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Magazine Politics: Edgardo Antonio Vigo’s Diagonal Cero and Hexágono ‘71

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Magazine Politics
Edgardo Antonio Vigo’s *Diagonal Cero* and *Hexágono ’71*

by

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of the requirements for the degree of
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INTRODUCTION

Graduate from the Escuela de Bellas Artes de La Plata. He has intervened as woodcut engraver, objectist [sic], sign-maker, and novísimo visual poet in national and international events… Since 1954 he endeavors in the construction and “assembly” of plastic objects, in 1968 he undertakes the development of visual poetry moving in the midst of an i-logical (sic) mathematics and suppresses the written word through numbers, establishing for these a specific code where the concept of mystery and [crossed-out] the aesthetics of bewilderment come together. ¹

These are the words with which Argentine artist Edgardo Antonio Vigo (La Plata, 1928–La Plata, 1997) defined his practice in a brief biography that he sent to the “Arte Joven Platense” exhibition held at the Museo Provincial de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires in 1971. The text provides an eloquent—albeit brief—insight into some of the most salient characteristics of Vigo’s life and work: a prideful kinship to the provincial city of La Plata, an heterogeneous artistic output, and a penchant for appropriating different forms of language to suit his needs such as poetry an art criticism. Throughout his career, which began in earnest in 1954 after his return from a sojourn to Europe, and continued until his death in 1997, Vigo produced a wealth of woodcut engravings, irreverent sculptures reminiscent of Dadaist antics, collaborative performance pieces supported by printed paraphernalia, visual poetry, and mail art pieces and projects. Parallel to his artistic practice, Vigo also worked as a critic and often contributed art historical texts on modern art and exhibition reviews to Platense newspapers such as El Día and El Argentino. He also delivered

lectures and technical courses at the Universidad Nacional de La Plata and even gave radio broadcasts from the university’s station.²

The intersection of Vigo’s artistic and critical practices is best seen in the magazines he edited throughout his life: *Standard 55* (1955), *WC* (1958), *Diagonal Cero* (1962 – 1969) and *Hexágono ’71* (1971–1974). In these publications Vigo showcased his own artistic output along with the work of collaborators, both Argentine and foreign, and critical art historical texts. *Standard 55* was Vigo’s first foray into magazine publishing.³ This early magazine displays some of the interests that Vigo would continue to pursue throughout his career: a penchant for irreverence, such as in the explanation he provides for his sculptures; the collaborative nature of his publications, as evidenced by the number of contributors; and an attachment to woodcut engravings and visual poetry. In 1962 Vigo published the first issue of *Diagonal Cero*, his longest-running periodical. Throughout its twenty-eight issues, *Diagonal Cero* combined Vigo’s main interests and pursuits: visual poetry, literature, woodcut engraving, and the history of modern art. The magazine became one of the most important platforms for the study and promotion of visual poetry and woodcut engraving within Argentina, and established Vigo as an important figure associated with these art forms.⁴ The already unstable political situation in Argentina reached a new degree of urgency in 1966, after the government of President Arturo Illia was overthrown by a military coup. The political situation continued to devolve with a succession of ever-weaker governments and increasing opposition to them. The political

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⁴ While several authors have made this remark, the most extensive and detailed account furthering this point can be found in Silvia Dolinko, “Circulación de xilografías y poesías latinoamericanas a través de la Diagonal Cero de Edgardo Antonio Vigo,” in América: Territorio de transferencias, ed. Marcela Drien et al., 1st ed. (Santiago de Chile: Dirección de bibliotecas, archivos y museos: Museo histórico nacional: RIL editores, 2008), 245–54.
instability marked all aspects of life within Argentina and influenced Vigo’s next editorial project. *Hexágono ‘71* was published from 1971 through 1974, and reflects the political upheaval of the period. In *Hexágono ‘71* Vigo’s lifelong belief in the need for artists to foreground the political and social is the most clearly detected. Parallel and often hand-in-hand with the development of his periodicals, Vigo developed a mail art practice that resulted in mail art objects and projects and, more relevant to this paper, motivated him to collaborate with an international network of artists.

I seek to explore how through a combination of mail art and visual poetry Vigo conjured in his magazines a form of political activity based on a-centered, unconstrained, and cryptic communication. The networks of mail art offered him the opportunity to transport concerns related to Argentina out of the country. These networks were not only a loose association of people connected through mail but a-centered systems were each addressee and recipient was fully autonomous from the original sender. Each magazine can be potentially intervened, stored or relayed. This autonomy translates as unpredictability, as Vigo was not in control or even aware of what happened to these magazines once they were placed in a mailbox. The Argentine authorities were equally incapable of determining where exactly these magazines and the political rallies contained in them would end up. The autonomy of the magazines was exponentially amplified by the fact that many of the political commentaries therein contained were written or represented as visual poetry. The messages are thus not clear but unstable, depending more on the primacy of their reader than in any specific reference to politics. Politics thus literally blended in with less controversial themes and subjects within the magazines.

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5 It is important to use the composite term a-centered as opposed to uncentered or decentered given that there is a difference between systems that had their centers removed (uncentered, decentered) and systems that as the prefix indicates, do not have a center (a-centered). This distinction is present and build upon in Brian Massumi’s translation of Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*. See, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 17.
Vigo’s practice as a magazinist exhibits in its earliest examples an interest in establishing connections with like-minded artists outside of La Plata. This interest would reach its full potential in the rhizomatic 1970s mail art networks. Likewise, Vigo’s belief in the need for artists to foreground social concerns in their work and his exploration of visual poetry were constant pursuits throughout his life. These strategies and interests developed in parallel to the progressively deteriorating political situation in Argentina, and as such, Vigo put them to use in addressing the social and political situation in which he and many of his collaborators lived. Vigo voiced these concerns through marginal channels of artistic communication such as magazines, mail art and visual poetry, instead of displaying them in galleries or museums. This political nuance appears incipiently in Diagonal Cero and is the most evident in Hexágono ‘71.6

With the exception of Fernando Davis’s Prácticas ‘revulsivas’: Edgardo Antonio Vigo en la escena crítica del conceptualismo, Ana Liza Bugnone’s Una articulación de arte y política: disclocaciones y rupturas en la poética de Edgardo Antonio Vigo (1968–1975) and Vanessa Davidson’s recent doctoral dissertation “Paulo Bruscky and Edgardo Antonio Vigo: Pioneers in Alternative Communication Networks, Conceptualism, and Performance (1960s–1980s),” most analyses of Edgardo Antonio Vigo’s work have avoided an encompassing, broad study of his oeuvre, choosing instead to focus on isolated bodies of work within his overall production. Such is the case with Silvia Dolinko’s essay “Circulación de xilografías y poesías latinoamericanas a través de la Diagonal Cero de Edgardo Antonio Vigo,” which focuses on Diagonal Cero as a vehicle for the dissemination and popularization of woodcut engraving. Another example is Mario Gradowczyk’s 2008 exhibition “Edgardo Antonio Vigo: Maquinaciones (1953–1962)”

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6 It is also important to highlight that Vigo’s mail art activities were at first, also marginalized from those of mail artists working elsewhere, such as Ray Johnson.
This practice of isolating aspects of Vigo’s work is understandable, given the scant literature dedicated to him. However, Vigo’s work cannot be understood in such a fashion: they reach their fullest expression not in isolation but examined in relationship with each other. Vigo’s notion of “communication at a distance”—the need for artist and audience to be able to communicate through artworks—lies at the center of the dedicated mail art activities he developed after 1971 separate from his work as a magazinist. Yet I believe the ideas labeled by Vigo as “communication at a distance” in 1971 had already began to appear in the pages of Diagonal Cero between 1962 and 1969. Indeed, many of the contributors who made the most powerful political statements in Hexágono ’71 during the 1970s first came into contact with Vigo through his promotion of visual poetry a decade earlier.

