todo momento la pantalla. En la parte posterior una malla ciclónica que da a un pasillo, permite a los espectadores ver lo que las figuras miran. Alusiones a la prensa impresa en muros y en columnas de periódicos amontonados.” GPP Notes, Archivo Ex-Teresa Arte Actual.
EL SECUESTRO AND KIDNAPPING AS ARTISTIC STRATEGY

The second ephemeral intervention to take place in the exhibition cycle was a kidnapping directly in front of the Palacio de Bellas Artes. Given their overt references to violence, censorship, and repression, the fake abductions could readily be interpreted as conceptual confrontations with dictatorial political regimes of Mexico and the Southern Cone, which had been done elsewhere. But in these two interventions, the critique of the Mexican art system, particularly the INBA’s continued commitment to produce biased, salon style and biennial exhibitions, was of equal significance and the artistic abduction served as a timely and effective foil to expose its failings.

The second intervention that comprised A nivel informativo... embodies more than just Proceso Pentágono’s concern for the Mexican social struggle, but it firmly plants the group’s work in contemporary dialogue with trends taking place in Europe and, more importantly South America. El Secuestro (Kidnapping) also took place directly outside the Palacio de Bellas Artes. For this intervention, several members of Proceso Pentágono positioned themselves within the crowd filling the small plaza in front of the Palacio. Muñoz and Finck then unexpectedly grabbed the third member (Hernández Amezcua), placing a sack over his head and “abducting” him- a staged abduction of an artist playing everyday man. Passers by were unaware that this was a staged event. (Fig.56) This action clearly references the kidnappings and disappearances that had become increasingly prevalent in Mexico and in South America, but more pertinent to this discussion is the fact that the installations within the gallery walls served more as a diversion to facilitate the production of the art occurring outside the institution.62

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62 Direct references to 1968 are also present: El ring, installation, 1973, Víctor Muñoz: Un ring en el que el alambre de púas ha sustituido a las cuerdas. En la lona dos costales de yute, pintados, con acompañados por otros objetos: zapatos, libros, pelo humano, otros costales suspendidos en torno al ring. Piezas que
On August 3-4, 1973, the Argentinian artist Marta Minujín also staged an abduction, but at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, playfully titled *Kidnappening.* Minujín was already well versed in the art of the happening, having already produced numerous events in Buenos Aires, San Francisco, Washington D.C., and New York. The 1973 kidnapping at MoMA was one of several institutional interventions the artists performed that year, their content growing more confrontational given the political situation back home in Argentina.

For *Kidnappening,* Minujín and an accomplice, with faces painted to resemble Picasso portraits, abducted and blindfolded two MoMA visitors, driving them around the city. As part of the actual exhibition component at MoMA, Minujín displayed response letters from the two “victims”: one expressing joy over the event and one expressing irritation at having to cover the costs of the long cab ride. Minujín, like Proceso Pentágono, understood the significance of not only of documenting the Performance, but also in still tying it to the physical gallery space or the institutional site. And like Minujín, there is a conflation of the increased state of surveillance, repression, and violence across Latin America with the critique of cultural institutions in promoting, veiling, or in other ways supporting these agendas.

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hacen referencia a la vida cotidiana, la violencia y la tortura interactúan con los elementos del ring, see: GPP Notes, Archivo Ex-Teresa Arte Actual.

63 The proliferation of the artistic kidnapping is not unexpected given the global rise of dictatorial regimes and such tactics, however, it is nonetheless a fruitful comparison. While here I focus on Minujín, there are many other examples that warrant further examination in another study. These include, but are not limited to: a 1978 “experimento urbano” by the group Taller de Investigación Plástica (TIP) in Morelia, Michoacan for which the artists planted a figure seated in a chair in a public plaza, his body bound by fabric and rope, see: “Taller de Investigación Plástica,” *Artes Visuales* 23, (January 1988). In 1978, another artist group, No-Grupo (which was active from 1976-1982), fake kidnapped the acclaimed Mexican abstract painter, Gunther Gerzso as part of an exhibition-homage also held at the Palacio de Bellas Artes. This action is discussion in relationship to Proceso Pentágono in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

64 Also related are *Soft Gallery* at the Rivkin Gallery, Washington D.C. in which the gallery was covered in two hundred mattress and *Artion,* a play on the Action art format at the Smithsonian Institution.
Yet Minujín’s work, unlike these works of what would become GPP, had more exposure and better popular reception. Perhaps this is due to Minujín’s own promulgation of her image, but it also points to the very different institutional support artists benefitted from in Argentina as opposed to Mexico. With the support of not only the privately funded Instituto di Tella, but also internationally known art historians and curator’s, like director Centro de Artes Visuales, Jorge Romero Brest, Minujín perhaps felt more open to exploiting, parodying, and indeed capitalizing on her critique of cultural institutions. Moreover, Minujín’s happening is demonstrative of Argentine artist’s arrival by second half of the 1970s to parsing out and challenging definitions and meanings of “the Happening”; in Mexico these issues wouldn’t not come under fire until the later 1970s.

GPP’s consistently refused to adapt strategies consistent with consumerist culture, even in an ironic sense (something No-Grupo would rectify) and it would be a misnomer to label the


66 See discussion of the first Happenings in Latin America, Chapter One. Minujín performed what is considered to be the first happening in Argentina in 1963, the same year as Jodorowsky’s first panic ephemerals. She also collaborated with Kaprow and Wolf Vostell on the project Simultaneity in Simultaneity, a transmission of Marshall McLuhan’s 1963 “Agentbite of Outwit”, see Olivier Debroise, Looking at the Sky in Buenos Aires,” Getty Research Journal, n.1 (2009), 128. In 1964, the artist staged her first Happening or “Visual Event” (suceso plástico) entitled La menesunda in Montevideo, Uruguay in collaboration with Rubén Santantonin and other artists. According to Debroise, this was the event that gained the Di Tella notoriety outside of Argentina. The work also had a goal similar to that of Jodorowsky’s Panic theory in that La menesunda was “…not a Happening, strictly speaking, but rather more an Environment within which the ‘viewer’ would transform into a ‘Happener,’ it inacapulated every element characterizing a Happening’s aesthetic,” see Debroise, 130. Curiously, Minujín also employed the use of both a helicopter and live chickens, as Jodorwosky had done the year prior in the his 1963 Panic ephemerals, See Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

Minujín was soon followed by revisionist approaches to the Happening that began to address its overexposure: Roberto Jacoby (the anti-happening) and perhaps most importantly, Oscar Masotta, who by 1966, had distinguished between the “old Happening” and the “new Happening”. A well-known scholar of Lacan, Masotta was firmly planted in probing the linguistic aspects of conceptualisms. As Debroise concisely explains “What was clearly getting out of control in the fall of 1966, was the Happening itself as an artform,” see Debroise, 128. This issue is taken up years later throught the parodies by No-Grupo as is discussed in the following chapter of this dissertation.
Secuestro as a Happening in any form, Minujín’s use of tongue and cheek references to the dark side of mass communication are filtered through the overexposure or mass global exposure of the Happening. This stands in stark contrast to GPP’s sober, almost paranoid investigations into state control of mass communication (a problem still plaguing Mexico to this day). As the group expressed in a 1977 statement:

Collective creation, in the strictest sense of the term, does not just happen, it ARISES; in its first period out of necessity to confront the state bureaucracy that administers culture and the elitist mafias who consciously, or unconsciously, reproduce the dominate ideology in this camp. Now, today, this position has [pushed] further and carries with it the fight against bourgeois individualism and against the world’s conception of this class, which presently holds the power.  

The comparison of these artistic kidnappings reveals a key distinction between the use of the ephemeral intervention and spectacle within the Mexican context and the context of Argentina read through New York City. As has been shown above, both interventions are clearly indictments of their respective political regimes and cultural institution’s often complicit relationship with them, their approaches to the critique of mass communication and consumerism were dramatically different, despite their obvious conceptual relationship. Minujín, always quick to exploit the potentials of consumerism, carefully documented her performance, remaining mindful that despite the museum setting, the Performance’s market value lie in the creation of the documentation (photographs, the letters by the “victims”, MoMA press). While Muñoz’s action was documented, this was largely incidental as all that remains are a few low quality snapshots and newspaper articles.

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67 “[La] creación colectiva en el más estricto sentido del término, no se improvisa, SURGE; en su primera época como una necesidad para enfrentar al aparato burocrático estatal que administra la cultura y las mafias elitistas que consciente o inconscientemente reproducen la ideología dominante en este campo. Hoy, ahora, esta posición ha ido más allá y conlleva en sí la lucha contra el individualismo burgués y contra la concepción del mundo que tiene esta clase, la que actualmente detenta el poder.”, “Grupo Proceso Pentágono,” Presencia de México en la X Bienal de París. Exh. Cat. Mexico City: INBA, 1977.
By 1976 the cultural landscape had not improved as artists struggled to circulate their work as the commercial market narrowed and censorship heightened. As Felipe Ehrenberg remarked:

Many things culminated in 1976. We were entering the Oil Boom years. Mexico City had grown to hold nearly ten million inhabitants; nevertheless it had barely five or six art galleries, two rather dinky art museums, and, for a while, a lonely art magazine subsidized by Mexico's Museum of Modern Art, [Artes Visuales].

Despite the shrinking options for artists, the first iterations of the Grupos would soon find themselves on the international stage and Proceso Pentágono would enlarge their project for the Bellas Artes into a full-fledged attack on the international biennial system.

**PROCESO PENTÁGONO IN THE X PARIS YOUTH BIENNIAL**

In 1976, Helen Escobedo (then already an influential artist and director at the MUCA) was asked to curate the Mexican selection for the X Paris Youth Biennale, a seemingly innocuous task that resulted in one of the most significant scandals in the Mexican art world of the 1970s and is frequently identified as the most solidifying moment in the argument for the Grupos movement and it took place within an international context. Rather than selecting a single Mexican artist, or conversely opting for a survey-style exhibition, Escobedo, somewhat radically but certainly informed by a 1970s zeitgeist of collective experimentation, chose four of

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the Grupos to represent the country (TAI, Tetraedero, Suma were the others). However it was only Proceso Pentágono that officially became a group upon Escobedo's invitation to participate.

GPP’s presented a didactic criticism of the use of torture and surveillance by military governments and police with their installation, *Pentágono o La cámara de tortura (The Torture Room)*. They presented a detailed, yet seemingly universal, recreation of a torture room. The exterior features blown-up graphics and statistics from the budgets of Latin American countries, “continuing the group’s tradition of replacing art with information.” (Fig.58) While this installation will not be discussed in detail here as it lacks the action-based components present in *A nivel informativo*, their participation did spur a kind of hijacking of the biennial format due to a well-documented controversy concerning the political interests of organizers responsible for the Latin American pavilion.

GPP's elaboration on their previous use of unique forms of combined political and institutional critique and conceptual projects as a means of revealing and disseminating

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70 As is discussed in the following chapter, No-Grupo also participated in the biennial with a guerilla-style intervention, though they never invited nor did they formally exhibit with the exhibition.

71 According to Vanessa D. Kam, it was Ehrenberg who suggested to Escobedo that it would be a good idea to use the groups and artist collectives for the Bienniale. See Kam, 9. However in 1976, an informal group that centered around the artists Zalathiel Vargas and Hérsua (known as “la Coalición”) would also serve as a catalyst for the creation of Proceso Pentágono. Hernández Amezcu, Ehrenberg, and Muñoz were all attendants of the “Simposio de Zacualpan” with Juan Acha and members of what would become No-Grupo, see Chapter4 of this dissertation. Muñoz was also a member of the early, short-lived group “La Rabia” (1969-70).

72 The group would revisit this format for the1979 Sección Annual de Experimentación with their even more controversial installation, *Pentágono 1929*, a 1200 square foot recreation of the interior of a police station build within the bowels of Mexico City’s Auditorio Nacional. According to Rubén Gallo, the installation was closed due to the realistic nature of the work (Gallo, 183). I am grateful to Julio García Murillo for having clarified details about this installation.

73 Ibid., 181.
otherwise hidden or obscured information, and one that falls in line with Ehrenberg’s pointed interest in infiltrating and taking advantage of publishing circuits. Dissatisfied with the cold, bureaucratic treatment of the political work included in the Latin American pavilion, GPP organized the production of a “counter catalogue” expressing their concerns.

While the compelling written exchanges (behind closed doors and in the press) between the artists, critics, and administrators associated with the pavilion, particularly those between Ehrenberg and the Uruguayan curator and appointed head of the Latin American, Angel Kalenberg, are beyond the scope of this discussion, it nonetheless pertains to this discussion of artistic intervention. Here again, GPP managed to infiltrate and utilize existing systems; even Mexican officials in Paris during the Bienniale co-operated in successfully distributing the counter-catalogue, but Uruguayan officials put an end to this. However, the artists still managed to distribute it underground. As Ehrenberg has explained:

The French temporized: They kept their Uruguayan curator, and we boycotted the pavilion. Gabriel García Márquez made his sympathy manifest in our catalogue, which we took to Paris. Artists such as Julio LeParc, Luis Felipe Noé, Crasso, and other important Latin American intellectuals residing in France closed ranks with us. Our position was widely publicized in Europe.

Three years after the biennale, GPP published Expediente Bienal X a kind of compendium of letters and newspaper articles detailing exchanges between the group and the organizers of the event, an exposé on the dangers of the biennial format. (Fig.60) Or as Gallo explains, “if [they] created Pentágono for the Biennale, the group also produced another piece about the Biennale experience.” The 1977 Paris Biennale and the ensuing scandal surrounding the catalogue and the organization of the Latin American Pavilion were defining moments for the

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74 The highly critical and expositional counter-catalogue, contained a sympathetic introduction by Gabriel García Márquez and letters revealing Kalenberg’s affiliations to the military dictatorship.

75 Ehrenberg, “East and West,” 143.
solidification of the Grupos, but I would argue the truly defining act of the biennial cannot be attributed to the groups officially invited to participate. In fact it was a younger group, No-Grupo, and their unofficial participation in the exhibition that more successfully and more radically challenged the institutional framework of a biennial and the culture surrounding conceptual art in general.
Chapter 4.

PerformanS: HUMOR AND IRONY AS STRATEGIES
OF INTERVENTION IN NO-GRUPO

The participation of the five Grupos in the X Paris Youth Biennial solidified the impression that the proliferation of artist groups in Mexico was something worth paying attention to, even from an institutional standpoint. Having received international attention due to the controversy surrounding the Latin American pavilion, some of the more progressive directors and curators at the INBA and Museo de Arte Moderno followed Helen Escobedo’s lead and began seeking out new vectors for incorporating more experimental artists into their exhibition programming. But the slippery circumstances of exhibiting within the context of the museum, and particularly the INBA’s continued sponsorship of competitive/juried exhibitions created unhappy bedfellows as the groups struggled to negotiate their politics within this context. And despite the growing number of groups forming towards the end of the 1970s, not all of the Grupos wholeheartedly accepted the premise of working collectively nor viewed this form of production as a political action. Others, primarily the younger group No-Grupo, instead questioned the merits of group practice, utilizing the format as a platform for a larger conceptual program.