What I bring to bear on the historical account of 1960s and 1970s art in Argentina is not only a more integral panorama of Vigo’s work, but perhaps more importantly a better understanding of the roles artists’ magazines played in the wave of artistic political dissent that pervaded Argentina during the 1960s and 1970s. While historical accounts linking the “imperative of politics” (as Andrea Giunta would put it) that characterized art in Argentina after 1968 with Oscar Massota’s media art abound, there is little mention of other forms of alternative spaces and means of communication such as mail art and artists’ publications. Vigo’s

8 An example of this early association through visual poetry is Guillermo Deisler, who is first listed as the Chilean distributor of Diagonal Cero in issue 21 from 1967.
9 See Andrea Giunta, Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics: Argentine Art in the Sixties (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Marcelo Eduardo Pacheco, “From the Modern to the Contemporary: Shifts in Argentine
magazines were spaces where artists and collaborators scattered throughout Latin America, North America, Western and Eastern Europe, and even Japan came together through the unpredictable paths of the mail art network. In these magazines they were able to state their—often politically contentious—concerns through the non-explicit language of visual poetry. Scattered through the mail art network, these publications reached readers who in turn were given the opportunity to manipulate, read, comprehend, and even echo the expressions contained in them. Vigo’s editorial guidelines favored unrestrained, participatory contributions and open-ended readership. He exerted very little control over what exactly made it into the magazine and often sent them out to addresses selected at random from phone books. These guidelines enabled publications such as issue *df* of *Hexagono '71*, in which a questionnaire on political ideology formulated by Argentine artist Jorge Glusberg was printed side by side with a reproduction of a “Little Nemo in Slumberland” comic strip by turn-of-the-century American cartoonist Winsor McCay (figs. 1 and 2). In Vigo’s magazine politicized statements such as Glusberg’s, which refers to the Perón regime and the Vietnam War, sit side by side with a cartoon whose subject is an innocent dream. This juxtaposition makes political stances just another form of artistic expression, the same as a cartoon. The reader thus contemplates a question from Glusberg’s questionnaire such as, “Do you think General Perón would agree with this exhibition?” next to the scene in McCay’s cartoon where a bed grows legs and walks out of a window to take a stroll in the streets of New York. The juxtaposition generates an association where politics blends

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10 Jorge Glusberg, “Political Ideology,” *Hexágono '71*, no. df, 1974, n.p. *Hexágono '71*’s numbering system follows a very loose alphabetical order. The thirteen issues were numbered as follows: a, ab, ac, bc, bd, be, cd, ce, cf, df, dg, e.
with the magazine’s less controversial contributions. This adds to the cryptic nature of the publication by potentially making every artwork contained in it a political statement.

Vigo assembled publications using the networks available to him, and in which he collected and solicited political commentaries from local and foreign artists expressed in the ambiguous language of visual poetry. In order to explore the nuanced form of political activity implied in Vigo’s magazines I analyze the strategies through which he combined mail art, visual poetry, and his own editorial labors between 1962 and 1974 in his magazines. Chapter one identifies the three editorial strategies used by Vigo throughout his life: 1) translation, 2) construction of an artistic critical apparatus, and 3) assembly of horizontal networks of international artistic collaboration. The chapter compares these strategies with those employed by other little magazines in Argentina in order to demonstrate how, though the strategies were similar, Vigo used them to pursue goals such as horizontal international collaboration. Chapter two focuses on the relationship between Vigo’s practice as a magazinist and as a mail artist. The establishment of unstable international networks of collaboration where all the nodes have almost unchecked autonomy through the mail art network lies at the core of this analysis. This chapter also maps out the appearance of Hexágono ‘71 (1971–74) against the historical backdrop of the increasingly unstable and violent political situation in Argentina between 1966 and 1976. Chapter three studies how Vigo’s development of visual poetry as an artist and his cultivation and promotion of this art form as a scholar and promoter in Latin America informed his practice as a magazinist. This examination demonstrates how the semantic ambiguity and visual freedom inherent to visual poetry were used by Vigo to cipher political statements that would have otherwise been censored by the Argentine authorities. This argumentative structure focuses, through various angles and lenses, on the shifting and nuanced politics Vigo developed in his
magazines and challenges the more pervasive narratives of Latin American modern art that focus on a more overt form of political activity by artists.

The absence of Vigo from seminal historical accounts dedicated to Argentine internationalism and conceptualism from the 1960s and 1970s and their intersection with politics reveals the limits of the critical definition of both conceptualism and politics provided by their authors. Andrea Giunta’s seminal *Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics: Argentine Art in the Sixties* makes no mention of Vigo despite the fact that his efforts to articulate an international network of artists during the 1960s falls within the scope of her subject. In her account of poet Julio Llinás’ short-lived magazine *Boa* (1958) her examination comes closest to Vigo, and it reveals the limits of the definition of internationalism she operates under. Giunta’s examination focuses mostly on the guise of internationalism professed and practiced by public and private institutions such as official museums, national contests, and privately funded exhibition spaces and galleries. The efforts conducted by artists to create more participatory and horizontal international networks for themselves is only lightly touched on in her analysis of *Boa*. Luis Camnitzer’s exclusion of Vigo from his *Didáctica de la liberación arte conceptualista latinoamericano*, specifically in the section dedicated to “post poetry” and mail art projects as forms of dissent in Latin American countries under authoritarian regimes, is particularly egregious. Camnitzer’s definition of politics relies so heavily on clear and instructive didactics that it simply cannot encompass the ambiguous, non-normative, and participatory form of politics practiced by Vigo. Vigo’s politics called for the liberation from the strictures of over-burdening didacticism and as such lie in opposition to Camnitzer’s model for liberation from authoritarian regimes and their hegemonic practices.

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Ana Longoni conducts a politically oriented study of Vigo in the chapter titled “La calle en el museo” in Vanguardia y revolución: arte e izquierdas en la Argentina de los sesenta-setenta.\textsuperscript{14} Longoni’s examination is useful for my present analysis given that it demonstrates the nuance of Vigo’s form of political activity. Her analysis, however, is not focused exclusively on Vigo but on a collaborative work he presented with Perla Benveniste, Juan Carlos Romero, Eduardo Leonetti, and Luis Pazos in the fourth Salón de Artistas con Acrílicopaulini held in the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires in 1973.\textsuperscript{15} The work was a seven meter wall within the exhibition space with the words “Ezeiza es Trelew” (“Ezeiza is Trelew”) that mimicked those that could be found in the increasingly violent Argentine streets. According to Longoni, the work was an example of artists representing what was occurring in the streets within the sequestered and deceivingly peaceful museum galleries.\textsuperscript{16} Vigo (in this case, in a collaboration) could spray a caustic political statement on a wall, but then have the wall placed inside a museum gallery. They also left a can of spray paint next to the wall as an implicit invitation to the audience to spray their own thoughts on the wall. As demonstrated by Longoni’s analysis, on which I will seek to expand, Vigo’s art was neither fully militant, nor only autonomous, posing artistic creation as a separate entity from social reality. It took both forms. He created ambiguous objects infused with commentaries voiced by dissimilar tongues and always shifting depending on the identity of the viewer.