No-Grupo formed in 1977 with a unique mixture of art students and established visual artists, as a direct response to Escobedo’s selection criteria for the Paris Biennial and in criticism of the “explosion” of Grupos. They conceptualized a brand of comedic conceptualism, one that utilized parody and irony (as their name indicates) to engage the larger public in a group critique of the Mexican art system. No-Grupo, the anti-group, simultaneously harpoons the notion of the proliferation of artists groups as a kind of “high art” concept or response, critiquing (or at least
questioning) the drive towards collective practice throughout the 1970s. Like Proceso Pentágono and others before them, No-Grupo was a multi-media approach to creating new artistic forms, employing actions or performances and other types of guerrilla infiltrations as a form of institutional critique. However, this younger group would introduce another element of subversion through their sharp, pointed employment of humor, irony, and satire, which was utilized to critique popular culture, and the particular Mexican context. Moreover, the introduction of humor and parody suggests a shift in the culture since 1968, though No-Grupo stands almost alone in their use of this strategy.¹ But this use of humor proved to be quite effective as the models put forth by this group has had a lasting impact on institutionally critical work in Mexico, particularly among the generation of the 1990s, as is discussed later in this chapter.

No-Grupo has recently received attention from curators and art historians, most notably the 2011 retrospective exhibition at the Museo de Arte Moderno.² Despite the comprehensive nature of the exhibition, importantly the first to examine the group from a monographic perspective, the chronological (and highly biographical) approach to the exhibition and catalogue failed to provide in-depth analysis of specific works and their contexts and specifically why No-Grupo consistently utilized interventions as part of their practice.³

The more politicized strain of Grupos (largely those who went on to form the Frente

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¹ As is discussed later in this chapter, one other group, Peyote y la Compañía, is perhaps the only other group to appropriate and parody popular culture in their projects.

² No-Grupo: Un zangoloteo al corsé artístico was curated by Sol Henaro for the Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City and did not travel.

³ The majority of the catalogue is comprised of descriptive texts and interviews with Maris Bustamante. While there is some focus on the group’s emphatic rejection of the term “Performance” and the irony suggested in their employment of the technique, there is little contextual or historical analysis to account for No-Grupo’s position within the longer tradition of interventionist artistic strategies.
Mexicano de Grupos Trabajadores de la Cultura in 1978) were largely working within the context of the public street and occasionally presenting in more institutional contexts such as the annual salons sponsored by the INBA, as is discussed later in this chapter. The presence of strong political motivations among many groups, and some having direct roots in the Movimiento estudiantil, is primarily responsible for the overshadowing of new tendencies or impulses that were not necessarily directly impacted by or derivative of the student uprising. Groups such as Março, Mira, or Suma took great interest in public interventions and the use of graphics, creating murals, graffiti, and other street interventions to directly aimed at community action, as they often collaborated with unions and political organizations. (Fig.61) These qualities may be considered hallmarks of the groups phenomenon, but they were not invested in the kind of self-reflective critique of the visual arts as is seen in No-Grupo, who in the 1970s nearly exclusively produced their work within the context of the art museum.

Grupo Março member Manuel Marín has explained:

What is the difference between SUMA, Peyote y la Compañía, No-Grupo, and Março? No-Grupo wants to deny having had ideologies and political participation, well, that is a political component, all of us who were opposed to

4 The Frente is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

5 “Mira and El Colectivo both conceived of their work as part of an effective strategy of political information that could serve popular movements, like labor unions and neighborhood associations.” Alvaro Vázquez-Mantecón, “Los Grupos: A Reconsideration,” in La era del discrepancia, 198. Incidentally, members of El Colectivo also participated in Juan Acha’s meeting in Zacualpan (ibid). While it is beyond this scope of this study to analyze in detail, No-Grupo has several parallel concerns with a little known and understudied “grupo” which grew out of literary circles and not the visual arts. The Infrarrealistas (1973-c.1977), lead by literary giant Roberto Bolaño and based in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at the UNAM, this group of poets and writers (and Carla Rippey of Peyote y la Compañía was a collaborator) “proposed a militantly anti-literary and proletarian poetry, and called for self-destruction, open expression of sexuality, and avant-gardism” and were eventually “marginalized due to its radical opposition to literary cliques.” (see “Infrarrealistas,” in La era de la discrepancia, 214-215). Not only do these concerns echo that of Jodorowsky’s in his Panic theory, the group might be considered a fore-runner to No-Grupo’s interruptive tactics as the Infrarrealistas often sabotaged literary events through happening-style interruptions.
this were handled humorously, they really hit us where it hurt with [respect to] a lot of the nonsense we were [involved in]…

Despite their anti-group stance, No-Grupo does share an interest in reflecting how society related to the distribution of information in the face of growing consumerism, particularly of products from the U.S., increasing access to mass media, and the government’s control over these realms, and I would argue much like Proceso Pentágono’s referencing of secret military operations and repressive government regimes or the direct engagement of language in Março.

But the interventions staged by No-Grupo, who stalwartly opposed juried exhibitions and Biennials, demonstrate that while many of the “groups” were aligned politically and directly concerned with socio-political movements, it is short-sided to consider there work only within the historiography of the Grupos or in an isolated manner that disregards the group’s engagement with cultural politics and the nature of art/the “art world”.

Taking cues from predecessors like Alejandro Jodorowsky and José Luis Cuevas (both of whom the group directly reference), No-Grupo, more so than any other of the Grupos, saw the potential for co-opting outlets or platforms beyond the museum or gallery, or even the tradition of taking art directly to the public on the streets. Rather, No-Grupo embraced the complexities and (even corruption) experienced in daily life by treating the museum as an extension of

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6 “¿Qué diferencia hay entre SUMA, Peyote y la Compañía, el No-Grupo y Março? Los No-Grupo quieren negar que hayan tenido ideología y participación política, bueno pues esa es una componente política, de todos nosotros eran los que se oponían a esto lo manejaban humorísticamente, entonces le dan en la torre a muchas de las tonterías que hacíamos…,” see: “Interview with Manuel Marin: Los sesenta empezaron en 68 y se acabaron en 83,” in Dulce María de Alvarado Chaparro, Performance en México (Historia y desarrollo), Masters Thesis (Mexico City: ENAP/UNAM, 2000), 164-65.

7 de Alvarado Chaparro, 165.

8 “…for a majority of participating artists, collective work was a reaction against the stagnation that prevailed in the artistic world during that decade, and an embrace of visual experimentation as a path to alternative and renewed aesthetic education.” (Vázquez Matecón, “Los Grupos,” 197)
institutional power and a space for the potential destabilization of assumed qualities and definitions of art production.

This chapter will present, as has not been done elsewhere, a detailed analysis of four conceptual projects that No-Grupo created within the context of the art institution between 1977 and 1980: an unsolicited proposal for the X Paris Youth Biennial; *Presencia ambiente de Gunther Gerzso*; an action in response to the INBA’s 1979 experimental salon; and *Atentado al Hijo pródigo*, a parody “homage” to José Luis Cuevas. I will argue in this chapter that a key distinguishing feature of No-Grupo, aside from their consistent engagement with institutional spaces, was their adaptation of new forms of expression and new technologies into their practice as a means of creating a dialogue with consumerism’s effect on art and society.

Across the group’s life span, they utilized photography, mimeographs, flyers, “editorial interventions” and mail art, as well as experimental mediums like Super-8 film, in conjunction with actions (or what will problematically come to be labeled “Performances”) to create what they termed *Montajes de momentos plásticos*. The complex, multicomponent projects featured individual and collective projects that did not turn to the street or public spaces as a platform, but rather to the museum institution itself. The concept of the *anti* is carried out to all logical extensions in the work of No-Grupo and their position within the broader history of the Grupos is complicated at best. As artist and founder of the group Taller de Arte e Ideología, Alberto Hijar, has noted:

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9 While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, No-Grupo began to intervene in television and radio increasingly in the 1980s and until their dissolution in 1984. Monica Mayer explained, “This group of artists are interested in utilizing mass communication as if it was the best museum in the world, for the possibility to stage events in front of millions of people.” / “A este grupo de artistas les interesa el utilizar los medios de comunicación como si fueran los mejores museos del mundo, por la posibilidad de hacer eventos ante millones de personas.” see: Monica Mayer, "Melquiades es… performance," *El Universal*, 17 September 1984.
Their discourse poses delineation from the rest of the groups. They rescued the work of the individual and defined themselves as a workshop of doomed criticism to research plastic problems and to examine the function of art in Mexico. Positioning their products as “assemblages of plastic moments” with a strong charge of irony and on occasion of humor. They pronounced themselves against art with etiquette.”

Through this examination of Montajes de momentos plásticos created in latter half of the 1970s, I propose an alternative framework for contextualizing No-Grupo that is particularly invested in their unique understanding of artistic celebrity and popular culture’s role in shaping the art that institutions choose to display for the public. I argue in this chapter that No-Grupo exploited the notion of celebrity personas and the spectacle that surrounds them in a manner that recalls Jodorowsky, Cuevas, or Ehrenberg a decade prior. No-Grupo’s employment of celebrity and notoriety came not only as a means of garnering support for their work, but as a clever act of subterfuge, seeking to draw into the light the hidden systems of control present within the culture industry and the information industry at large as the 1980s approached.

Accordingly, the presence of figures such as Juan Acha, Hersúa, Cuevas, and others are treated here as figures that served not only as progenitors, but that also directly shaped the trajectory of the group. In the case of Acha, the argument for a non-objectual art in Latin America or with Hersúa the exploration into viewer/object relationships forged by the artists of Geometrismo and their natural extension into the appearance of the term “Performance” within the local context of Mexico. This will be carried out, however, without relying on the conventional narrative, which treats this development strictly within the historiography of the movimiento de los Grupos in favor of comparative discussions of projects both in Mexico and

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10“Su discurso plantea un deslinde con el resto de los Grupos. Rescata el trabajo individual y se define como un taller de crítica abocado a la investigación de problemas plásticos y a examinar la función del arte en México. Plantea sus productos como "montajes de momentos plásticos", con una fuerte carga de ironía y, en ocasiones, de humor. Se pronuncia contra el arte con etiqueta.”, Híjar, Frentes..., 361.
abroad that share a kinship in the exploration of institutional intervention.

It is necessary to mention here that while the young members of No-Grupo were heavily invested in discovering and testing new artistic processes and methods of display or circulation, they also stand almost singularly alone amongst the groups for their consistent engagement of a longer historical art tradition. Engaging more senior artists directly, indirectly, collaboratively, and mostly critically, I argue throughout the chapter that No-Grupo utilized these artists not only as reference points, but also as bridges to, and foils for, the concept of “the institution.” For No-Grupo, the being or “presence” of the artist becomes a primary strategy for exposing the effects of artistic celebrity within the institution and the broader cultural arena.

THE FORMATION OF NO-GRUPO AND JUAN ACHA’S NO-OBJETUALISMO

Beginning in 1976, or what Sol Henaro defines as No-Grupo’s “foundational moment”, a diverse group of artists and art students, primarily from San Carlos and a few from La Esmeralda, began meeting informally under the loose direction of Peruvian art theorist, Juan Acha. Never coming together as a formal group, but as a think-tank of sorts, it was here that the future members of No-Grupo would first come together. Later referred to as “La Coalición”, the regular gatherings surrounding Acha occurred over a six-month period with the initial goal of organizing an exhibition of non-objectual art, a theory Acha had been developing since the early 1970s, and is discussed in greater detail later in this section.

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11 Key attendees included: Maris Bustamante, Melquiades Herrera, Hersúa, Alfredo Nuñez, Katya Mandoki, Roberto Realh de León, and Susana Sierra (all later members of No-Grupo); members of Proceso Pentágono (Felipe Ehrenberg, Víctor Muñoz, Carlos Finck); Zalathiel Vargas, the Venezuelan conceptual artist, Carlos Zerpa (who would later collaborate with No-Grupo in 1982), and Juan Acha, see Henaro, 18-19.

12 As curator Sol Henaro has concisely explained: “the story of No-Grupo, like many other collective experiments, has been formed through many versions…The truth is that after confronting sources of a
The planning of the exhibition was to take place at the home of painter and illustrator Zalathiel Vargas, in what is now known as the “Simposio de Zacualpan ” in reference to the remote location in the state of Morelos. While the exhibition never came to fruition, largely due to the chaos created by the number of uninvited or unexpected artists that arrived in Morelos, the meeting presents an alternative network of artists that either already were working in groups (Proceso Pentágon and El Colectivo) or may be seen as progenitors of the groups (Hersúa, Zalathiel Vargas).

The sculptor and installation artist Hersúa, who had already solidified his position as a different order, we may speak of two periods of action within this group: the foundational moment that comprised a large group of artists and subsequently the trajectory of No-Grupo that was united and permanently working since its founding in 1977 until its dissolution in 1983.”, Sol Henaro, No-Grupo: Un zangoloteo al corsè artístico. Exh. Cat. (Mexico City: Museo de Arte Moderno, 2011): 12.

“El primer trabajo público de la agrupación sería una quincena de actos callejeros en el primer cuadro de la ciudad de México, pero al llegar a la asamblea de arranque casi todo mundo hizo mutis. El estreno y canto de cisne de La Coalición tuvo como escenario al MAM (Museo de Arte Moderno, de México), mediante un videotape grabado por Jorge Glusberg (CAYC) y que, en sus manos, terminó exportado a Buenos Aires. from Frentes, coaliciones... Híjar, Frentes..., 294

According to Híjar, “They had various meetings in Mexico City and a big meeting in Zacualpan, Morelos, deprived of organization and lacking in definitions around the objective of coming together as a group. They arrived at the proposal to create a series of acts in the pubic places in the center of Mexico City, called ‘Nuestra ciudad’ (‘Our City’) with the theme of urban phenomenon. The event was never realized...Although they did not reach their goal, it was a first attempt at bringing together artistic collectives, a process that culminated in 1978 with the creation of the Frente Mexicano de Grupos Trabajadores de la Cultura.” / “Realizan varias reuniones en la ciudad de Mexico y una gran reunión en Zacualpan, Morelos, en las que priva la desorganización y la falta de definición alrededor del objetivo del agrupamiento. Llegan a proponer la realización de una serie de actos en lugares públicos en el primer cuadro de la ciudad de México, denominado 'Nuestra ciudad', cuyo tema serian los fenómenos urbanos. Este evento no se realizó...Aunque no llega a cumplir su objetivo, es un primer intento de agrupación de colectivos artísticos, proceso que culminará en 1978 con la creación del Frente Mexicano de Grupos Trabajadores de la Cultura.”, Híjar, “La Coalición,” in Frentes, 294.

Zalathiel Vargas, primarily a painter and comic illustrator, also had strong affiliations with the grupo Pánico, particularly through his collaborations with Jodorowsky’s surrealist/sci-fi projects, like the magazine, Sucesos para todos.
progenitor of *Grupos* through his formation of Arte Otro in 1969 while he was a stud. Hersúa was present at Acha’s meetings at Zacualpan and it was he who first suggested the formation of a non-group to combat the proliferation and increasing politicization of artist groups in Mexico.\(^{15}\) Beginning in 1976, Hersúa also began to carry out informal meetings in his home located on Chapultepec Avenue to hash out potential paths for experimental practice.\(^{16}\) As had been done by students and more radical teachers in San Carlos during the 1960s, Hersúa recognized the importance of providing education outside of the official curriculum and offering a space for like-minded artists to convene. Maris Bustamante has explained that Hersúa’s magnetic personality and motivation attracted around thirty artists and is where she (a student at La Esmeralda) first encountered Núñez, Herrera, and Valencia as well as more shorter-lived members, Mandoki, Realh de León, and Susana Sierra, whom were also all participating in Acha’s circle.

I would argue that part of what distinguishes No-Grupo from the other groups is their understanding of what constitutes political action, something that clearly grew from their shared experiences working around both Juan Acha and artists like Hersúa. In 1968, the majority of the No-Grupo members were just beginning their professional studies in visual arts and were too young to actively participate in the Student Movement, but the political situation fissured their relationship with everything that was constructed as “official”, marking them as inheritors of an even more paranoid and distrustful Mexican society.\(^{17}\) But direct connotations of 1968 are, in the

\(^{15}\) See Chapter Two of this dissertation.

\(^{16}\) Also in 1976, Hersúa presented a public intervention at the *IV Festival Cervantino* in Guanajuato. (Fig.62) An extension of his *ambientes*, the performance consisted of a group of nude children parading through the streets while carrying handmade, manipulable objects aimed at the questioning or expansion of perception.

\(^{17}\) Henaro, 10.
case of No-Grupo, largely more conceptual and abstracted than many of the other groups who
(sometimes directly) grew from precedents for collective art action during this period.

The limited contextual literature surrounding No-Grupo has largely focused on the
influence of Peruvian art theorist, Juan Acha’s theory of *no-objetualismo*. A term Acha coined in
1973, “non-objectualism” was meant to encompass temporal and spatial qualities specific to
Latin American countries with a focus on the creation of an art practice that would speak to these
unique conditions.\(^{18}\) Contained within Acha’s arguments is the questioning of the importance of
a “Latin American” identity, particularly as it is constructed through artistic practice. As curator
Miguel A. López has summarized, *no-objetualismo* was a Marxist theoretical premise conceived:

> “…[as] part of [Acha’s] approach to the counter-cultural protest and performative
> artistic production of the so-called Mexican “groups” of the 1970s, but also in
> reference to indigenous aesthetics such as popular arts, crafts and design, which
> put in crisis the modern/colonial perspectives of Western art history.”\(^{19}\)

One of the primary tenants of *no-objetualismo* was a shifting the paradigm of rational, linear
(read Western) thought versus the a-logical or disordered nature of Latin American thinking. In
her essay “Non-objective Arts in Mexico 1963-1983”, No-Grupo member Maris Bustamante
defines *no-objetualismo* as a new form of conceiving and making art (particularly actions and
ephemeral objects) that lead to the development of conceptualism in Mexico, but without the
influence of the mainstream conceptual practice.

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\(^{18}\) See: Juan Acha, *Arte y sociedad, Latinoamérica : sistema de producción*. Mexico City:

Gabriela Rangel has provided an excellent summary of the term “non-objectual art” in notes to her essay
on non-objectual art in Venezuela. See “An Art of Nooks: Notes on Non-Objectual Experiences in
Venezuela,” in *Arte ≠ Vida*, 131.

\(^{19}\) López, “Back to No-Objetalismo: Returns of Peruvian Artistic Experimentalism
Acha’s premise rests on the influx of Eurocentric and “Yankee-centric” constructions that have colored, shifted, or otherwise altered the Latin American self-identity.\(^{20}\) The impact of the technology boom in Latin America was met with reluctance, in Acha’s observation, to accept new ideas, materials, or theories and there was a current need in Latin America specifically to acknowledge that the social role of art had in fact changed.\(^{21}\) Taking a sociological approach to understanding the role of art, Acha’s writings facilitated a new understanding of the new social function of art in a contemporary Latin American context, one that facilitated, rather than imposed, the formation of new aesthetics, new languages, and new forms that took into account the history of art as well as theory and criticism.\(^{22}\)

We might partially begin to explain No-Grupo’s attraction to Acha’s theories by recognizing that by 1976, when the young artists were meeting, the administrations of Presidents Echeverría had successfully reclaimed the culture of 1968, recycling it back into a symbol of nationalism. As Eric Zolov has explained:

> backlash catalyzed …an intense debate in Mexico over what it meant to be “Mexican” in an age of increasingly transnationalized—“Americanized”—media representations. President Echeverría encouraged this polemic as central to a strategy of renewed nationalism…and efforts to repossess control of a public discourse of national identity.\(^{23}\)

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\(^{21}\) “…observamos cómo nos invaden los productos de la actual explosión tecnológica y trae consigo ideologías que inadvertidamente van depositando, en nuestra mentalidad, sensibilidad afectividad, retardativos con respecto a los cambios sociales y artisticos.” See Juan Acha, *Arte y soceidad*, 9.

\(^{22}\) Acha, “El Binomio teoría-práctica,” in *Arte y soceidad*, 135-137. Here Acha provides a flowchart/diagram of how various components of contemporary society might feed into creating a new aesthetic that was expressive of the modern Latin American condition (see Acha, 161).

\(^{23}\) Zolov, 217.

Both Echeverría and Portillo infused the Mexican economy with a surge of capital, which was met with unprecedented corruption from oil profits. This was also coupled with extreme inefficiency in the public sector, despite an influx of spending on large-scale public projects. Moreover, the strategy evoked by the PRI to manage public opinion, was to utilize rhetoric around the redistribution of wealth, aiming to blur
Acha’s anti-colonialist stance is, according to Bustamante, precisely what drew the artists of No-Grupo to his ideas, explaining that they were “against colonialist mental attitudes, that this was one of [their] obsessions.”\(^\text{24}\) But there are other striking parallels between Acha’s theories and advancements in Mexican art that had taken place before his arrival and that also had direct influence on the artists of No-Grupo.\(^\text{25}\)

Curator Gabriela Rangel has characterized non-objectual art in the case of Venezuela as having “an organic alliance with theater, dance, music, and film”, a natural extension of proto-conceptual and conceptual Mexican artists of the 1960s, where multidisciplinary and collaborative approaches served to situate artists outside of the museums and outside of traditional art models.\(^\text{26}\) This is also the case for artists in Mexico that were working with Acha and a natural point of connection given the work by 1960s progenitors such as Jodorowsky and the “grupo pánico,” who sought new modes of expression through the destruction of precisely these artistic categories or definitions.

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\(^{24}\) “Estábamos contra las actitudes mentales coloniales, esa era una de nuestras obsesiones.” “Interview with Bustamante,” in Henaro, 145.

Much of the history that has so far been recorded has been through the recounting of one of No-Grupo’s founding members—Maris Bustamante. In fact, Bustamante has been one of the few writers or artists to directly address lack of attention to action-based, conceptual practice in Mexico. She has argued for a lineage of Mexican conceptual and performance art that does not rely on Western or South American histories of conceptualism or neo-conceptualism, but that reflects many of the propositions supported by Acha.


\(^{26}\) Rangel, 116.
There is also an emphasis on the possibilities of performativity that clearly play out in the work of No-Grupo, as will be seen throughout this chapter. As Miguel López has deduced, for Acha, non-objectual art was an all-encompassing transformation in which aesthetics should perform utopian ideals.\(^{27}\) Here, another distinguishing characteristic of No-Grupo and what Acha’s theories afforded them, was an alternative model for engaging society and social issues, without relying upon “a direct and detailed study of social participation…[simply] looking for new approaches.”\(^{28}\)

AN ACT OF SABOTAGE: NO-GRUPO AND THE X PARIS YOUTH BIENNIAL

The event that solidified No-Grupo as an official grupo was their unofficial submission in the X Paris Youth Biennial. Engaging in an “act of sabotage,” No-Grupo formulated a project for participation in the Latin American pavilion, but without having ever been invited to participate alongside the other artists groups selected by Helen Escobedo as representative of new artistic tendencies in Mexico. No-Grupo co-opted the platform of the biennial to enter the international stage by creating their own ephemeral intervention, one that simultaneously critiqued the nature of international biennials and the recent promulgation of artists groups and collectives in the local context of Mexico. As Hersúa has expressed, it was he who suggested the name “No-Grupo” having noticed these younger artists’ shared interests in questioning the potential for collective production while retaining individual identities in the face of the proliferation of artists groups. But it is significant to note (and as is typical when dealing with the multiple voices and memories of participants) that while Hersúa claims the name was his invention, the group

\(^{27}\) López, “Back to no-objetualismo.”

\(^{28}\) “…un estudio directo y detallado de la participación social …simplemente buscamos nuevos enfoques.” Juan Acha “Prólogo,” in Arte y sociedad, 8.
narrative maintains that it was a collective invention. Nonetheless, the origin of the group’s name was plainly tied to the “criteria for selection of the Mexican representation” (being a group) or as Sol Henaro explains, “because No-Grupo had recently formed and were not considered is precisely why its members decided—on their own initiative—to participate in an extra-official form with an act of productive disobedience.”

As it has not been discussed in detail elsewhere, I argue in this section that No-Grupo’s infiltration into the Paris Biennial was facilitated by earlier and concurrent projects with similar goals and carried out within the Mexican context: early conceptualism and geometrismo. Like Felipe Ehrenberg’s lampooning of the politics of the museum as institution and the limited interaction between artist and daily life (such as in A Date with fate at the Tate and Chicles, chocolates, y cacahuates) or the Salón Independiente’s aspirations to create a system for display outside of official vectors, No-Grupo’s project required neither the artists’ physical presence nor an official display of work to constitute as a means of validating the creation of the project.

What the intervention did require, however, was the participation of a public in some fashion, something that many of the artists present at both Juan Acha and Hersúa’s informal gatherings (such as Roberto Realh de Leon and Francisco Moyao) had been actively formulating and incorporating into their practices at least since the late 1960s. Moreover, several No-Grupo

29 Interview with Hersúa, Mexico City, September 12, 2014 (see also Henaro, 19 and note 23, page 29.) “However it was not until they proposed to do something unofficial for the X Paris Biennale (1977) that things really began to take form; Maris Bustamante, Andrea di Castro, Melquiades Herrera, Hersúa, Katya Mandoki, Alfredo Núñez, Susana Sierra, and Rubén Valencia collectively agreed on the ironic name of No-Grupo just as a gesture against the proliferation of artist groups.”

30 “…el No-Grupo debido a su reciente formación y no fue considerado, y es precisamente por lo que sus integrantes decidieron—por iniciativa propia—participar de forma extra-oficial con un acto de desobediencia productiva.”, “…No-Grupo, because of its recent formation, was not considered, and this is precisely why its members decided—by their own initiative—to participate in an extra-official form with an act of productive disobedience.” (Henaro, 19).
members (Valencia, Mandoki, Sierra) continued producing individual works that fit the parameters of geometrismo as is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, but this connection to the group’s emphasis on the physical presence of both artists and artwork have [has] not been previously been examined.

The components of No-Grupo’s Biennial intervention were limited and simple: a set of cardboard masks featuring copied photographs of each individual No-Grupo member’s portrait. (Fig.63) The masks were mailed to Paris for the Biennial along with a text outlining their overall “proposal” and including instructions for both the viewer-participant and for the host institution, the Centre Pompidou, yet it remains unknown if the project was ever received in Paris and it remains unlikely that the Biennial would have allowed for the distribution of un-official materials given their reaction to the production of the counter-catalogue by the groups that actually had been invited. But as Henaro summarizes, it was the promotion of the conceptual gesture that counts when we consider the project and I would argue the spontaneous or open-ended nature of the proposal stands suggests a dialogue with larger developments around institutional critique.31

Like the one-eyed pillowcase used by Felipe Ehrenberg at the Tate Museum as a device for the critique of the limited viewing experiences had by most museum-goers, No-Grupo’s masks were meant to be worn by attendees of the Biennial as they circulated in the galleries.32 But masks and hoods are not the same devices and their difference in function suggests that No-Grupo is encroaching upon a territory of conceptual (or no-objectualismo) that Ehrenberg had not reached when we consider contexts in which the two works were created. Ehrenberg, an outsider in London, with no official institutional framework (like a biennial) wears a hood, a

31 Henaro, 19

32 See Chapter Two of this dissertation for Ehrenberg’s intervention.
device for hiding his identity as an artist, thereby suggesting there is something that is either hidden or that needs to be concealed from public view. Moreover, the hood used at the Tate evokes more sinister references as the makeshift mask recalls those used in kidnappings, torture, or even the Inquisition, suggesting a Ehrenberg’s politicized take on the social function of the museum and the artist. Donning his one-eyed-hood, Ehrenberg’s transformation is a one-way street: he attempts to embody the experience of the typical visitor to the Tate Gallery, one that is almost like tunnel vision. There is no suggestion of the visitor transforming into the artist, meaning their roles essentially stay the same. Ehrenberg perceptively called into question the institutional relationship between art/artist/viewer/institution.  

While a mask is often meant to conceal or protect, it also possesses the power to transform. In donning the mask of a No-Grupo member, attendants of the Paris Biennial might not only transform into the artist, but the artist might also symbolically transform into viewer. They were explicit about this concept in the instructions they sent to the Centre Pompidou, declaring: “We want to be there without being there = physically.”; “We want to be the viewer that takes us.”; “We want to live in the face of everyone that takes one of our masks.”; “WE WANT TO BE THE VIEWER”. This emphasis on questioning the importance of physical presence (of the art object, of the artist, of the spectator) is a line of inquiry that I argue may be found throughout the projects carried out by No-Grupo and is sometimes even literally referenced, such as in the following project, Presencia Gunther Gerzso. The concept that the

33It is significant to note Ehrenberg’s previous experiences working within a group context: through the SI, the and Coalition for Liquidation of Art and the Polygonal Workshop in London and then with Fluxus and the Beau Geste Press.

34 “Queremos estar ahí sin estarlo = físicamente.”; “Queremos que sea el espectador el que nos lleve.”; “Queremos habitar en la faz de cada uno que lleve nuestra mascara.”; “QUEREMOS SER EL ESPÉCTADOR.”, No-Grupo, texto para la X Bienal de París, No-Grupo archive, Centro documentación, Arkheia, MUAC, UNAM. Reproduced in Henaro, 40.
spectator might serve as a stand-in or proxy for the artist was something that no other group had dared to address so explicitly.