The fact that Vigo is more often referred to in historical accounts focused on the history of mail art and artists’ publications while works devoted to Argentine art of the 1960s and 1970s

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 136. This work is briefly mentioned but not analyzed by Luis Camnitzer. See Luis Camnitzer, Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation, 1st ed., Joe R. and Teresa Lozano Long Series in Latin American and Latino Art and Culture (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), .
\textsuperscript{16} Longoni, “Capítulo 7: La Calle En El Museo,” 135.
fail to acknowledge him reveals how misrepresented his legacy is. In Géza Perneczky’s *The Magazine Network: The Trends of Alternative Art in the Light of Their Periodicals, 1968–1988* Vigo is credited for being the creator of alternative artists’ publications in the 1970s and the originator of mail art in Argentina.\(^\text{17}\) The attention devoted by Pernecsky to Vigo demonstrates that Vigo’s work had a unique character within the history of mail art and assembly magazines that is missing in historical accounts dedicated to Latin American art of the period. In light of this, Ana Liza Bugnone’s brief but incisive overview of *Hexágono ’71* was of key importance for my research, as it provided a detailed account of the collaborators in each issue and thus made my own analysis much easier to conduct.\(^\text{18}\) Bugnone’s analysis also highlighted how *Hexágono ’71*, in spite of being led by a single person, was the reflection of the contributions and concerns of a whole array of artists ranging from members of Grupo Centro Arte y Comunicación to deceased American cartoonists such as Winsor McCay.\(^\text{19}\) Another historian who has contributed to the understanding of Vigo’s practice as being at the crossroads of magazine editing, visual poetry, alternative channels of communication, and the pressing political concerns of early 1970s Argentina is Vanessa Davidson. Her recent doctoral dissertation “Paulo Bruscky and Edgardo Antonio Vigo: Pioneers in Alternative Communication Networks, Conceptualism, and Performance (1960s–1980s)” frames Vigo’s political activity as one that must be analyzed in tandem with his endeavors in alternative communication networks such as mail art and magazines. Her research proved invaluable to the present dissertation. The present paper runs closely in parallel to her own focus on Vigo’s magazines and mail art. However, while she argues


\(^{19}\) The CAYC was an group of Argentine artists formed by artist and critic Jorge Glusberg (b. 1938) in 1971. They were based in Buenos Aires and remained active throughout the 1970s, producing exhibitions, press releases, and happenings.
that for the most part politics “did not register among Diagonal Cero’s pages.” I hold that the resources that Diagonal Cero does register politics, albeit in an incipient fashion in comparison to Hexágono ‘71.20

The most important source of information, however, is the archive kept by Vigo himself, an invaluable collection of papers related to his practice that evinces how one project seamlessly bled into another. Starting from 1954—the year Vigo marked as his artistic birth—all the way to his passing in 1997, Vigo kept a detailed archive of his artistic activities. In this archive it is possible to trace the string of ideas and concerns that tie together various projects such as his radio broadcasts and the editorials of Diagonal Cero. Carefully preserved and classified in yearly biopsies, the archive kept by the Centro de Arte Experimental Vigo in La Plata, Argentina contains a true life sample of Vigo’s various interests, projects, concerns, and associations. Everything from diagrams and sketches of some of his best-known works to extended epistolary dialogues with detractors of his artwork can be found in this rich archive.21 Furthermore, Vigo’s own lifelong pursuit to promote the magazines he edited and in which he showcased the work of artists from all over the world was essential to the present paper. The preservation of Hexágono ‘71 and Diagonal Cero in the Franklyn Furnace Archive of the Museum of Modern Art, New York was key to the present research.22

Vigo lived and worked throughout one of the most politically fraught periods in Argentine history. While other artists made explicit political statements a part of their work—such as those who participated in Tucumán Arde–Vigo integrated politics into his work in a much more nuanced fashion. This nuance does not result in a lessened strength, but in a different form

20 Davidson, *Paulo Bruscky and Edgardo Antonio Vigo*, 75.
21 A grant from the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies made the digitization and uploading of much of the archive possible and the online accessibility of these archives made the present project feasible.
22 See *Diagonal Cero* and *Hexágono* ‘71, Manhattan Special Collections, Museum of Modern Art Library, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY.
of political participation. Vigo preferred the suggestiveness and ambiguity of a criptic letter than rallying cries and partisan slogans.
CHAPTER I

Diagonal Cero and the Argentine Little Magazine

*Diagonal Cero* (1962–69) was a magazine founded, edited, designed and printed by Edgardo Antonio Vigo. The pages of *Diagonal Cero* read like an index of the concerns of and influences on Vigo from throughout his entire career. The magazine was funded by Vigo through his work as a clerk in one of La Plata’s courthouses. Vigo selected the material and contributions that made up each issue and afterwards designed and printed them. As noted by several scholars, including Géza Perneczky and Clive Phillpot, Vigo’s magazines are not only printed media, but art objects unto themselves: carefully crafted paper objects designed for interaction through pliable sheets, hinges and strings, translucent papers, and inside gate covers. Vigo gathered contributions from friends and fellow artists from La Plata and from the holdings of his own extensive library, which featured a wide array of historical texts in foreign languages by authors such as Georges Hugnet, Raoul Hausmann and Tristan Tzara. *Diagonal Cero* also featured series of woodcut engravings in almost all of its issues, most of which were first edition prints. The magazine also explored visual poetry through the inclusion of contributions and theoretical texts by Vigo himself and other Latin American practitioners like Wladimir Dias Pino.

In this chapter I will examine the ways in which *Diagonal Cero* appropriated a number of strategies from earlier Argentine magazines dedicated to the literary and plastic arts and tailored

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these strategies toward the pursuit of his own goal: namely, the creation of a multilingual editorial platform with both local and foreign contributors that would explore artistic expression through non-hegemonic structures. I will compare Diagonal Cero with three groundbreaking publications that preceded it: Sur (1931–70), Ver y Estimar (1948–55), and Boa (1958–60), elucidating their common ambition to overcome Argentine isolationism. My comparison locates the strategies present in these earlier magazines that were used and adjusted by Vigo in the pages of Diagonal Cero. Sur was a literary magazine founded by the intellectual, poet and socialite Victoria Ocampo that reached its heyday during the second half of the 1930s, when it published in Spanish texts by foreign writers like Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, André Breton, and William Faulkner, among many others.\(^{26}\) Ver y Estimar was a platform for iconic art critic Jorge Romero Brest to explore the development of modern art during the regime of General Juan Domingo Perón, when many intellectuals were sidelined by the government’s cultural apparatus.\(^{27}\) Finally, Boa was the Latin American incarnation of an international network of poets and artists working in South America and Europe that were seemingly bound together by the exploration of abstraction under different guises.\(^{28}\)

Diagonal Cero shared in some of the goals and strategies employed by these previous publications. Like Sur, Diagonal Cero presented local and foreign contributors together in order to overcome Argentine isolationism. The construction of a cosmopolitan yet idiosyncratic artistic language is the key similarity between Vigo’s magazine and Jorge Romero Brest’s Ver y

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\(^{26}\) For a detailed account of the history of Sur see John King, Sur: A Study of the Argentine Literary Journal and Its Role in the Development of a Culture, 1931–1970 (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Although the magazine continued its publishing activities, John King marks 1970 as the year the magazine stopped appearing as a periodical.

\(^{27}\) Andrea Giunta and Laura Malosetti Costa, eds., Arte de posguerra: Jorge Romero Brest y la revista Ver y estimar (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2005), 30.

\(^{28}\) Julio Llinás, Exposición Boa - Phases; Confrontación internacional de arte experimental, del 4 Al 20 de junio de 1959 (Santa Fe: Santa Fe [?], n.d.), n.p.
Estimar. Lastly, Boa and Diagonal Cero both assembled an international network of artists bound together not by formal characteristics but by a common spirit of collaborative projects. Vigo did not simply duplicate these strategies in Diagonal Cero, but rather adapted them to his own particular goals. While identifying the shared strategies, the analysis also intends to foreground the distinctive traits of Vigo’s magazine.

I. I Diagonal Cero and Sur: “Flawless translations” and their potential influence in Argentina

By the time Victoria Ocampo founded Sur in 1931 periodicals had acted as arenas for intellectuals to combat each other since a decade earlier. These prior publications provided writers and thinkers with a platform to share their ideas with a larger audience and to simultaneously establish a dialogue amongst themselves that the readers could follow as it developed. Throughout Latin America, the little magazine contributed to a surge in cultural innovation and avant-garde movements during the 1920s.29 In Brazil, contributors to Klaxon (1922–23) organized paradigmatic exhibitions like the “Week of Modern Art” in 1922, which was critical to the emergence of Brazilian Modernism.30 According to John King, In the first post-revolutionary decade in Mexico, when such magazines provided vibrant forums for debate about Mexican identity, author Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano founded the magazine


30 King, Sur, 18.
Contemporáneos (1928–31) in Mexico City, where he fused the yearning for a new Mexican identity with the latest literary trends from Europe and North America.31

Magazines also proved crucial to the development of a cosmopolitan literary milieu in Argentina prior to the appearance of Sur. In their pages writers were grouped according to their often-conflicting positions towards the question of what, if any, political ambitions art could foster.32 Serial publications like Prisma (1921–22), Proa (1924–26), and Martin Fierro (1924–27) appeared during the 1920s and, although transient, had a lasting impact on the formation of the literary identity of the country. It was in the January 1925 issue of Proa, for example, that Jorge Luis Borges boasted about having been the first “Hispanic adventurer in encountering James Joyce’s Ulysses.”33 Martin Fierro, whose tone both deprecated and appealed to the growing Buenos Aires middle class, sold as many as 18,000 copies of its second issue, a feat hitherto unseen for a little magazine in Argentina.34

The translation of texts previously unavailable in Spanish was one of Sur’s key editorial contributions and provided editorial guideline for Vigo. According to John King, “Sur’s view on literature and life became the most powerful force within Argentine letters during this period [from the 1930s up to World War II] and all other forms of cultural expression can be defined by their adherence to, or disagreement with, its central premises.”35 Translation to Spanish of contemporary texts that were, for the most part, not previously circulated in Argentina was central to Sur’s foundational model and played a large part in its relevance. Vigo also emphasized the translation of texts from foreign languages intended to be read by art aficionados and the general Spanish speaking audience. However, unlike Sur, which placed these foreign

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 23.
35 Ibid., 2.
texts in a privileged position within each issue, *Diagonal Cero* avoided hierarchies by granting both local and foreign cultural expressions the same weight. This key difference will be explored later; suffice it to say that both *Sur* and *Diagonal Cero* strove to overcome Argentine isolationism, as did many other periodicals throughout the region.

My comparison between Vigo’s *Diagonal Cero* and Ocampo’s *Sur* focuses on one strategy deployed by Ocampo and later adapted by Vigo: translation—“flawless translation,” as Ocampo ordained it—as a means to consolidate the participation of foreign contributors and circulate texts previously unavailable to Spanish-speakers. It was this investment on impeccable translations that distinguished *Sur’s* editorial guideline from those of earlier magazines that had also translated texts into Spanish. Although they used very different sources, both *Sur* and *Diagonal Cero* made it a central premise to translate texts written in foreign languages. *Sur* published Spanish translations of texts that were simultaneously available in their original language, while most of Vigo’s selection came from his own library and were thus older texts. Immediately after the end of World War II, *Sur* published as a normal issue an anthology of French literature that included the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose *Phenomenology of Perception* was published in 1945.36 On the other hand, Vigo published in *Diagonal Cero* earlier texts from his own library by authors such as Georges Hugnet, Hans Richter, and Raoul Hausmann.37 Both publications made possible the circulation and exposure of texts that would have otherwise been unavailable to local audiences in Argentina. This practice also allowed Argentine writers and artists to publish their own work alongside that of their European counterparts. This juxtaposition—the placement of Argentine and European texts within the same issue—allowed for poignant comparisons between the literary and visual production of

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36 Ibid., 133.
Argentina and Europe, as is evidenced in issue number 3 of *Diagonal Cero*, where a suite of woodcuts by Vigo appears unbound and unpaginated in the same issue as a text on Kurt Schwitters written by Théodore Kooning (fig. 3). The brief text concisely describes Schwitters career and work and ends by stating that, “at least one great MERZ [sic] sir lives in every town.”38 It is thus possible that by including such a text Vigo was purposefully locating *Diagonal Cero* as an inheritor of Merz’s publishing activities and positioning himself as its continuation.

The emphasis placed on translations in *Sur* was a result of its main collaborators’ polyglot upbringings.39 Raised between Buenos Aires and Paris, Victoria Ocampo’s first language was not Spanish but French, and as John King notes, she did not feel confident enough to publish in Spanish until she was in her forties.40 For his own part, Jorge Luis Borges, probably the most famous writer to contribute to the magazine, learned to speak English and Spanish simultaneously and, according to Borges, was not entirely able to differentiate between the two languages during his childhood.41 He recalls this tension in the prologue of *El idioma de los Argentinos*, where he describes language as a lifelong quandry.42 Although many critics of the magazine attacked the foreign and undoubtedly privileged background of many of *Sur’s* contributors, their multilingual skills were instrumental in its success.

It was on the pages of *Sur* that some of the most important interactions between Spanish writers and foreign texts took place, in the form of translations. Early issues of *Sur* featured a collection of poems by Langston Hughes translated by Borges.43 Another translation by Borges credited as being influential to Latin American writers was William Faulkner’s *The Wild Palms*

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39 King, *Sur*, 133.
40 Ibid., 32.
(1939). According to James Wilson, Octavio Paz drew inspiration from the translations of the poems of André Breton in *Sur*.\(^{44}\) For Borges, translation was not merely the transference of a text from one language to another, but an aide in the creation of an Argentine language that could articulate the subjectivity of its people.\(^{45}\) The ability of writers to develop this language was linked to the ability of readers to comprehend it. Translations not only allowed the readers of the magazine to establish contact with the work being made elsewhere in the world, but they also created a space for dialogue in which Latin American writers were presented contiguously to their European counterparts.

Vigo adopted this emphasis on translation but employed it towards a further goal that Victoria Ocampo never had. For him, making the ideas and theories of the European avant-garde intelligible to the Argentine reader was the first step in a more ambitious process. Beyond that step, translation was an instrument toward the creation of publications that placed Argentine and European contributions en par with each other in terms of cultural value. Conversely, *Sur* upheld the primacy of European over Argentine culture. The magazine placed more emphasis on the work of European contributors and, with the exception of a few authors who belonged to Ocampo’s coterie, rarely published texts by Argentines. Throughout its twenty-eight issues, *Diagonal Cero* featured many translations of texts that had been previously written and published in Europe. These included texts by artists, such as a selection of aphorisms by Francis Picabia, Max Ernst’s “Más allá de la pinutra” (1937), Théodore Kooning’s “MERZ, ZEN y consideraciones sobre ‘Merz’” (1956), among many others.\(^{46}\) Vigo consistently juxtaposed these foreign with both visual and textual work by Latin American contributors, including a text by

\(^{44}\) Quoted in King, *Sur*, 71.