**SEQUESTERED GEOMETRISM: PRESENCIA AMBIENTE GUNTHER GERZSO**

Aside from the controversy in Paris, the event that has come to define the parameters of what may be considered the Grupos was the formation of the Frente Mexicano de Grupos Trabajadores de la Cultura (Mexican Cultural Workers Front), otherwise known as the "El Frente" (the Front) in 1978 and operated in some fashion until 1982. At least seventy members from fourteen different artists groups banded together in the hopes of gaining even greater power in combating repressive and corrupt political and social forces. The formation of the Frente solidified the Grupos's legacy within the history of collective artistic production in Mexico, but despite some groups' earlier resistance to being affiliated with antiquated models carried out by the muralists or the Taller Gráfica Popular (TGP), their collective insistence upon finding new models of speaking to and for the general population but that often fell into rhetoric that sounded suspiciously like these unhappy bedfellows.

Though eventually the Frente would serve as a catalyst in shifting focus away from collective practice and the disbanding of many groups, two important exhibitions were produced as a result of the coalition: *Muros frente muros* and *América en la mira*, a large-scale assembly of mail art from across Latin American, spearheaded by Felipe Ehrenberg. Given the highly politicized nature of the Frente, No-Grupo did not join in. Becoming a bureaucratic nightmare of sorts, the Front represented precisely the dangers that No-Grupo had considered in reacting to the requirements of participation in the Paris Biennial. According to Dominique Liquios, artistic

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35 Alberto Hijar’s Taller de Arte e Ideología (TAI) and Taller de Investigación Plástica were the founding groups. Among the groups to join the front were: Mira, Proceso Pentágono, and Suma.
proposals were presented during the weekly meetings of the Frente and were then collectively examined for the FMGTC seal of approval, which would include their drafting of manifestos or articles signed by the Front. Moreover, the political ambitions of the Front found members identifying as “cultural workers” and not artists, signaling an investment in social or community activism that Acha and No-Grupo sought to avoid. In a statement by No-Grupo, their self-description almost seems to be constructed in direct reaction to the tenants of the Front:

No-Grupo does not have leaders or bosses; we treat ourselves as being composed of equals [...] We are not a group in which each of us do as he pleases and then display it as a collective; whose works are shown and have a vote of confidence from the others… Nor are we a forced and fraudulent collectivism free from responsibility after comfortable anonymity. The purpose is not to opportunistically link up with anecdotal events of our time, but their fundamental constants guarantee a continuity to our work.

The Frente eventually did dissolve due to internal differences among the groups, a lack of financial support for their projects, or as Liquios suggests perhaps because of weariness or fatalism, the groups moved towards a more individualistic attitude.

The same year as the organization of the Frente and five years after Proceso Pentágono’s kidnapping at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Hersúa was invited to contribute to an homage to the great German/Mexican abstract painter, Gunther Gerzso to be held as part of the Salón de Individuales at the Palacio de Bellas Artes. After his participation in their un-official project for

36 Liquios, 32.

37 “El No-Grupo no tiene líderes ni jefes; los que lo componemos nos tratamos como iguales [...] No somos un grupo en el que cada quien haga lo que se le antoje y lo muestre en una colectiva; los trabajos son de quien los muestra y tienen el voto de confianza de los otros [...] Tampoco somos un forzado y fraudulento colectivismo que libre la responsabilidad tras el cómodo anonimato [...] El propósito no es eslabonarse oportunisticamente a los sucesos anecdóticos de nuestra época, sino a sus constantes fundamentales que nos ofrecen la garantía de una continuidad en nuestro trabajo.”, “El No-Grupo y la Experimentación,” statement distributed during the Sección de Experimentación de Artes Plásticas, February 1979, quoted in Liquios, 37.

38 Ibid.
the X Paris Biennial, Hersúa thought to extend his invitation to the homage to No-Grupó (now consisting of Bustamante, Nuñéz, Valencia, Andrea di Castro, Katya Mandoki, and Susana Sierra).

Just as Proceso Pentagono’s artistic kidnapping could be and has been interpreted solely as a critique of military dictatorships, No-Grupó’s secuestro could simply read in relation to Gerzso as an artist and his position as a famous abstract painter. But, No-Grupó strategically utilized not only the traditional concept of an homage-style exhibition, but also INBA’s lack of support for alternative art as grounds for a critical attack on the state of the arts. Their critical message was heard loud and clear as even an article from Excélsior called the Gerzso project a contribution from a “New Genre of Art-Criticism”. Moreover, the works they produced served to reinforce the participatory goals set forth by much of geometrismo all the while critiquing the position the movement held in Mexico. Therefore, I argue that No-Grupó’s hijacking of Gerzso’s physical and artistic presence allows us to re-evaluate the significance of geometrismo in a time when conceptual and Performance art also flourished.

*Presencia ambiente de Gunther Gerzso* was comprised of a series of projects by the individual artists centered on the concept that Gerzso had been abducted by the group, an idea that served to disrupt the commonplace notion of honoring a single artist for his/her outstanding achievements. Here, Gerzso’s abduction is carried out through the appropriation of his works or his artistic personage and the privileged position he held in the art world. With this project, No-

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39 Hérsua, Interview with author, Mexico City, 12 July 2014. According to the artist, the transference of the invitation to participate was as far as Hersúa participated in the Gerzso project. He never directly collaborated with the group again, but they would reference both Hersúa and Gerzso in a 1981 project in association with the Primer Coloquio Latinoamericano de Arte No Objetual y Arte Urbano in Medellin, Colombia. See: Henaro, 78-79.

Grupo initiated a line of production that they would soon come to call *Montajes de momentos plásticos*, projects that incorporated elements approved by Acha’s *no-objetalismo*: actions or performances; mechanically reproduced flyers with ephemeral objects, or what I term “takeaways”; photographs; video; and texts, often in the form of *communicados*. But what is of particular significance is that No-Grupo insisted upon inventing their own terminology for their approach rather than relying on terminology vetted and approved by the art system and/or imported to Mexico from outside sources. Or as is explained by Henaro:

> the Montajes de Momentos Plásticos would be classified or situated as *performances*, but No-Grupo rejected this term from the beginning and even when they came to be known as such, they preferred to continue defending their own method of naming their productions. Why refuse to adopt the Anglicized term that had already been used in other contexts? Because they maintained a distance with respect to the dynamic of the importation of styles and concepts originating from artistic epicenters …in the words of Rubén Valencia, as “fayuca conceptual,” that is to say conceptual or creative contraband…⁴¹

Overall, the “conceptual contraband” for Gerzso consisted of statements by No-Grupo, plastic bags filled with objects and documents related to the supposed kidnapping of the abstract painter, collages or *photographic interventions* as the group called them, that not only assisted in communicating the group’s potentially obscure objectives while challenging the popular reverence for singular art objects and the institutions in which they circulated. (Fig.64) The group also produced a document resembling a ransom note that is comprised not only of text written by the group in the voice of their captive, but it also included manipulated anedmimeographed images of Gerzso’s “sequestering.”(Fig.65) But how may we account for

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⁴¹ “…los Montajes de Momentos Plásticos se calificaban o situaban como performances, pero el No-Grupo al inicio desconocía el término, y aún cuando lo conoceieron, prefirieron seguir defendiendo su propio modo de nombrar a sus producciones. ¿Porqué negarse a adoptar el término angolsajón que en otros contextos era ya una referencia? Porque mantuvieron distancia con respecto a la dinámica de importación de estilos y conceptos provenientes de los epicentros artísticos… en palabras de Rubén Valencia, como ‘fayuca conceptual’ es decir, contraband conceptual o creativo.” (Henaro, 23).
this young, rebellious group’s fascination with a figure that by 1978 could have been considered mainstream, not particularly radical, but successful by measures of the international market and Mexican art institutions?

Once home to the first artist-run space in Mexico, the INBA, the host of Gerzso’s homage, was no longer emblematic of Mexico’s economic and cultural progress. Instead, particularly for younger artists, it represented a fossilized government that still refused, even in the wake of Tlatelolco Massacre, to support emerging experimental art that addressed the very real problems the country faced. Gerzso was, in many ways, the perfect emblem for the type of art (abstraction) and exhibition format (homage) that the Mexican government had favored over the last decade, one that forced artists working in modes other than painting and sculpture to resort to the disruption, infiltration, and subversion of the institution in order to realize their projects and reach the public in a more direct fashion than traditional art production afforded.

No-Grupo’s “kidnapping” was then reflected in a kind of proto-Montaje de momentos plásticos. Members responded both collectively and individually to Gerzso’s position as a forerunner of Mexican Geometrism. One of the most compelling responses is Rubén Valencia’s Trece planos molidos de Gerzso or Thirteen Ground Planes of Gerzso, consisting of small plastic bags filled with ground pigments and attached to a piece of cardboard. (Fig.66) The take-away ostensibly provides all the necessary tools for the public to create their own masterwork while calling into question object-art market relations. Valencia has included the title of a Gerzso painting (Paisaje verde-rojo-azul No.1), its exact dimensions, and then a list of the colors and the corresponding quantities featured in the Gerzso painting.⁴² (Fig.67) Not only does the assembly of the plastic bags of pigments cleverly resemble one of the painter’s abstracted canvases, Valencia begins to suggests a renegotiation of the value of the art object. As will be

⁴² I have been unable to identify any painting by Gerzso with this exact title.
demonstrated throughout the analysis of No-Grupo’s takeaways, this format successfully facilitated No-Grupo’s desire to renounce and circumvent traditional systems of display and circulation.

Melquiades Herrera explained with respect to graphic flyers (I prefer the term “takeaway” as it encompasses their conceptual premise and takes into account their frequent object-like qualities) produced by Bustamante for the Gerszo project that,

Maris’s work affords the luxury to literally indulge the viewer. The demystifying slap is consumed: a work can be worth a lot or a little, none of which matters, the work is given away, the luxury is double. 43

The flyers and takeaways may also be read as an extension or expression of the crisis of spirituality in art, largely due to the worship of the cult of originality and technologies delayed acceptance in Latin American countries. Given Mexico’s “incomplete” arrival of Modernity, Acha’s statement that, “technology constitutes the characteristic and dominant cultural phenomenon of our time, capable of explaining to us many of the social aspects of art,” may partially explain No-Grupo’s turn towards more technologically experimental formats, like memeography. 44

Given No-Grupo’s reputation for an often ironic and nearly always critical filtering of the Mexican artistic landscape, it may be surprising how closely linked the group was to geometrism, both literally and conceptually. In 1976, the year just prior to No-Grupo’s founding intervention for the Paris Biennale, the Museo de Arte Moderno, then headed by super curator,  

43 “La obra de Maris se dá el lujo de regalarse literalmenta al espectador. La bofetada desmitificadora se consuma: una obra puede valer tanto o tan poco, que nada de eso importa, la obra se regala, el lujo es doble.”, Melquiades Herrera, “Secuestro plástico,” 1978, document mecanografiado, Reproduced in Henaro, 62.

44 La tecnología constituye el fenómeno cultural característico y dominante de nuestro tiempo, capaz de explicarnos muchos aspectos sociales del arte.”, Juan Acha, “Prólogo,” in Arte y sociedad, 11.
cultural broker Fernando Gamboa Jr., presented the watershed exhibition of geometric painting and sculpture *Geometrismo Mexicano: una tendencia actual*. While not all No-Grupo artists shared an interest in or prior history with geometrism, it is significant, as has not been highlighted to any degree elsewhere, to note the presence of three No-Grupo members in this exhibition: Hersúa, Roberto Realh de Leon, Rubén Valencia and many sympathizers/influences: Gerzso, Helen Escobedo and artists with overarching connections to conceptualisms: Mathias Goeritz.\(^{45}\)

In an essay on non-objectual art in Venezuela, Gabriela Rangel has expressed that in Venezuela, like in Mexico, across the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s, kinetic and op-art had come to mean progress and independence, the universal and the modern, where as local non-objectual practices propose a dystopian model that exposed “suppressed cultural miscegenation” by rethinking how the popular and the vernacular “organically constituted the nation.”\(^{46}\) According to an essay by Cuauhtémoc Medina, Mexican geometrism and kineticism played a similar role.\(^{47}\) *Geometrismo* produced what has been called an “amnesia about radicalism” under which more experimental aspects of geometric painting (viewer/object relations, participatory projects) were subsumed by nationalist discourse. This often erased significant links between the more formal, mainstream movement and subversive, experimental practices associated with conceptualism.\(^{48}\)

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\(^{45}\) See Daniel Usiaga Garza, “El geometrismo mexicano. Una tendencia actual,” in *La Máquina visual*, 131-146.

\(^{46}\) Rangel, 116.

\(^{47}\) Though beyond the scope of this discussion, the 1968 exhibition *Cinetismo: esculturas electrónicas en situaciones ambientales* (curated by Willoughby Sharp) was also a force in the development of participatory art forms. Held at the MUAC, the exhibition was in association with the Olympic cultural program.

While No-Grupo’s evocation of the artistic kidnapping could theoretically have borrowed from Proceso Pentágono’s earlier employment of the “Trojan horse” style kidnapping in 1973 at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, in that both utilized a pre-existing exhibition as a rouse for their guerrilla intervention, there are other precedents and parallels that present greater insight into the symbolic weight of their performed sequestering of Gerzso. The artistic kidnapping or sequestering was also revived by the group Taller de Investigación Plástica (TIP) in a 1979 action *El fardo* (*The Bundle*) in which a man, covered in burlap and bound by rope, sat in protest before the house of government in Morelia. (Fig.68) As was discussed in the previous chapter, the evocation of a kidnapping, undoubtedly served as a metaphor for the disappearances that had become all to commonplace across Latin America at the hand of repressive governments, but it also provides a stand-in for censorship at large, the silencing of artistic voices of dissenting voices from across society. But No-Grupo has not selected an anonymous figure as the emblem of censorship, rather, they have selected one of the figureheads of abstract and geometric painting in Mexico.

We might then also consider here an unintended dialogue between the Gerzso kidnapping and a kidnapping attempt made by Californian artist Tony Labat the very same year with his *Kidnap Attempt*. For the performance/intervention, Labat utilized the 1978 California race for Governor as source material, deciding to follow (or stalk) the candidate, artist Lowell Darling. Disturbed by Darling’s “theater of gesture” in that the artist’s entrance into the political arena had little to do with the interests of the public.49 This prompted Labat to begin spending time stalking Darling, tracking his moves, and planning the perfect opportunity to perform a fake

kidnapping at a moment he could ensure that a photograph of the event could be captured. (Fig.69)

Labat (assisted by artist Mike Ousterbout) awaited Darling outside of a $1,000 a plate benefit, with fake pistols in hand and disguised by black bandanas over their faces, Sandinista-style. The attempt was successful until the two kidnapping artists could not physically force Lowell Darling into Labat’s getaway car, a small, two-door Chevy Vega leading them to abandon the attempt and flee the scene. As Lowell did not know Labat, he was unaware that the kidnapping attempt derived from the artistic arena, but the politician-artist was forever changed, as the lines between artistic action and real life blurred. According to Labat:

Maybe first I thought it was a performance piece, and then it got real. The punching got real, the wrestling got real. He published a book called One Hand Shaking (1980), and he talks about going home that night and not sleeping and looking over his shoulder from that moment on, sort of like I ruined the party…He felt like a politician for the first time.51

Like Labat, No-Grupo’s kidnapping confronts the complicated relationship celebrity and politics share within the artistic arena, a theme they would continue to tackle with more force as the group evolved.

Katya Mandoki created and showed as part of the performance, the first documented Super-8 video to be produced under the No-Grupo moniker, entitled Aparición. The roughly three-minute short tackles the medium of painting and the supposed permanency of the geometric style by creating an exact copy of Gerzso’s abstract composition Aparición (1960) but rendered entirely in fabric. An invisible hand manipulates the fabric, reconfiguring components of Gerzso’s compositions to create entirely new and imaginary “Gerzso.” (Fig.70)

50 Phillips, 153.

51 Ibid.
Valencia’s *Tres planos molidos* take-away, Mandoki’s film suggests a literal participatory action in place of the more indirect goal of Geometrism to collapse viewer/object relations. Moreover, Mandoki’s evocation of the multiple and an impermanent multiple at that, calls into question the figure of the artist himself and the effect the artist’s physical being, presence, or notoriety has on the circulation and on the commercial success of an art object. Mandoki’s simultaneous destruction and reconstruction of Gerzso’s work recalls a statement composed by Bustamante for the project, she explains that:

> the terms creative and destructive, we do not distinguish between them as they both reduce movement, change, both one and the other on their par make forwards and backwards interchangeable. Thus, what matters is the is the act of movement.”

*MONTAJES DE MOMENTOS PLÁSTICOS AND THE SECCIÓN ANUAL DE EXPERIMENTACIÓN (1979)*

On March 4th 1979, No-Grupo mounted their first official *Montaje de momentos plásticos* at the Auditorio Nacional in reaction to the Sección Anual de Experimentación of the INBA’s Salón Nacional de Artes Plásticas. The first edition of INBA’s new initiative to “recognize a form of practice increasingly common within independent artistic networks.” No-Grupo’s formulation of a *Montaje de momentos plásticos* was spurred in reaction to the Salón’s questionable criteria for “experimentation” an opportunity for further experimentation in

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52 “Los terminos creativo y destructivo no hacemos diferencia entre ellos ya que ambos producen movimiento, cambio, tanto una como la otra parte hacen retrodecer o avanzar indistintamente. Así pues lo que importa es el acto de movimiento.”, Maris Bustamante, *Secuestro plástico*, 1978, documento mecanografiado, Arkheia and reproduced in Henaro, 50.

53 There would be three more installations of the Sección Anual de Experimentación, the last taking place in 1987 and now under the title Sección de Espacios Alternativos or Salon for Alternative Spaces.

54 “Experimental Salons,” in *La era de la discrepancia*, 236.
mechanical reproductions (takeaways) and interventions into the institutional arena. Not yet aware of the term Performance Art, the group’s adoption of their own terminology was meant to encompass their multi-media (or non-objectual) approach. As Herrera has famously recounted, once the group did become aware of the more mainstream concept of Performance, it was (not surprisingly) met with great suspicion:

The first time that the word *performance* was heard (pronounced “performanS”) was when we presented …at the Museo de Arte Moderno in Chapultepec [Park]. I think it was Carla Stellweg, knowing the North American scene, who with her correct pronunciation, apostrophized with whiplash in naming the work we had presented as a group. At this time, it seemed to use that to pronounce the word *performance* she had to contort her lips in a snobbish manner, we rebelled against this label…

As was proven with both the Paris Biennial and Gerzso projects, the group wholeheartedly embraced their “new form of art criticism,” targeting precisely these types of competitions that more often than not revealed the institutional biases systemic to the cultural landscape. And the group therefore did not participate directly in the exhibition, but rather formulated a *Montaje de momentos plásticos* to address the highly problematic and controversial new initiative.

The jury (comprised of Rita Eder, Nestor García Canclini, Francisco Fernández, and Carlos Jurado) experienced great difficulties in selecting projects as the majority of submissions were not truly experimental, explaining that “[there was] a lack of experimental spirit, low artistic quality, or communicational deficiencies.” They eventually settled on eleven projects including Grupo Suma (who literally brought their graffiti street interventions inside the gallery) and Zalathiel Vargas who won “becas de investigación”, but Suma even projected a distrust of the exhibition’s platform of experimentation as they eventually vandalized their own installation.

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55 Henaro, 23.

The jurors also highlighted Proceso Pentágono, who created an elaborate installation *1929: Pentágono* that recalled many of the elements of their Paris Biennial project, but they refused to participate in the actual competition. “El Colectivo” for their conceptual contributions in the form of documentation though lacking sufficient visual elements, and Peyote y la Compañía for having presented a truly experimental work with their *Arteespectaculo.* But the INBA-sponsored attempt at providing a voice for “experimental” artists served only to further highlight the “tensions between an art of opposition and more official ambitions to bring contemporary production into an institutional terrain” thereby proving No-Grupo’s suspicions of the exhibition to be sound.58

No-Grupo’s response to the concept of “experimentation” under the wing of the institution, took as its premise that “lunchtime is more important than art”, noting that the public had a tendency not to visit museums (they refer specifically to the Palacio de Bellas Artes) during lunchtime.59 This multi-component *Montaje* established the format that No-Grupo would continue to use (and had begun to take form with the Gerzso kidnapping): a planned institutional intervention accompanied by takeaway objects and the presentation of several Super-8 films. In this case, the takeaway was *La Lonchera* or *The Lunchbox*, a cardboard box containing objects and ephemera that were distributed to the public during the run of the exhibition. (Fig.72) Some of its contents included a cutout photograph of a cow, the image of Marcel Duchamp, and a silkscreen created from Bustamante’s own lipstick marks which appear to be speaking or


58 “Experimental Salons,” in *La era de la discrepancia*, 236.

mouthing the words to the phrase: “Arte es que porque tu lo digas asi es.” or “Art is because you say it is so.” (Fig.73)

This questioning of the objecthood of art, undoubtedly tied to their studies with Juan Acha, also took expression in a critique of the Pop Art movement and its subsequent canonization or institutionalization of the movement. The “art lunchbox” also included a bottle of Coca-Cola tagged with a text signed by Melquiades Herrera that reads:

This Coca-Cola, recently discovered by Pop-Art, just 10 years ago, brand new, the rescue of art to propose to reintegrate with reality, only there is a detail, between preserving it or drinking it, whether it is or isn’t art, the decision is yours. (Fig.74)

There are several references to Coca-Cola that should be considered briefly here given the number of artists who have used the product as a stand-in for capitalist enterprise in their work. In addition to Warhol’s employment of the soda-pop in ubiquitous works like Green Coca-Cola Bottles (1962), Herrera’s coke bottle was also preceded by Brazilian conceptual artist Cildo Meireles’s Insertions into Ideological Circuits: Coca-Cola Project (1970) a series of modified coke bottles that he reintroduced into circulation with stamped politicized messages and a statement by the artist on the effects of US imperialism in Brazil and the need for alternative

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60 Bustamante’s lipstick prints were also utilized to create a Super-8 film, Mensaje hablado, The second Super-8 was likely the notable Museo de arte redondo, a fascinating short filmed from the perspective of a painting installed at the Museo de Arte Moderno. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSK69BBHmYA, accessed March 12, 2014.

61 “Esta coca-cola, recién descubierta por el Pop-Art, hace apenas 10 años, nuevecita, la rescate del arte para proponer reintegrarla a la realidad, solo que hay un detalle, entre conservarla o bebérsela, que sea o no sea arte, la decisión es de Ud.”

The group also created a Super8 film around this time featuring “competing” bottles of Coca-Cola, Boing!, and Pepsi, jockeying for the center position among the three brands.
systems for distributing information under military repression.\textsuperscript{62} (Fig. 75) Mathias Goeritz, as part of “Los Hartos” also commented on the growing ubiquity of Coca-Cola as he published an announcement in a 1962 issue of \textit{El Corno Emplumado}, declaring: “Mathias Goertiz está harto pero toma Coca-Cola.”\textsuperscript{63} (Fig. 76)

Or, we might consider Colombian conceptual artist Antonio Caro’s \textit{Colombia} from 1976, a now infamous riff on Coca-Cola’s unique position of having been the only global company legally permitted to import cocaine from Colombia. (Fig. 77) While Herrera’s example may then quickly (and accurately) be understood as a response to Coca-Cola’s particular influence in expanding consumerism in Mexico, he has applied this construct not to a particular socio-political issue (as in the case of Meireles and Caro) but to consumerism’s (capitalism’s) influence on art and its publics through its co-opting of artists and strategies once considered to be new, radical, or subversive.

No-Grupo’s relationship to a “Latin American Pop-Art”, if we accept that such a movement existed, is complicated. Aside from Peyote y la Compañía, No-Grupo is singular amongst the groups in their employment of references also utilized in Pop Art ranging from the Coke bottles, to Mickey Mouse, to comic books, \textit{luchadores}, and superheroes. While they were certainly working with a Duchampian impulse (they in directly referenced the artist in several projects) the group rarely spoke of Pop art as a movement, nor one they viewed themselves in dialogue with. Their use of imagery and symbols drawn from commodity culture was meant as a critique of the invasion of U.S. products into Mexico and the specific impact this arrival had on the local, everyday life. Moreover, No-Grupo utilized the platform of


imported consumer culture as a foil for the state of the culture industry within Mexico.\textsuperscript{64}

Like Bustamante’s viewer-empowering definition of art (that which "you say it is"), Herrera’s Coca-Cola bottle renegotiates the traditional power structure behind the ownership of art by leaving the existence of the art object in the hands of the public. The bottle, a quotidian object, but one loaded with capitalist symbolism, is imbued with the potential power for creating an alternative art market that coincides with daily life. As Felipe Ehrenberg had already begun to suggest with his exhibition \textit{Chicles, chocolates, y cacahuates} or his documentation of the garbage worker’s strike in \textit{La Poubelle}, the conceptualist impulse towards the blurring of everyday life and art was a vehicle for destabilizing artist’s (and art’s) dependency on existing systems and institutions.\textsuperscript{65} As Maris Bustamante explained, the \textit{Montaje de momentos plásticos} format was meant to signal,

That your everyday life, including the tiniest piece, is connected with this so that your life reactivates your permanent senses. And I believe that this is what we managed to expropriate from the system. The system that we did not want to give into, but we took ourselves out of."\textsuperscript{66}

The action or performance component of No-Grupo’s \textit{montaje} for the Sección de Experimentación accordingly contributed to this blurring by providing pointed institutional criticism, directly poking fun at local political and artistic figures: Alfredo Núñez put on a photographic mask of President López Portillo’s portrait and directed the public to accept his error in having designated low budgets for art and culture (Fig.78) and Herrera also staged an

\textsuperscript{64} As is discussed later in this chapter, Peyote y la Compañía, the only other group to consistently envoke consumer products, not only directly addressed Pop, its leader, Adolfo Patiño, embraced Warhol as a type of founding father and the inspiration for his forming the group.

\textsuperscript{65} See Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{66} “Que su vida cotidiana, incluso en el pedacito más pequeño, esté conectado con eso para que su vida reactiva su sentido permanente. Y creo que eso es lo que nosotros logramos expropiarle al sistema. El sistema no nos lo quería dar pero nosotros se lo sacamos.”, Bustamante, “Interview,” Henaro, 158.
action in which he dressed as a common street-hawker selling his wears in reference to fellow artists continuing to “suck-up” to the institutions.\(^\text{67}\)

Because No-Grupó had stood firmly against competitive exhibitions, the majority of the group had no interest in officially entering the Sección de Experimentación. The question over how to respond caused a rift within the group when Katya Mandoki decided to enter as part of the interdisciplinary group “Yaltéotl,” despite No-Grupó’s wishes. However, before this inter-group conflict arose, Mandoki had been involved in the planning of parallel activities to the Salón and had secured an opportunity for No-Grupó to present a project.\(^\text{68}\) Because of their disapproval, she interrupted the planned action for the Montaje de momentos plásticos, leading to her definitive expulsion from No-Grupó.\(^\text{69}\) (Fig. 78) This left No-Grupó down to its four core members: Bustamante, Herrera, Núñez, and Valencia.

PEYOTE Y LA COMPAÑÍA’S TRANSFORMANCE

Like No-Grupó who formed because of the X Paris Youth Biennial, Peyote y la Compañía (1978-1984) came together as group the night before the opening and, according to Olivier Debroise, had zero political agenda (even less than No-Grupó) and “propos[ed] itself


\(^{\text{68}}\) Henaro, 55.

\(^{\text{69}}\) Ibid.

Mandoki, who frequently worked with experimental film, decided to participate in a group installation entitled “Parto Solar 5” as part of the group “Yaltéotl” that also included filmmaker Raul Kampfer (see, Sarah Minter, http://videoarde.net/pdf/minter.pdf, accessed 01/05/2015). While Henaro’s text mentions Mandoki’s interruptive performance and includes images, there is no description of what the intervention during the No-Grupó action actually entailed. However, it is clear from the extent photographs that she appeared during Melquiades Herrera’s performance enclosed in some kind of ad-hoc wooden frame, which she and an assistant began to cover with some kind of paper or canvas.
more as an association based on having fun…a simple coming together of affinities.”

Peyote y la Cia, like No-Grupo, frequently centered their projects on the criticism of consumer culture and the notion of artist-celebrity, particularly the invasion of U.S. products into the Mexican market and like No-Grupo did not form out of political motivations. In a statement from 1979, the group explains:

Peyote y la Compañía is not a group segregated because of social movements. It intends to be a movement that generates the conceptual, objectual, and theoretical radicalization of the artistic object, to make it an indispensible part of daily life…because we believe that human unification can be planned or initiated utopically, from art.

Adolfo Patiño, the group’s organizer, had already attempted to bridge the gap between daily life and the art object with the founding of another group, Fotógrafos Independientes (1976-1984). He decided to found this group after meeting members of Tepito Arte Acá, leading the photographers to set up ephemeral exhibitions of their works (hung by wires, like laundry hung out to dry) in the streets of Mexico city in an effort to draw their work into a different context and to further connect art with its public.

The work that “Adolfotógrafo” developed during this

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70 Henaro, 55.

71 Members of Peyote y la Cia in 1978: Rogelio Villarreal, Alejandro Arango, Mongo, Armando Cristeto, Carla Rippey, Enrique Guzmán, Xavier Quirarte, Ángel de la Rueda, and Adolfo Patiño. Members in 1980 included: Adolfo Patiño, Armando Cristeto, Carla Rippey, Ángel de la Rueda, Terry Holiday, Alberto Pergón, Jorge Pergón, Xavier Quirarte, Ramón Sánchez Lira. Alejandro Deschamps and Juan José Gurrola, among others, served as collaborators.

72 “Peyote y la Compañía no es un grupo más, segregado por los movimientos sociales. Pretende ser un movimiento que genere la radicalización conceptual, objetual, teórica, del objeto artístico, hacerlo parte indispensable de la vida común… porque bien creemos que la unificación humana puede ser o iniciarse utópicamente planeado, a partir de arte.” In “La Onda,” Excélsior, 20 February, 1979. Reproduced in Híjar, Frentes…, 407.