Haroldo de Campos on Brazilian concrete poetry, several anthologies of young Platense poets, and poems by Thelma Nava, in an equipollent structure created by editorial choices and design features such as equal focus on local and foreign contributions and lack of pagination.47

The second issue of *Diagonal Cero*, published in 1962, is an eloquent example of how Vigo’s editorial decisions put European and Argentine cultural expression on the same level through the contiguous and non-hierarchical placement of local and foreign contributions.48 The publication opens with a brief selection of aphorisms by Francis Picabia translated by Vigo’s wife, Elena Comas, who worked as the magazine’s main translator throughout its run.49 Another article is a brief account of the plastic concerns that fueled and guided the Grupo Perceptismo and its most notorious practitioner, Buenos Aires painter Raúl Lozza.50 This article was written by one of the movement’s adherents, Abraham Haber, and is accompanied by photographs of Lozza working on his atelier (figs. 4 and 6). One of Picabia’s aphorisms associates a certain type of modern French painting with American skyscrapers and later describes these paintings as “butt scrapers.”51 This incendiary remark would linger in the mind of the reader as he or she looked at the images of Raúl Lozza working on his irregularly shaped canvases. This juxtaposition allows the reader to contemplate the avant-garde of Argentina alongside that of the Parisian front without a hierarchical categorization. The overall picture offered by the editorial program of the magazine is a non-proscriptive one. This non-hierarchical organization lies in opposition to *Sur*, which according to King, had a fascination with Europe as one of its central

48 A point similar to this is raised by Vanessa Davidson. See Davidson et al., *Paulo Bruscky and Edgardo Antonio Vigo*, 68.
51 Picabia, “Aforismos.”
premises. An analysis of the index reveals that for the most part, the contributors to the magazine were European.52

Design features and the reproduction of artworks also play a role in Diagonal Cero’s equipollent structure by further destabilizing any sense of hierarchy between European and Argentine art. A substantive comparison can be made in this regard between Diagonal Cero and other contemporaneous arts publications, such as the catalogue for the “First International Modern Art Exposition” held at the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires in 1960. The editors of the book privileged European painters by using the majority of the color prints to reproduce their works, while most Argentine artworks were relegated to black and white.53 The catalogue is therefore an inadvertent actualization of a cultural hierarchy whereby European artists are placed above their Argentine counterparts.

Vigo thwarted such a hierarchy by reproducing all artworks in black and white. It might be argued that Vigo’s use of black and white reproductions can be explained by the self-financing and lack of resources. Regardless, the readers of the magazine experienced Argentine and European art not in a hierarchical but in an equipollent structure. An example of this organization can be witnessed through the comparison between the reproduction of a sculpture by Eduardo Chillida in the first issue of Diagonal Cero and a painting by Raúl Lozza featured in the second, as both are reproduced in black and white and hence no primacy is given to one or the other (figs. 5 and 6).

Another design feature that plays an important role in Diagonal Cero’s equipollent structure is the magazine’s unbound construction and lack of pagination, which allows the reader to shift and disrupt the order of the magazine’s content. In most publications, the sequence of

52 King, Sur, 32.
53 Rafael Squirru, Primera Exposición Internacional de Arte Moderno (Buenos Aires: Museo de Arte Moderno, 1960).
content is fixed in the order in which the folios were bound together and encased in the spine, but each copy of *Diagonal Cero* is assembled as loose printed sheets stored inside a cover, which functions as a folder or envelope (fig. 7). This format allows the reader to rearrange the contents of the magazine according to his or her own criteria. Therefore, the sequence of the magazine’s contents is not fixed but fluid, and the temporal ranking of what came before or after is moot. Influence understood as a temporal lineage is thus broken down, and Argentine artists are not presented as temporally derived from Europeans, but instead as visually associated.

Vigo’s disregard for hierarchies points to *Diagonal Cero*’s central vocation, the pursuit of a universal sense from a localized position, La Plata in particular. In *Diagonal Cero*, Vigo balanced European historical texts such as Max Ernst’s “Beyond Painting” in the fourth issue of *Diagonal Cero* by the equitable appearance of Argentine contributors who explored art within the local milieu, as can be seen in the article written by Libero Badii on the 1962 Premio Torcuato di Tella from the same issue.54 These lofty goals are stated in a somewhat cryptic fashion in Vigo’s editorial statement in the first issue of *Diagonal Cero*:

> We are in the *Diagonal Cero*, in the heart of the matter, observing our observers, pulling and being pulled. We are in the *Diagonal Cero*, which does not mean to be center or to be in the center. We are contradictory. A contradiction that equals freedom of expression. We are in the *Diagonal Cero* of the contemporary, we are in an identifiable city and in a beginning.55

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As Vanessa Davidson explains, the title of the magazine refers to the city of La Plata, where Vigo lived and worked all his life. The city’s gridded layout is crisscrossed by a series of numbered diagonal streets. However, there is no zero diagonal; such a street would in fact be the absolute center of La Plata. As she writes, “The title thus implies a tabula rasa, a starting from scratch, in a mythic place where creativity reigns and everything is possible.”56 The would-be epicenter is nevertheless acentered; the ensuing contradiction, an expression of freedom. This seemingly paradoxical statement can be read in tandem with an interview that Vigo gave to a Paraguayan newspaper explaining what the cero diagonal means: “An intention […] To get what is OURS, not from a national point of view but from a UNIVERSAL sense […] My most important struggle is the search for a new encompassing notion. That is my commitment.”57

The different value placed on European culture and on its potential influence in Argentina is ultimately what distinguishes Diagonal Cero’s and Sur’s inclusion of translations. Vigo pursued this new encompassing notion—a universalist humanist language—from the vantage point of La Plata, invoking both European and Argentine influences. Vigo launched this quest not only away from a center of European culture such as Paris, but also away from the ostensible center of Argentina—Buenos Aires. Sur drew mostly from European culture and only somewhat from Argentine culture in the articulation of its view on culture. Standing in the zero diagonal—the whimsical center of La Plata—Vigo compiled magazines that placed equal importance on European and Argentine voices, that proportionately examined Salvador Dalí and Raúl Lozza. In contrast, after World War II ended in 1945, Sur dedicated two lengthy issues to the French and

56 Davidson et al., Paulo Bruscky and Edgardo Antonio Vigo, 67.
English literature produced during the war.\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Sur} was a magazine focused on European culture whereas \textit{Diagonal Cero} was a magazine focused on Argentine culture, though through both European and local contributors. While both publications relied heavily on translation, ultimately they both wielded this operation toward different objectives. For \textit{Sur} translation was a means to bring European influence to Argentina whereas for \textit{Diagonal Cero} it was a means to suggest the equality of local and foreign culture. \textit{Diagonal Cero}’s strategy of placing European and Argentine texts side by side in an equipollent structure worked in tandem with another strategy that is explored below: the construction of an adequate critical apparatus with which to engage modern art.

\textbf{I. II \textit{Diagonal Cero} and \textit{Ver y Estimar}: The construction of an Argentine critical viewership}

One of \textit{Diagonal Cero}’s main objectives was the exploration of modern visual art through a model that would be informative to artists, viewers, and critics alike. The majority of the art historical and critical texts included in the twenty-eight issues of \textit{Diagonal Cero} focus on twentieth-century art. The oldest text featured is the De Stijl manifesto, originally published by Theo van Doesburg, Piet Mondrian, and Antony Kok in 1920, which Vigo and reprinted in \textit{Diagonal Cero}’s (no. 24, 1967). This historical manifesto appears alongside a text by poet and musician Henri Chopin entitled “Sound Poetry,” a work created only two years before.\textsuperscript{59} This inclusion of texts belonging to different historical periods and nationalities was typical of \textit{Diagonal Cero}: almost consistently in every number there is a juxtaposition of early and recent texts.

\textsuperscript{58} King, \textit{Sur}, 167.
Diagonal Cero featured these texts in order to provide its readers with the means to better understand, discuss, and create modern art. This three-pronged agenda is plainly stated in an essay written by Vigo entitled “Observador,” which appeared in the first issue of Diagonal Cero in 1962. In it, Vigo describes how the relationship between artists, viewers, and critics is restricted by the positions they are forced to take regarding the artwork, as either creators, viewers, or experts. Vigo claims that the contemporary spectator of art has become locked out of a hermetic discussion between artists and critics which prevents him from becoming an “active observer” and relegates him to a passive role in which miscomprehension inevitably leads to uninformed personal taste or outright dismay at contemporary art.60 This belief is further echoed in his essay “Ensayo de la clasificación de la plastica,” published in the newspaper El Argentino in 1958, where Vigo declares, “Daily, plastic expression features complexities that often cause a lack of understanding from the audience. This prevents the public from engaging in the issues at stake and even from quenching their thirst for human expression.”61 The rest of the essay is an art historical overview of perspective. It traces its development from fifteenth-century Italian painter Paolo Uccello all the way up to Piet Mondrian. The statement taken together with Vigo’s historical analysis reveals his belief that in order for the audience, the critics, and the artists to engage in a meaningful dialogue it is first necessary for all to understand the concepts that underpin modern art.

Diagonal Cero’s aspiration to equip Argentine spectators with a more sophisticated understanding of modern art was shared by one of the most iconic Argentine art publications of the second half of the twentieth century: Ver y Estimar (1948–55). The publication was founded

61 Edgardo Antonio Vigo, “El Ensayo de La Clasificación de La Plástica,” El Argentino, May 15, 1958. Spanish: “La plástica presenta día a día complejidades que ocasionan, en su mayoría, ese desentendimiento por parte del público para entrar dentro del problema, o para, por lo menos, saciar la sed de esa parte del hombre que es su expresión.”
and spearheaded by Jorge Romero Brest, and it also published a vast array of critical and theoretical texts on the subject of modern and contemporary art. The magazine’s main objective was to develop and present to the Argentine readership a well-informed and theoretically sound compilation of the most up-to-date European artistic expression. Argentina was sorely lacking in both museum holdings and critics who could formulate an effective approach to analyzing and interpreting the art of this period, particularly abstract art. Romero Brest was aware of the widening breach between the realist landscapes of La Pampa, so ubiquitous in Argentina and celebrated by the official institutions of the Perón regime, and the abstract art being produced outside of the country was widening. His several trips to Europe confirmed this view and made the need for Argentina to catch up with European contemporary art and thought an urgent one. As Andrea Giunta and Laura Malosetti Costa summarize, “Ver y Estimar can overall be seen as a laboratory that, from the shadows of Perónism, explored ideas that would fully materialize in the near future.”

In Ver y Estimar provided Romero Brest created for himself and for other art critics a space in the margins of official culture where they could explore and examine foreign modern art during a time when Argentine authorities were weary and even hostile to such influences. In 1947, Romero Brest and other faculty members were ousted from their teaching positions at the Universidad Nacional de La Plata by the Peronist regime after students staged a wave of anti-Perón protests on campus. Afterward he began delivering private lectures on aesthetics and art history in Buenos Aires among circles of sympathizers, and was soon convinced of the need to

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62 Giunta and Malosetti Costa, Arte de Posguerra, 30. Spanish: “En su conjunto, la revista podría considerarse como un laboratorio que, desde las sombras del peronismo, investigó y consolidó algunos de los principios de los valores artísticos que se concretarían en los años siguientes.”
63 Ibid., 37.
find an outlet for their discussions and arguments. Together with a group of former students and followers, he launched the first issue of *Ver y Estimar* in 1948. The magazine’s impact on the development of plastic art in Argentina is, in the words of Giunta, “almost without comparison with anything else in Argentine history.” In the climate of nationalism enforced by the government of Perón, in power in Argentina from 1946 to 1955, *Ver y Estimar* was the only space where Romero Brest and others was allowed to discuss, critique, and generally explore European twentieth-century art, which he regarded as the only canon of “authentic art.”

Romero Brest enshrined European modern art as a standard against which all ensuing artistic developments had to be appraised. This was the criteria that he used to judge Argentine modern art. As Giunta points out, the name of the magazine literally means “see and judge.” For Romero Brest, the effective and proven model of European art was necessary given Argentina’s lack of artistic tradition. According to Romero Brest, the imposition of a barren academicism derived from decrepit Spanish colonial art had left the country with a void in its visual and plastic tradition. In a essay published after the closure of *Ver y Estimar* he plainly states that, “It would be useless to search for a distinctive stylistic contribution from Argentine art of the last 50 years.” Romero Brest himself traveled extensively through Europe during his tenure as director of *Ver y Estimar* in order to experience the artistic output of the European

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68 The lack perceived by Romero Brest could be said to extend to all of Latin America. Giunta and Malosetti Costa point out his failure to mention Mexican muralism and successful Latin American artists like Joaquin Torres-García.
These experiences and the convictions he developed during his travels were articulated through the magazine and presented as the standards through which local art should be valued and understood.

A comparison between the articles that each publication devoted to Grupo Madí reveals that while *Ver y Estimar* held European art as a standard, *Diagonal Cero* regarded it as a historical precedent. *Ver y Estimar* rebukes Grupo Madí for its inadequate adherence to the European model whereas *Diagonal Cero* praises it for its local idiosyncrasy. An article written by Damián Carlos Bayón published in the sixth issue of *Ver y Estimar* disapproves of Grupo Madí, whose members had recently held an exhibition in the Galería Van Riel. Bayón’s critique of the paintings of Tomás Maldonado and Alfredo Hlito comes only after six paragraphs dedicated to trends in European art such as De Stijl and Bauhaus. Moreover, he begins his review of the exhibition by lamenting that nowadays, through print and photography, “the world finds itself invaded by all sorts of manifestations.” Lacking any formal analysis of the works themselves, Bayón’s article concludes that, “overall, this group reveals immaturity, carelessness in the presentation of their works, and a lack of self-criticism. The mere comparison with the work produced by Moholy-Nagy’s Bauhaus students […] reveals how much can be achieved with dedication and enthusiasm.” In the article, Bayón constructs a qualitative comparison between European and Argentine artists along lines of adequate and inadequate adherence to earlier European schools and styles. Bayón’s article confirms that *Ver y Estimar* created a dogmatic European critical apparatus.

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73 Ibid., 60.
74 Ibid., 61. Spanish: “En general este grupo revela inmadurez, precipitación para presentar sus obras, falta de autocrítica. La mera comparación de sus obras con los trabajos de alumnos de la Bauhaus dirigidos por Moholy-Nagy […] demuestra cuánto se puede hacer en este campo con un poco de dedicación y entusiasmo.”
In contrast to the derogatory review published in *Ver y Estimar* almost a decade earlier, *Diagonal Cero* presented a retrospective of Grupo Madí written by Guillermo Adolfo Gutierrez and published in the third issue of *Diagonal Cero* in 1962 that granted it rightful prominence in the history of twentieth-century sculpture. More importantly, the article presents the inverse of Bayón’s accusation of Madí being derivative manifestations of abstraction. Gutierrez declares Madí a “Group of personal characteristics, universal in its deepest conceptual roots, not the reflection of an idea that appeared in Europe but born on the banks of the Río de La Plata, product of Argentine and Uruguayan artists.”75 Gutierrez’s review makes the crucial point that Madí did not merely reflect a European trend but was born in Argentina. For him and for Vigo, the locality of Madí, expressed in the phrase “born on the banks of the Río de La Plata,” was an important characteristic worthy of being foregrounded. The laudatory review finishes by describing Grupo Madí as having earned a rightful place in art history.76 These divergent opinions offer insight into the particular views of the editors in charge of the publications where they appeared. They suggest a contrasting belief in the relationship between European and Argentine art.