73 Olivier Debroise, “A Kitsch Dandy,” in La era de la discrepancia, 205. For more on Fotógrafos Independiente, see: Birkhofer, Denise Birkhofer, “On and off the streets: Photography and Performance in Mexico City, 1974-84” (PhD diss., New York University, 2013.)
period formulated an aesthetic that was intentionally in bad taste, poorly executed, and of seemingly unimportant subjects, a “pre-punk” attempt to reject the clichés that were reinforced by the “dominance of visual poetry and tasteless representation of misery” at the end of the 1970s.  

The formation of PyC allowed for the exploration of other issues pertaining to the radicalization of the art object, but within the context of more pointed social and even personal concerns. In the 198’s he was a figurehead of the neo-Mexicanists, frequently mixing nationalist and pop imagery to explore issues of gender, sexuality, and cultural identity. With Peyote y la Cia., Patiño’s proclivity towards the irreverent was made plain. His personal tastes for Mexican pop culture began to be utilized as a platform for the rejection of nationalism, imperialism and consumerism, and this would be a hallmark of his later work. But in the context of the late 1970s, Patiño demonstrated what was still a curiosity towards collective production and within the context of consumerist culture, which also might account for an interest in Pop Art. He explained: “My major influence was the knowledge of the mythical figure, Andy Warhol…I said, my gosh, this is my ideal of an artist…I said, well he is Andy Warhol and the Factory, I will be Peyote and the Company.”

Peyote y la Compañía utilized the Salón as a means of creating their hallucinatory

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74 Debroise, “A Kitsch Dandy,” 205.


76 “Mi mayor influencia fue el saber del mítico personaje Andy Warhol…yo decía, hijole, ese es mi ideal de artista…dije bueno, él es Andy Warhol and the factory, yo voy a ser Peyote y la Compañía.”, see “Adolfo Patiño,” in Dulce María de Alvarado Chaparro, “Performance en México: Historia y desarrollo” (Undergraduate Thesis, ENAP/UNAM, 2000), 231. The name “Peyote” was a nickname given to Patiño in the early 1970s. He was also one of the founding members of the group Fotógrafos Independientes (active 1976-1984) under the name “Adolfógrafo.” His adoption of alternative names further signals his interest in playing with social identities.
installation composed of found objects, photographs, graphics and sculptures. Entitled *Tragodia II*, it was one of the first projects to “reactivate forms of popular culture that in the 1980s would lead to a broad interest in Mexican kitsch.”

The title of the installation was also meant to point to the tragic history of Mexico, a series of foreign invasions across time, now finding expression in the flooding of Mexican markets and culture with U.S. consumerism. The group explained that they “wanted to open eyes to this process of invasion/absorption” and to steer Mexican culture back towards its local roots.

At the heart of this constructed environment was an altar-like pyramid made from cardboard boxes, with collaged monotype prints of portraits, televisions displaying skeletons of José Guadalupe Posada, comics, advertisements, or left in their original state. (Fig.80) Surrounding the pyramid were a series of mini-installations including *ofrendas* and *retablos* centered on the theme of “modern satire.” Juxtaposing images of a nude Marilyn Monroe with traditional Mexican sugar skulls; neon lights and traditional masks; the Virgen of Guadalupe with mannequin parts; Coke bottles with traditional and commercially produced *pan dulce*; the installation “rescued everyday materials from diverse origins from an ironic viewpoint they called ‘newreadymadismo’,” or *newreadymadeism*.

Their “newreadymade” also contained an altar, part of which featured an homage to Patiño’s beloved Andy Warhol. This

77 “Peyote y la Compañía: Tragodia segunda,” in *La era de la discrepancia*, 234-35. The “broad interest in Mexican kitsch” in the 1980’s was directly linked to the *neomexicanismo* movement, in which Patiño is often considered to have been a participant.

78 “Queremos abrir los ojos a este proceso de invasión/absorción…Queremos tener y crear conciencia de este proceso para dirigirlo mayor, para que conduzca a una cultura, si no pura, por lo menos más dirigida, por nuestra.” (see “Peyote y la Compañía,” in *Salón Nacional de Artes Plásticas, Sección Anual de Experimentación* [exposición presentada en la] Galería del Auditorio Nacional: enero/marzo 1979. Exh. Cat. (Mexico City: Palacio de Bellas Artes / INBA, 1979), 73.

79 “…rescata materiales cotidianos de origen diverso con una Mirada irónica que ellos mismos nombran ‘newreadymadismo’.” See, Néstor García Canclini, “A donde va el arte mexicano?,” in *Salón Nacional de Artes Plásticas, Sección Anual de Experimentación*, 5.
tounge-and-cheek Altar mayor, or main altar, contained a seashell encrusted, framed photo of Warhol, a pack of cigarettes, a box of Brillo, and a 7-Up bottle enclosed in glass.80 (Fig.81)

The hallucinatory space was further activated by the constant loop of a recording playing against this stagestet. The recording was a mash-up of “native music, random cuts of radio programs, mestiza music, rock and roll, the national anthem, the star wars “anthem”, recordings of fascist rallies, punk music, and Patty Smith.”81 There were also two projections created for Tragodia II comprised of transparencies of urban scenes, juxtaposing the two cultures of the U.S. and Mexico.

Peyote y la Compañía’s newreadymadismo conceptually bears resemblance to No-Grupo’s montajes not only for combining physical objects with ephemeral actions, but particularly for their appropriation of popular culture. Their simultaneous employment and critique of the category of Performance, or Transformances in Patiño’s terms. Melquiades Herrera has explained that:

Maris proposed that what we had done was a Montaje de Momentos Plásticos, a generic title we liked to adopt to designate our actions or events. The sentiment at that moment may have a parallel with the name "Transformances" that the group Peyote y la Compañía presented with their actions, those that on the one hand seemed theatrical to me, as they were also called them "Microtheater", Peyote & Cia. Their appearance was supported by an intellectual of the theatrical avant-garde: Juan José Gurrola.82

Both groups are frequently cited as having been important spearheads for what would be known as Performance, but the above quote by Herrera also points to their shared roots in the longer tradition of action-based projects in Mexico, particularly through figures like Gurrola or

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80 “Peyote y la Compañía,” in Salón Nacional de Artes Plásticas, Sección Anual de Experimentación, 69.
81 Ibid. 74.
Jodorowsky. Just as the panic ephemerals were distinct from the happening, Transformance was outside of the formal theater, but retained more of a theatrical structure than the happening.

The manifestation of Transformance came in the form of Microteatro as the group termed their brand of theatrical action. A series of ten “microtheaters” took place within their installation, making use of their newreadymades as a backdrop for performances and experimental film projections. The group compared the format of the microtheater to a television commercial: “they both depend on brevity and impact: the suggestive element” and that their implication of consumerism was meant to “play with a space in time, to make a small subversion of quotidian reality,” and to explore the possibilities that everyday actions can create artistic actions. An “act of Dada logic,” the Microteatros were also meant to directly respond to their immediate context, the art institution and the Salón format. Like the Salón Independiente, Proceso Pentágono, or No-Grup, Peyote y la Cia. turned the institution into a stage for collaboration and subversion.

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83 “We never new Jodorowsky personally, but nonetheless his texts, interviews, and films influenced us. His attitudes always alternative to the system, his iconoclastic humor and his charisma, surprised us. I consider him one of the collateral ideologues of conceptualism and above all, of performance.” / “A Jodorowsky nunca lo conocimos personalmente, pero desde luego sus textos, entrevistas y películas nos influenciaron. Sus actitudes siempre alternas al sistema, su humor iconoclasta y su charisma, nos sorprendieron. Lo considero uno de los ideólogos colaterales del conceptualismo y sobre todo, del performance.” Bustamante, Interview in Henaro, 156-57.

84 See “Peyote y la Compañía,” in Salón Nacional de Artes Plásticas: Sección Anual de Experimentación, 80.

85 Peyote y la Cia also invited other participants in the Sección, including Yoiltéotl, to collaborate for the microteatros. Ibid., 81.

86 “…se puede ver la relación del microteatro con el commercial televisado: los dos dependen de la brevedad y del impacto: el element sugestivo.” And “…queremos jugar con un espacio del tiempo, hacer una pequeña subversion a la vida cotidiana., mostrar que cualquier actividad humana puede tener un instante realmente creativo.” Ibid.

In their statement for the catalog, the group acknowledges antecedents for the microteatro: Samuel Beckett and Juan José Gurrola, Salón Nacional de Artes Plásticas: Sección Anual de Experimentación, 81.
Like No-Grupo’s kidnapping of Gunther Gerzso’s homage exhibition, on of the microtheaters played with the concept of homage while presenting a critique of the current state of the arts. A participatory event called *La Libertad*, was a multi-part, spontaneous, yet loosely planned, action that would call upon the public to “enjoy the space of the Galería del Auditorio as a stageset.”\(^{87}\) Within this context, the other ten *microteatros* were presented, including *To Raquel with Love*, starring Terry Hollyday, a tongue-and-cheek ode to the Mexican art critic, Raquel Tibol. (Fig.82) While the exact nature of this action remains unclear, this play with figures representative of the old-guard (yet celebrated) Mexican artists or art critics would find continued kinship in the following projects of No-Grupo.

**MYTH AND MEDIA: *ATENTADO AL HIJO PRÓDIGO* AT THE MUSEO DE ARTE MODERNO**

Shortly after the internal rupture among its members at the Sección Anual de Experimentación in 1979, No-Grupo, now down to their four core members, followed up their homage to Gerzso by tackling another, but this time more notorious, artist. In “a pointed critique of the puerile idea of artist as celebrity,” No-Grupo again utilized a pre-existing exhibition dedicated to José Luis Cuevas as a platform for their intervention.\(^{88}\) The Museo de Arte Moderno mounted a solo exhibition of Cuevas’s work, which primarily featured paintings and lithographs from his recent stint living in Paris.\(^{89}\) Entitled *José Luis Cuevas. El regreso de otro hijo pródigo* (*José Luis Cuevas: the Return of Another Prodigal Son*), the exhibition clearly aimed to solidify Cuevas’s position as a leading international artist, while No-Grupo’s project would serve to

\(^{87}\) “…una fina crítica a la pueril idea de la celebridad del artista”, Henaro, 65.

destabilize the image of Cuevas as an artist.

In this section, I further argue that No-Grupó distinguishes themselves from the other groups not only by addressing historical art traditions, but also by inserting themselves within the narrative of Mexican art history to subvert its hierarchies, using humor as a means of destabilization.90 While elements of humor where certainly present in both the Paris Biennial and Gerzso Homage projects, I would argue that the Cuevas Montaje demonstrates a more sharply honed employment of irony and parody, strategies that the group would employ with a vengeance in their later project of the early 1980s. Among the very serious political goals set forth by many of the Grupos (Proceso Pentagono’s recreated torture room installations, or Suma’s graffiti with a social message) No-Grupó’s parodied approach was meant both as a breath of fresh air, but with as serious a goal as their fellow artists groups. As Bustamante has explained, for No-Grupó humor was not only an attention-grabbing strategy and one that undoubtedly lends a certain degree of accessibility to the public, but as she explains, “If it wasn’t with humor, we wouldn’t have been able to do it, it was a political strategy.”91

With this project, humor and parody serve to destabilize or demystify official narratives and Cuevas was, in many ways, a more appropriate target for a critique of the Mexican art system than Gerzso given the former artist’s position as a rebel against muralism and state-sanctioned art at the end of the 1950s and one that had supported the students in 1968, but that by the late 1970s had almost made a mockery of his own position as a leading Mexican painter. According to a recent article, in 1988 Cuevas had even gone so far as to proclaim that “within

90 While it is beyond the scope of this project, it is also necessary to mention here another project in which No-Grupó either awarded them or renounced professional titles and accolades or prizes.

91 “Si no era con humor no lo hubiéramos podido hacer, era una estrategia política.”, Bustamante “Interview,” Henaro, 148. Bustamante has also explained that their quotation of “popular urban culture” was also a political act (ibid).
Latin America, I was a precursor and in the United States my attitude was compared to that of James Dean in cinema or of Elvis Presley in popular music.”⁹² A statement so grandiose and ultimately so reductive of the artist’s position in the history of Mexican art, exemplifies a dramatic shift away from Cuevas’s incendiary “Cactus Curtain” days, when such proclamations would have belonged to the realm of los tres grandes.

For all of the radicalism present in many of the Grupos proposals, by 1979, the retention of activist models and concerns attached to 1968 were rendering many of the groups’ political ambitions out of touch with the changing culture around them, one that was growing evermore interested in products filtering down from the north and the consumerist mindset that it facilitated. Therefore, the timely addressing of celebrity and fame is one that would have spoken to the Mexican public on a level far deeper than institutional politics or art historical traditions. No-Grupo selected a very local art celebrity, but with a very high-profile and international presence, one that had been heavily promoted by controversial curator/critics, the Colombian Marta Traba and Cuban, José Gómez-Sicre.

Moreover, the growth of Cuevas’s celebrity status in Mexico and abroad served as a conceptualization of how the artistic landscape had also shifted across the 1960s and into the 1970s. Cuevas, who had participated with his ironic ephemeral mural in the 1961 exhibition of “los Hartos”, the Fed-Ups, had now been fully embraced and promoted by the very institutions he once fought against. In an unsolicited postscript for the exhibition catalogue accompanying Cuevas’s exhibition, the No-Grupo explains that:

A prodigal son is a son that enters the Museum of Modern Art with open arms, to be received by others also with open arms, those of his father, the system. A

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father, this system that maybe gives things but also denies many others.  

Cuevas, who rejected the system with his participation with the Hartos, was now exhibiting works that lacked the critical edge the artist once had.

No-Grupo continued to point to the numerous, yet ultimately unsatisfactory, attempts at bridging gaps between art and daily life and signaled Cuevas’s failure to break with the institutions he had lampooned decades earlier in “The Cactus Curtain.” For this montaje de momentos plásticos, No-Grupo first went to Cuevas’s home where they spoke with the artist and took photographs of their encounter and like in Gerzso’s kidnapping these were later utilized as source material by the artists. Cuevas, never one to shy away from having his image captured, may be seen in a contact sheet seated in traditional portrait pose; or with fists up like a boxer ready for the fight; or leaning forward with an excited grin; and in a chair, back turned to the camera. The artists are also seen physically accosting the more senior artist, almost as if to restrain him, but their glowing smiles and laughing faces indicate that their encounter took on a confrontational, yet jovial, tone. (Fig. 83) While the MAM never formally gave No-Grupo an exhibition, they sponsored a one-time presentation of their individual and collective responses.

On Thursday, April 19 the group organized a “spectacle” at the MAM entitled Atentado al hijo prodigo, “taking José Luis Cuevas as a pretext to approach artistic demystification through 60 minutes of plastic humor…” (Fig. 84) The premise for this process of “demystification” was the premier of three Super-8 films and a series of “visual gags” presented to the attending audience. For their action, the members created a kind of stage set creating a

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93 “Un hijo pródigo es un hijo que entra al Museo de Arte Moderno con los brazos abiertos a ser recibido por otros brazos también abiertos, los de su padre, el sistema. Un padre, éste sistema, que tal vez dé cosas, pero que niega muchas otras también.”, No-Grupo, “Postscript to the catalogue, El hijo prodigo de José Luis Cuevas,” 1979. Reproduced in Henaro, 69.

94 Henaro, 65.
literal cactus curtain, “made of plastic and printed with silkscreen” as a metaphor for the “devolution” of Cuevas’s earlier stance against muralism and the Mexican School of Painting.95 (Fig.85)

Several documentary photographs of the event at MAM feature several images of Rubén Valencia intervening in a photographed portrait or photomural of Cuevas. Upon the stage, the literal cactus curtain has been pulled back to reveal a portrait of Cuevas, photographed during their prior meeting. By all accounts, No-Grupó had invited Cuevas to attend, but as he failed to appear, Valencia proceeded to desecrate Cuevas’s image, smearing it with a large piece of heavily frosted cake.96 (Fig.86) An action perhaps more befitting of a comedy act, Valencia commits the ultimate act of demystification through a humorous act of destruction—albeit a benign destruction as the photographic stand-in remained protected by a sheet of plastic.

While Cuevas might not have been sport enough to have physically participated in Valencia’s cake smearing action, he was, according to Bustamante, complicit in another component of Atenado del Hijo Prodigio. Along with Herrera and Valencia, Bustamante made an audio recording of the group reflecting upon what would happen if all of the artwork was removed

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95 “…the devolution of his cactus curtain, made of plastic and printed with silkscreen…”; “la devolución de su cortina de nopal realizada en plastic e impresa en serigrafía” No-Grupó, “Comunicado del No-Grupo del Montaje de momentos plásticos Atentado al hijo pródigo,” 1979. Reproduced in Henaro, 77.

96 “Con una porra prefabricada, se logró un ambiente de participación del público quien reaccionó con risas y aplausos espontáneos, por lo que en reciprocidad, fue obsequiado con obra grafica inedita y se le hizo participar del estreno de tres cortos de cine super 8 y de varios gags visuales, entre los que mencionamos: la primera falsificación reconocida por Cuevas; el descubrimiento del gran hombre que está detrás de José Luis; la devolución de su cortina de nopal realizada en plastic e impresa en serigrafia; la demostración de que las obras consagradas se caen, se desprenden o se doblan, o porqué un autorretrato de José Luis bien puede reducirse a las dimensiones de un espejo; donde se vió que si [C]uevas hubiera o no asistido, el bizcocho con que iba a ser agasajado, de todos modos estaba condenado a convertirse en un paste lazo a su efigie foto-mural, que porque José Luis no asistió, tuvo que consumarse ‘en ausencia’.” No-Grupo, “Comunicado del No-Grupo del Montaje de momentos plásticos Atentado al hijo pródigo,” 1979, reproduced in Henaro, 77.
from the museum and featured Cuevas imitating then director of the MAM, Fernando Gamboa.  

Melquiades Herrera and Valencia together created another photocopy takeaway entitled *Elija supersonaje*, a play on a kind of choose your own adventure type of game. (Fig.87)

Featured is an image of Mickey Mouse and a figure drawing by Cuevas one of which you are instructed to choose. The only text to appear reads: “One afternoon, we had to choose between doing work about Cuevas or seeing a Mickey Mouse movie and we chose…” The figure of Mickey Mouse would be re-used frequently by Valencia as a stand-in for U.S. consumerism.

In addition to the direct critique of Cuevas’s privileged position within the museum institution, No-Grupo also riffed on the commercial effects of artistic celebrity. For the project, the signature, that which lends authenticity and value to a work of art, becomes the bone for No-Grupo to pick clean. Cuevas had begun to exploit the potential for recognition and fame as early as his ephemeral mural in the Zona Rosa where the spectacle surrounding the artist’s notoriety was as significant or more so than the mural. There is also a focus on the artist’s signature, a highly recognizable component of his work and something the artist himself had already used as

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97 “Hablando del caso contrario, y bastante conocido, de obras que habían sido aceptadas y que se encuentran guardadas en los museos y que pierden vigencia histórica para luego convertirse en chatarra que ocupa espacios que no le corresponde, con el No-Grupo hicimos una acción que hoy día está en la red. Rubén Valencia y Melquíades Herrera armaron el guión con Manuel Zavala, y yo también participé. Se trataba de reflexionar sobre qué va a pasar el día en que las obras se tengan que sacar de los museos porque ya no caben. Hicimos la obra solo en audio, pidiéndole a José Luis Cuevas que imitara a Fernando Gamboa, entonces director del MAM (Museo de Arte Moderno, México), see: Schmaltz, “Interview: Maris Bustamante.” Recording here: [http://pias.arts-history.mx/entrada.php?id=365](http://pias.arts-history.mx/entrada.php?id=365), accessed November 6, 2013.

98 “Una tarde, entre hacer un trabajo sobre Cuevas o ver una película del ratón miguelito tuvimos que elegir, y elegimos…”

99 Henaro, 150-51

100 Not only was the signature the focal point of his *mural efímeral*, in 1976, Cuevas had caused a minor scandal when he had four women agree to be tattooed with his signature. See Cherem, 1.
a strategic device for probing artist-celebrities.

Rubén Valencia adapted his earlier takeaway for Gerzso in his *Atención coleccionistas*, a photocopied set of instructions for collectors that might find a fake Cuevas amongst their collection. (Fig.88) Valencia, proclaiming himself an “ex-artista geometrica”, instructs the unfortunate collector to: “send me the dimensions of your painting and I will tell you which signature is appropriate…my stickers have a totally invisible adhesive.” He then “guarantees” that once the painting contains his product (his sticker-signature), not even the best specialist would be able to detect its falsity. Below Valencia’s instructions is a diagram featuring versions of Cuevas’s signature, numbered one through seven, ostensibly for the selection of the collector, or, as demonstration of Valencia’s capable hand, but also as a visual cue towards the demystification of authenticity of the art object and of the artist.

One of Bustamante’s responses also directly confronts the myth of individual artistic genius or celebrity. Her takeaway offers visitors the “Genuine Sweat of José Luis Cuevas”, represented here by a white cloth (presumably soaked by Cuevas’s sweat) collected in a plastic bag, then attached to a printed piece of cardboard featuring Cuevas’s signature and date and the statement “Las Reliquias duran toda la vida” or “Relics last a lifetime.” (Fig.89) Here, Bustamante clearly quotes Rubén Valencia’s earlier *Tres molidos...* for Gerzso and the attempt to call into question authenticity, authority, and ownership of objects and artists as they circulate in the world. However Bustamante’s response is decidedly sharper and more pointed in its poking fun at the hard work, the blood, sweat and tears the maestro Cuevas exerts to achieve his

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101 “Envíeme las dimensiones de su cuadro y yo le diré que tamaño de firma la conviene…mis calcomanías tienen una adhesión totalmente invisible.”

102 “Le garantizo que na vez que su cuadro ostente mi product, ni el major de los especialistas podrá detectar su falsedad.”
artistic celebrity. And that rather than owning a “masterwork” by Cuevas (a canvas, a drawing, a print) his physical sweat might serve as a replacement. Bustamante’s takeaway then pointedly asks: what are the implications of the physical presence of the artwork or the artist? Are they necessary for the creation of what we call art?

One of the three Super-8 films created by No-Grupo for the montaje, entitled Hijo pródigo, takes place in Cuevas’s exhibition at the MAM.\footnote{The film may be seen here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSK69BBHmYA, min. 9:09, accessed 05/12/2014.} In the beginning moments of the film, the camera begins to move through silent, unpopulated galleries filled with Cuevas’s work. As the camera begins to center in on one particular work, one of its figures (Cuevas’s self-portrait) suddenly appears to have jumped from the picture plane and now stands, still in two-dimensional form, on the gallery floor. The camera assumes the position of Cuevas’s proxy as he wanders through his own exhibition and out into the foyer of the museum.

The film then jumps to a view of Cuevas’s figure standing outside of the MAM. As he begins to make his way through the parking lot and towards the exit onto bustling Chapultepec Avenue, his attempt to enter the public street (and to bridge that gap between daily life and art production) are thwarted. Unaware of the bright-orange Volkswagen Beetle parked behind him, we see the driver return to his car, start the engine, and proceed to backup and run over Cuevas. The film ends with the flattening of Cuevas’s two-dimensional form against the asphalt, legs ripped from his torso, and bleeding streams of a dark ink or paint from his mouth and body.

CONCLUSION

No-Grupo continued producing projects until 1983 and their later projects introduced more pointed political and social commentary. They also expanded their borders, engaging in projects with other Latin American countries. This included their 1982 participation in the
Primer Coloquio Latinoamericano de Arte No-Objetual in Medellín where they collaborated with the dissident political movement, M-19, to produce “Agena Colombia 83”, a publication of graphic expressions related to the tense socio-political situation in the country. Designed by No-Grupo it brought together experimental graphics produced by over forty artists (and many of them Grupos) in support of the M-19 cause.\footnote{See: “Interview with Maris Bustamante,” in Henaro, 157.} They continued their expanding collaborations in 1982 with the Venezuelan performance artist, Carlos Zerpa. They produced the performance *Caliente! Caliente!* At the Museo de Arte Moderno in Xalapa, Veracruz and were also invited along with Zerpa to appear on the television show *Hoy* where they also presented several interventions in live television.\footnote{For more on this collaboration, see: Henaro, 103.}

These and many other No-Grupo projects from the 1980s, while chronologically beyond the scope of this project, demonstrate why the influence of this group and its individual members had an arguably stronger impact on contemporary Mexican art than many other groups. In particular, the work of Meliquiades Herrera has had a noticeable impact on neo-conceptual art in Mexico. His pointed and humorous interventions and performances continued to address Mexican urban life with a critical eye towards consumerism. Herrera has been cited by contemporary artists as an influence (Abraham Cruzvillegas and Damian Ortega, for example) and he was recently the subject of the monograph, *Melquiades Herrera*.\footnote{See: Arden Decker-Parks, “Interview: Abraham Cruzvillegas,” *Museo* 11 (2009) and Sol Henaro, ed. *Melquiades Herrera*. (Mexico City: Alias/Antitesis, 2014).}

Another key influence imparted by No-Grupo was their early discussions surrounding gender and sexuality, thanks to projects instigated by Maris Bustamante. While this precise issue is beginning to be addressed (and is one aspect of the Grupos that is benefitting from tremendous
renewed interest), the absence of feminist discourse (or discourses of sexuality) is surprising given the number of woman artists that participated in nearly every one of the groups.\footnote{While not an exhaustive list, some of the many woman artists that participated in the Grupos included: Lourdes Grobet and Rowena Morales in Proceso Pentágono; Bustamante, Katia Mandoki, and Susana Sierra in No-Grupo; Carla Rippey in Peyote y la Cia.; Mónica Mayer and Ana Victoria Jiménez in the Colectivo Cine-Mujer; Virginia Gutiérrez, Brisa Avila, Abigail Gómez, Maria Elena Gómez, María Teresa Guzmán, and Antonia Guerrero (Tepito Arte Acá); Isabel Estela Campos, Ariadne Gallardo and Mara Soto in TIP; Hilda E. Ramírez in Tetraedero; Araceli Zúñiga (also Taco de la perra brava) and Blanca Noval, in El Colectivo; several interdisciplinary participants in TAI; Paloma Díaz Abreu and Miriam Ramírez of Suma; Silvia Paz Paredes in Mira; Yolanda Hernández, Ana Cecilia Lazcano, and Silvia Ponce (Germinal); Gilda Castillo and Magali Lara (Março); and while not part of any official group, Pola Weiss was a pioneer of video art and performance (her earliest video, Flor Cósmica, was made in 1977).}

However, this might be accounted for by the lack of support for woman artists and to the limited arena of feminism until the 1980s. As Gabriela Acevedes Sepúlveda has summarized, 1970s feminism was characterized as “an imported imperialist dogma that prioritized issues of sexual liberation over more pressing class-based and social justice agendas.”\footnote{Aceves Sepúlveda, “¿Cosas de Mujeres?: Feminist Networks of Collaboration in 1970s Mexico,” \url{http://cral.in2p3.fr/artelogen/spip.php?article230}.} But in the 1980s, feminism turned to more activist approaches and many woman artists began to utilize the visual arts as grounds for critique.

As the 1980s approached, and the feminist movement entered firmer ground, Maris Bustamante began to confront more forcefully issues of gender and women’s rights, particularly


\footnotetext[107]{\url{http://cral.in2p3.fr/artelogen/spip.php?article230}.}
the conflictive role of the woman artist within this context.\textsuperscript{109} With works such as La Patente del taco (Taco Patent) from 1979, in which she successfully filed a patent for the taco as a “weapon for cultural penetration” and playing off of the symbol’s erotic connotations, she utilized the pre-existing platform of her group to draw attention to the diminished role of women artists and women’s issues in Mexican society.

In 1982, Bustamante produced her now iconic feminist project, Instrum\textit{ento de trabajo/ Para quitarle a Freud lo macho} (Work Instrument: To Get Rid of the Macho in Freud) as part of the performance Caliente-Caliente with Carlos Zerpa. For this montaje, Bustamante again made use of masks as a device for transformation as had been done in No-Grupo projects for the X Paris Youth Biennal and in their kidnapping of Gunther Gerzso. Three hundred masks she featuring a photo of her own visage, but with a penis in the place of the nose, where distributed to the public. Audience members, including noted art critic Raquel Tibol, then donned the masks while Bustamante (wearing her own mask) critiqued Freud’s theory of penis envy.\textsuperscript{110} In these two projects, interventions and performances served as effective mediums for provoking audiences into recognizing the inequalities surrounding gender and sexuality in the artworld and society at large. Whether examining inner artworld politics, gender and sexuality, or political movements, No-Grupo utilized humour, parody, and intervention as tools for the systematic dismanteling or toppling of hierarchies. Their position as interlocures between the public and the institution served to not only draw audiences closer to the institution, but also (like Proceso Pentágono) reveal the systems of power and economy that drive their existence. No-Grupo’s near

\textsuperscript{109} This is not to suggest that Bustamante was the only woman artist tackling feminist issues in the 1970s, but that her clear expression of these issues within the context of los Grupos and the visual arts was unusual.