Vigo was keenly dedicated to generating a local mode of artistic expression that, through its embrace of the local and international, could transcend those boundaries. This mission is stated in a scathing text entitled “El artista y sociedad platense,” published as an editorial in the twelfth issue of *Diagonal Cero* in 1966. In it, Vigo accuses the artists of La Plata of being concerned with nothing more than the social motion of being an artist, with getting their names published in local newspapers and moving to Buenos Aires, so that their “fat mothers” will be

75 Guillermo Adolfo Gutiérrez, “Madí,” *Diagonal Cero*, no. 3 (1962), n.p. Spanish: “Grupo de características propias, universalista en sus raíces conceptuales mas profundas, no se manifiesta como reflejo de una idea surgida en el continente europeo, sino que nace en las márgenes del Río de La Plata, producto de artistas argentinos y uruguayos.”

76 Ibid.
able to say that their sons “have made it.” The editorial concludes with an exhortation to the artists of La Plata:

Desist with trends and silliness, let us at least make our own trends and silliness. Without being serious let’s search for seriousness, without being old let’s search for maturity, without being young let’s seize the bravado and irreverence of youth. This is LATINOAMERICA [sic] gentlemen, not a vulgar operative-imitative terrain.77

The text reveals the extent to which Vigo was concerned with generating local awareness. Although in the lines quoted above it makes no explicit reference to the art being produced in La Plata, the text’s title together with its appearance in a magazine dedicated to arts and culture must be read as a call to develop genuine local expressions. By stating the need to drop the trends and silliness from elsewhere in favor of local trends and silliness, Vigo declares the need to transform Latin America into something other than a terrain of vulgar imitation. Diagonal Cero operates under this belief, Its editorial decisions invite readers to inform themselves about the latest international developments in modern art. However, within its pages there is no call for these developments to be used as the standard by which to judge Argentine artists.

Both Romero Brest and Vigo regarded Dada as the avant-garde indispensable to the development of later European art. While they both advocated for its relevance, however, Romero Brest understood it as an episode that brought about important theoretical innovations, whereas Vigo adopted and incorporated its influence into his practice more directly. According to Romero Brest, Dadaism anticipated many of the important movements of the first half of the

twentieth century, including surrealism and existentialism, and “it even the casts its shadow on the proud abstracts.” But he also regards Dadaists as artists who, for all their antics, left behind nothing more than “a handful of canvases and drawings of pointless machines inhabiting unreal spaces.” On the other hand, Vigo was the inheritor of Dadaism in both theory and practice. He made sculptural works and drawings reminiscent of Francis Picabia and was steadily drawn toward the same “pointless machines” that Romero Brest rebuked. More important to the present analysis, Dadaist publications served as a major source of influence for Vigo in terms of the possibilities that little magazines could have in the development of a determinate artistic and cultural program. During his time in Europe between 1953 and 1954, Vigo became aware of the ability of these types of magazines to connect different artists working across scattered locations and enable them to share ideas through their pages.

Dada informs all of Vigo’s oeuvre, to the point that some critics have labeled him a Neo-Dadaist. Vigo’s pointless machines have a clear similarity to some of Picabia’s own useless machine designs (figs. 8 and 9). Both drawings mimic the technical representation of an engine but render an image which cannot translate into an operational mechanism. They are both two-dimensional section plans of what appear to be machines. The title of Picabia’s drawing indicates that it represents an alarm clock. The circles and lines in the two drawings suggest gears and timing belts (in Picabia’s drawing much more clearly). These attributes, however, do not amount to an actual machine: Picabia’s drawing does not delineate the walls of this so-called alarm clock while Vigo’s walls are so irregular in shape that a machine like that would be impossible to build.

78 Jorge Romero Brest, La Pintura Europea Contemporánea, 198.
79 Ibid., 207.
80 For a detailed account of Vigo’s relationship with Dada see Gradowczyk, “Edgardo Antonio Vigo: Maquinaciones (1953–1962).”
81 Davidson, Paulo Bruscky and Edgardo Antonio Vigo, 104.
The influence exerted on Vigo by Dada is evident in not only in his visual language but in the first three issues of *Diagonal Cero*, both in terms of the content of the magazines as well as in some of their formal features. As previously mentioned, the second issue opens with a selection of aphorisms by Francis Picabia translated by Vigo’s wife Elena Comas from a larger anthology. The third issue contains a translation of an article on Kurt Schwitters and Merz written by Théodore Kooning and originally published in the French review *Phantomas* in the spring of 1916. A footnote claims that, “The MERZ magazine is one of the principal Dadaist manifestations, which appeared in 24 issues. In 1922, SCHWITTERS participated in the Great DADA Congress in WEIMAR [sic].” Further proof of Vigo’s knowledge of Dada can be found in his library. Books obtained during his sojourn to Europe and from the Buenos Aires bookshops that specialized in French publications include iconic Dadaists such as Georges Hugnet, Raoul Haussmann, Willy Verkauf, Tristan Tzara, and Francis Picabia, as well as the *Dada Almanach*, which contains detailed information on Dadaist publications and describes them as essential to the Dadaist network.

Little magazines were critical to the development of Dada. Although the first issue of the eponymous *Dada* magazine didn’t appear until 1918, Hugo Ball began producing printed materials and calling for the publication of a magazine at the earliest Dada soirées of 1916 in Café Voltaire in Zurich. On one such occasion on May 15, 1916, he presented a pamphlet that declared, “The little booklet we are giving you today owes its existence not only to our own initiative but also to our friends in France, ITALY, and Russia [sic]. […] The next goal of the artists assembled here is the publication of an international review. The review will appear in

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82 Kooning, “MERZ, ZEN Y Consideraciones Sobre ‘Merz.’”
Zurich and its name will be ‘DADA’ (‘Dada’) Dada Dada Dada [sic].”

According to Stephen Foster, the collapse of official cultural organizations during World War I and their inability and evident unwillingness to connect people belonging to different nationalities (sometimes of countries at war with each other) meant that the role of articulating artistic proposals between artists from different nationalities fell to the little magazines. 

The influence of Dadaist publications can also be seen in the design of Diagonal Cero. Dadaist publications were “explosive combinations of manifestos, poems, verbal and visual experiments, theoretical statements, collages, reliefs, paintings, sculptures, drawings and objects, slogans, automatic writing, popular art, and other indefinable contributions.” Likewise, Vigo’s publications were never static but always shifted in design from one issue to the next and were constructed using heterogeneous materials. Even in the first three issues of Diagonal Cero there are some of the same formal innovations that Dawn Ades signaled as innovate characteristics of Dadaist publications: the use of different papers, typefaces, and colored inks, and the inclusion of perforated papers and playful objects intended as interactive objects for readers. Vigo’s magazines engage their reader not only as text printed on a paper support but as autonomous objects meant to be played with and handled. Perhaps the most poignant example of this material quality of Diagonal Cero can be found in issue 24, published in 1968 (fig. 10). The publication is no longer presented as a trimonthly magazine but as a physical object, or as Vigo called it—a “thing.”

For example, the contribution made to this issue by Argentine artist Carlos Ginzburg consists of a series of transparent paper circles with figures of different colors printed on them

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86 Ades, The Dada Reader, 12.
These papers can be shuffled and shifted so that different figures appear depending on how the reader stacks them on top of one another.