\textsuperscript{110} Henaro, 155 and McCaughan, \textit{Art and Social Movements: Cultural Politics in Mexico and Aztlán}, 58-59. After the end of No-Grupo, Bustamante, with Mónica Mayer, went on to found the watershed feminist art group Polvo de Gallina Negra (Dust of the Black Hen) (1983-1993).
obsession with the critique of the institution would be taken up in full force by artists in the 1990s generation, many of whom (Gabriel Orozco, Abraham Cruzvillegas, or Damian Ortega, for example) gained attention worldwide for their artist-run initiatives and their melding of conceptualism with humor.
CONCLUSION

Times were certainly changing. [The] government began sponsoring until then unheard of art competitions, offering purchase prizes to “enrich public collections.” So how in the heck can a performance or installation be given awards if it can't be stored or sold? To compete or not to compete, that became the question. Pragmatism triumphed over idealism and all the enthusiasm for the Group Movement and non-market-oriented production was promptly wafted away by the winds of modernization. Postmodernism here we come.¹ (Felipe Ehrenberg)

As Felipe Ehrenberg concisely summarizes in the above quote, the Frente’s demise in 1980 marked the end of an era for the Grupos, whether they were participating in the larger organization (like Proceso Pentágono) or, like No-Grupo and Peyote y la Cía, reacted against it. Ehrenberg’s assessment also brings in to focus a shift in institutional practices and market-driven galleries in Mexico City as the 1980’s developed. This led to demise of the conflictive institutional environment that simultaneously opened and closed channels for experimental artists to present their work to the Mexican public, but consistently acted as a stage for many artists to call attention to precisely these concerns. As the artists associated with neomexicanismo began to garner local and international market attention, institutional support perhaps not surprisingly swung towards those artists whose work was easily exported, once again leaving artists working in conceptual and non-objectual modes to move underground or shift their own practices. Moreover, this commercial shift with the success of neomexicanismo, coupled with the institutionally critical nature of their work, led to the burial of or amnesia of conceptualisms in the 1960s and 70s.

The growing frustration among artists of the 1960s led to a questioning of cultural and commercial gallery spaces and their affects not only on art production, but how art might speak

to, or for, the public. As this dissertation has shown, the desire to address daily life was already of primary concern to the neo-avant-garde and conceptual artists in Mexico beginning in the early 1960s. Be it Mathias Goertiz’s moralistic challenge to re-imbue artistic production with a spiritual component; Jodorowsky’s desire to create a sense of panic so powerful that the viewer might actually become transformed; or Cuevas’s adoption of celebrity as a platform for the critique of popular culture in the Mexican context, the concerns of these progenitor figures, expressed through radical interventions, precisely aimed to collapse (or destroy) boundaries between the viewer, the institution, and the artist.

And while it is beyond the scope of this project, there are many more significant artists and interventions that will be uncovered and introduced into the narrative as research surrounding this decade grows. The constellations and networks of Mexican artists attempting to radicalize artistic production had only begun to be explored. And while recent exhibitions such as the comprehensive Desafío a la estabilidad (MUAC, 2014) have successfully begun to identify the holes, the niches, and the cracks within the traditional narrative of Mexican art history during the 1950s and 1960s, the 1970s remain understudied, leaving connections between the two decades to be framed primarily within the context of 1968.

While much headway has been made in studying the effects of 1968 on the art and visual culture in Mexico (particularly in architecture and design), disconnections between the first half of the decade and the “long Sixties” have begun to be bridged in Chapter Two of this dissertation.² Here, factors not directly tied to the Student and Workers Movement and the

² Examples include: Luis M. Castañeda, Spectacular Mexico: Design, Propaganda, and the 1968 Olympics. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014) and George Flaherty’s doctoral dissertation, “Hospitality and Dwelling on México ‘68”. (Austin, University of Texas, 2011). Recent exhibitions in Mexico include: Pedro Ramírez Vázquez: inédito y funcional at the Museo de Arte Moderno (September 2014-February 2015) and De ida y vuelta: iconos urbanos de Lance Wyman at the
cultural programming surrounding the Olympics were taken into consideration to broaden the context in which the number of artists groups and collectives began to proliferate. Considering the previously under-discussed, yet direct, connections between the neo-avant-garde of the first half of the 1960s and the Grupos, the longer tradition of collective and ephemeral interventions was explored and this tradition was re-positioned within a framework that considered the impact of the *movimiento* but also internal artworld ruptures that also encouraged this development. While short-lived phenomenon such as the Salón Independiente have primarily been discussed within the specific political context of 1968, chapter two has positioned the SI as an important bridge between neo-avant-garde practices among the Ruptura and conceptual practices among the Grupos of the 1970s. And in a continuation of this expanded understanding of interventionist strategies, chapter two highlighted international forces, such as Felipe Ehrenberg’s investigations into collaborative projects, public interventions, and institutional critique while living in England. This is a significant contribution towards expanding our understanding of action and conceptual art within a richer framework.

While 1968 undeniably impacted and forever changed the course of conceptualism in Mexico, I challenge the narrative that all Grupos formed and made work in reaction to these events. As Chapter Three has explored, the attempts to define a Grupos movement or even *phenomenon* have failed and with good reason. The sheer multitude of platforms and strategies, coupled with their diverse political positions, make this trend difficult to encapsulate or contextualize as an artistic movement. This is made even more difficult when we take into consideration, as this chapter does, that similar impulses existed far earlier and networks (and

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Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporaneo, UNAM (October 2014-February 2015), curated by Pilar Garcia.
artistic concerns) of Mexican artists had already expanded well beyond the geographic boarders of Mexico.

Having completed his watershed interventions in London’s streets, subways, and museums, Chapter Three demonstrates Felipe Ehrenberg’s impact in Mexico through his multi-part intervention at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in 1973. *Chicles, chocolates, cacahuates* marked the direct translation of Ehrenberg’s collaborations with the Polygonal Workshop, Fluxus, and Gustav Metzger’s DIAS platform to the Mexican institutional context, and made an impression on the artists that would come to form Grupo Proceso Pentágono. That projects such as Ehrenberg’s were carried out within the Mexican context, further challenges the pre-existing notion that art of these two decades was produced in isolation and that artists had little contact or interest in international trends or movements.

Alongside Ehrenberg, this chapter has also reconsidered and repositioned works by members of what would become Proceso Pentágono to account for their implementation of what Rubén Gallo called a “Trojan-horse” style of institutional critique throughout their body of work. Through the discussion of their interventions for the 1973 project *A nivel informativo*..., a new understanding of this group’s use of pre-existing exhibition platforms emerges, as they created informative exposées, driven by a collaborative approach to the critique of artist-viewer-institutional relations. This exhibition and associated interventions have previously been treated reductively- as a response to specific political conditions and ignoring compelling parallels to both earlier Mexican artists such as Goeritz, Jodorowsky, or those that participated in the Salón Independiente.

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The analysis of Proceso Pentágono within this expanded framework demonstrates that the concept of a “Grupos phenomenon” must continue to be questioned and redefined to account for the individual trajectories of each group and their members. Moreover, the introduction of related and contemporaneous projects by artists outside of Mexico, such as Marta Minujín and the Chicano group, Asco, place the actions by GPP within the global constellation of conceptual impulses. Moreover, this discussion has attempted to distinguish this group within the trajectory of the Grupos, taking into account their unique style of institutional critique that would greatly impact many other groups.

The close study of projects by No-Grupo, and more briefly Peyote y la Compañía, in Chapter Four has attempted to account for the flourishing of institutional interventions as the 1970s progressed and artists faced even greater challenges for support. Moreover, the projects discussed in this chapter demonstrate that despite the propensity for many groups to engage directly in the streets or to foster community-based projects, there were artists who continued to investigate the proposals put forth by the neo-avant-garde of the 1960s. This chapter also takes into consideration previously under-examined connections to geometrismo and earlier artists groups like Arte Otro, which arrived at interventions through plastic experimentation and a desire for a visual art that required viewer participation or activation. No-Grupo member Maris Bustamante’s declaration that “art is what you say it is” strikes a harmonious chord with both Jodorowsky’s panic ephemerals and Felipe Ehrenberg’s search for a “model for life” as the drive towards the collapsing of daily life and art accelerated.4

Both group’s significantly shared a skepticism not only of artist collectives, spurred by the formation of the Frente, but also of the artworld itself, frequently lampooning issues not

typically addressed by other Grupos, such as celebrity and popular culture. No-Grupo’s *montajes de momentos plásticos* and many of the projects of Peyote y la Cia. introduced an important brand of comedic or parodic conceptualism that, like Proceso Pentágono, utilized humor as a means of bringing to light hidden systems of control, be it the commercial gallery system, advertising, consumer goods, political slogans, or even other artists. Their brand of political expression was not, as Maris Bustamante has suggested, “to opportunistically link up with anecdotal events of our time,” but as a constant, or premise, that “guarantee a continuity” to their work.⁵

No-Grupo’s attraction to a diverse range of platforms and methods of production is reflective of the influence of Juan Acha and his theories of *no-objetualismo*, driven by a search for an art practice capable of expressing a *Latinamericanismo* and a society in which the role of art had changed. Here it is instructive to recall Acha’s statement that, “technology constitutes the characteristic and dominant cultural phenomenon of our time, capable of explaining to us many of the social aspects of art.”⁶ No-Grupos investigations into new media platforms (mimeographs, photo interventions or montage, Super8 films, and television) warrants further attention as these strategies would be carried on well into the 1990’s and beyond.

A “GRUPOS” LEGACY?

*We have not lived bitterly because we knew since the beginning that he voluntarily accepted to be promoted, usurping the role of “the pioneer of Mexican conceptualism.” They ask Gabriel*

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⁵ El propósito no es eslabonarse oportunísticamente a los sucesos anecdóticos de nuestra época, sino a sus constantes fundamentales que nos ofrecen la garantía de una continuidad en nuestro trabajo.”, “El No-Grupo y la Experimentación,” statement distributed during the Sección de Experimentación de Artes Plásticas, February 1979 and quoted in Liquios, 37.

⁶ La tecnología constituye el fenómeno cultural característico y dominante de nuestro tiempo, capaz de explicarnos muchos aspectos sociales del arte.”, Juan Acha, “Prólogo,” in *Arte y soceidad*, 11.
In the 1990s, a confluence of events lead to the resurrection of alternative models for making art, one that largely relied heavily on both neo-conceptual and collective strategies that often had a direct connection to the artist of the 1970s. However, these connections have not been explored in detail, but most certainly warrant future research. As Bustamante suggests in the above quote, while some artists of the late 1980s and 90s usurped the position of having introduced conceptualism to Mexico (at least as it appeared on the “global” stage), there was also a re-visiting or a rebirth not so much in artist collectives with overtly political goals, but in groups of artists coming together to create spaces that were not reliant upon direct institutional support.

With the scars of the 1968 student movement and the Tlatelolco massacre only beginning to fade, the country was hardly prepared for the tragic events of September 19, 1985 when a massive earthquake struck Mexico City. Many parts of the city’s infrastructure were decimated and an estimated 60,000-100,000 people died. The damage was so extensive that it left a permanent mark on the Mexican consciousness. As residents of Mexico’s capital city struggled to cope with the devastation caused by the quake, many left the city and within time new artists began arriving in the urban center due to cheaper living and studio conditions. It soon became clear that a new, young generation would face the task of continuing the projects of the 60s and 70s, but in a context that was far different from that of their predecessors and despite many shared challenges and goals.

The phenomenon that was the flourishing of alternative artists spaces across Mexico City in the 1990s has been one of the most critically discussed periods in Mexican art history since the muralists, yet like the Grupos has been primarily understood outside of the context of precisely this history. This is to suggest that conceptualisms or the propensity for artist groups did not exist until Gabriel Orozco began his legendary “Friday afternoon workshops.”

Relationship to earlier conceptual artists within the context of Mexico is rarely, if ever, discussed, favoring placing these artists within a “global”, a-historical context. However, the artists of the 1990s generation themselves have been quick to acknowledge that there was a precendence for their rejection of dependency on both cultural institutions and the commercial market. Yoshua Okón, artist and co-founder of La Panadería and founder of SOMA, has stated that;

The political changes and urban growth that took place after the 1960s had serious cultural consequences for Mexico City. On the one hand, after the student movement...gatherings of young people were viewed distrustfully by the government. On the other hand, the unchecked growth that characterized this period (the city almost tripled its population in twenty-five years) greatly affected urban planning, leaving few public areas and cultural centers and alienating citizens from each other. La Panadería was founded to counteract this sense of disorientation: beyond exhibiting art, its basic objective was to provide us with a new social context—to transform our way of life.8

The strikingly similar conditions Okón references presents a compelling parallel between the “phenomenon” of artists groups in the 1970s and the proliferation of underground or independent art spaces (largely organized and run by artists) in the 1990s.

The radical artistic interventions into cultural institutions and university spaces during the 1960s and 70s demonstrates that Mexican artists were as invested in conceptual and experimental practices as their international counterpoints and that 1968 represented an acceleration, rather than a spontaneous explosion of collective approaches to artmaking.

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Moreover the longer tradition of art interventions in Mexico also has implications for the generation of the 1990s. As the previous statement by Maris Bustamante suggests, these early explorations provided fertile ground for those artists of the 1980s and 90s who have largely been credited with the initiation of the first neo-conceptualisms in the country. Strategies of intervention and non-institutional platforms continue to be central to many Mexican artists’s practice (Francis Alÿs, Melanie Smith, Luis Felipe Ortega, or Yoshua Okón, just to name a few) and demonstrate a need to extend the intergenerational dialogue of interventionist strategies and conceptualism in Mexico to include the 1990s.

These artists’ proclivity towards social practice and non-traditional venues of display clearly bears comparison to early conceptual practices of the 1960s and the generation of the Grupos. Further study of these connections would most certainly add tremendous and fresh insight to this well-tread era of Mexican Art. This dissertation has attempted to begin this conversation in establishing a tradition of interventionist strategies in Mexico. The risks taken by artists of the 1960s and 70s (and in the face of repression, censorship, and violence) will continue to serve as guideposts for artists of generations to come. The role of intervention will surely continue to serve as a strategy for destabilizing hierarchies and power structures within the realm of culture and will continue facilitate the creation of new social contexts in an attempt to transform our way of life.
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Films, Documentaries, and Recorded Interviews


Sub-versiones de la memoria...60-70...México. DVD. Pilar García and Rafael Ortega, dir. (Mexico City: Centro de Documentación Arkheia, Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, UNAM, 2011). Includes interviews with: Arnulfo Aquino, Alberto Gutiérrez Chong, Hersúa and Jorge Pérezvega (Disc 1-2); Manuel Felguérez, Francisco Icaza, Brian Nissen and Carla Stellweg (Disc 3); and César Espinosa, Víctor Muñóz, Katya Mandoki, and Zalathiel Vargas (Disc 4).

Interviews and Conversations

Abraham Cruzvillegas
Felipe Ehrenberg
Angelica García
Pilar García
Alan Glass
Hersúa
Ernesto Mallard
Brian Nissen
Yoshua Okón
Luis Felipe Ortega
Montserrat Pecanins
Carla Rippey
Melanie Smith
Carla Stellweg
Luis Urias
Zalathiel Vargas

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El Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información de Artes Plásticas, INBA, Mexico City
Hermeroteca Nacional de México, UNAM
Memorial del 68, Centro Cultural Universitario, UNAM
Museo Carrillo Gil, Mexico City
Museo Ex-Teresa Arte Actual, Mexico City
The Museum of Modern Art, New York City
Pinto Mi Raya (Mónica Mayer)
Victor Muñoz (victormunoz.net)