As aptly noted by the mail art historian Géza Pernezcky, the alternative magazines that appeared during the 1960s and 1970s did not differ considerably from their predecessors, the avant-garde little magazine. Like them, the alternative magazines were non-profit publications exchanged as opposed to sold. In light of the modus operandi and attitudes found in Dadaist publications it is not surprising to encounter terms like “Dadazine” applied by artists to the alternative magazines that were established after 1960.88 One of the most compelling comments on the pervasiveness of Dada comes from notable mail artist Klaus Groh: “Mail art is the first attempt to democratize creativity in a very wide room. Mail art is Dada art! Mail art is cheap like Dada. Mail art is not purchasable like Dada. Mail art is explosive like Dada. Mail art is easy to do like Dada.”89 As will be analyzed afterwards, the way in which the postal network allows for almost effortless international communication is one of the most important explanations for Vigo’s adherence to Dada. According to Romero Brest, Sidney Janis once said, “Dada was the first organized international art movement.”90 It was precisely this penchant for international collaboration that Vigo promoted through his magazine and that can be observed in another publication that appeared during the 1950s: *Boa.*

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89 Groh Klaus, “Thoughts on Dada and Mail Art and the New Dada,” in Michael Crane and Mary Stofflet eds., *Correspondence Art: Source Book for the Network of International Postal Art Activity* (San Francisco: Contemporary Arts Press, 1984), 75.
I. III Diagonal Cero and Boa: International networks of collaboration

Throughout its existence, *Diagonal Cero* sought out collaborators abroad, not only to be authors who simply sent in their work to be published, but to be correspondents who distributed the magazines in places such as Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. A legend appearing in all of the issues of *Diagonal Cero* plainly states, “We seek exchange with similar publications.”91 Further evidence of this international network can be found in issue 14, published in 1965, in which poets Miguel Ángel Fernández and Jorge Casterán are listed as the “representatives” of the magazine in Paraguay and Uruguay, respectively. This list of representatives continued to grow and by issue 20 in 1967 it also includes Guillermo Deisler in Chile.92 The intention of these associations was twofold: to incorporate foreign material into the magazine and to provide it to foreign outlets, albeit limited ones. After 1971, when his work veered toward more dynamic, amalgamate mail art, Vigo made international networks a central premise of his practice and transformed his magazines into collaborative platforms. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that *Diagonal Cero* manifested from its first issues a yearning for a transnational operation can be detected.

An Argentine magazine that sought to articulate an international network of collaborators similar to Vigo’s *Diagonal Cero* was *Boa* (1958–60). Julio Llinás founded the magazine after his return from Paris in 1954. It ran for three issues between 1958 and 1960 as a Latin American iteration of *Phases*, a magazine published in Paris starting in 1951 by the poet Edouard Jaguer.93 *Phases* sought to insert itself in the void left after the disappearance of two earlier French

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91 Spanish: Deseamos el canjee con todas las publicaciones de tipo similar.
93 Exposición Boa - Phases; *Confrontación Internacional de Arte Experimental, Del 4 Al 20 de Junio de 1959* (Santa Fe: Santa Fe [?], n.d.), n.p.
magazines: *Cobra* and *Salamander*. Like *Diagonal Cero*, *Boa* quickly devised itself as a node in a horizontal, non-hierarchical network of artists joined not by influence, but by transnational collaboration. In comparison to other Argentine little magazines, *Boa* did not adhere to the European canon and its importation into Argentina. This translates into a horizontal collaboration with foreign contributors where they are placed as equal to their Argentine counterparts. More importantly though, *Boa* was published by practicing artists and poets, and its goal was not to form a critical discourse, but to connect itself with other “sister publications” produced in other places in the world. As Giunta notes, this instance was one of a publication in Argentina that sought to link a network of artists acting in several places across the world. In contrast to the sanctioned internationalism in Argentina, which operated through official institutions, this union was interested in eliminating all policy borders and organizing intellectual and artistic programs “at a distance” in an equipollent editorial platform.

Like Vigo’s *Diagonal Cero*, the magazine published poetry by Argentine and foreign authors, essays on modern art criticism, and reproductions of artworks. The main point of comparison, and arguably a key characteristic of Vigo’s magazine, is the ambition of both publications to establish an international network of like-minded contemporaneous artists working in Latin America and abroad. Among its objectives, *Boa* listed the strengthening of the international network of surrealist art that had found common ground in these earlier magazines.

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95 Ibid., 75.
96 The third and final issue published in 1960 featured seventeen texts, including poems, short stories, and brief art theory texts and thirty-three reproductions of paintings, drawings, and engravings. The authors included Julio Llinás, Edouard Jaguer, and Oliverio Girondo. The artists included Enrico Baj, Clorindo Testa, and Jacques Lacomblez.
Boa was thus not the recipient of the paternal influence of these earlier European magazines but was instead a sister publication, albeit a younger one. In the catalogue of an exhibition held in 1959, Llinás mentions that Boa had been closely linked with similar publications from across Europe: Phases in Paris, Edda in Brussels, and Il Gesto in Milan. “These four sister publications constitute an ‘international vanguard of art and poetry.’”98 "The magazine’s “gaze is set in a world without borders.”"99 Andrea Giunta suggests that the name Boa is not incidental, as the Amazonian snake is related both to cobras and salamanders, much like the Argentine magazine is related to its European precedent sisters. This emphasis on international networking through the presentation of contemporaneous artists working around the world through a little magazine based in Argentina would also occur in Diagonal Cero.

The first issues of Diagonal Cero from the spring of 1960 adapted the operational tactic of associating with foreign intellectuals and artists to their own goals and circumstances. In issue 8 published in December 1963, Diagonal Cero invites its readers to collaborate on an “International Poetic Action” by submitting books to the Movimiento nueva solidaridad, an international poetry organization directed by Miguel Grinberg whose honorary president was the American novelist Henry Miller.100 Issue 13, published in 1965, features several poems by Mexican writer Thelma Nava—wife of the celebrated poet Efraín Huerta—together with the a collection of young Paraguayan poets compiled by Miguel Ángel Fernández.101 From the example of little magazines, and perhaps from Llinás’s Boa, Vigo became aware of the

98 Exposición Boa - Phases; Confrontación Internacional de Arte Experimental, Del 4 Al 20 de Junio de 1959, n.p.
99 Julio Llinás, “La gran mentira” in Boa; Cuadernos Internacionales de Documentación Sobre La Poesía y el Arte de Vanguardia, no. 3, 4. Spanish: Estas cuatro publicaciones hermanas, constituyen una “internacional de la poesía y el arte de vanguardia.
100 “Acción Poética Internacional” in Diagonal Cero, no. 8 (1963), n.p. For the relationship between Miguel Grinberg and American intellectuals see Merton, Thomas, James Laughlin, and David D. Cooper eds., Thomas Merton and James Laughlin: selected letters (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).
101 Nava, “Poemas de ‘Los Territorios.’”
possibility of creating international networks through the mail. As Ades argues, “the ‘little review’ became the primary medium of dissemination of new ideas across Europe. […] By the early 1920s these reviews had established an international network, advertising each other in long lists on the back pages. Tristan Tzara was in correspondence with numerous editors of little reviews from all over Europe, from Seville to Moscow.”

Through Diagonal Cero, Vigo became one of the most important promoters of visual and concrete poetry, or Novísima Poesía, as he called it, in Argentina and in Latin America. The term “novísimo”—distinct from anything in correct Spanish—points to what is perhaps the only common denominator to all this heterogeneous practices: their ambition towards innovation from the perceived archaism of poetry. Throughout the 28 issues of Diagonal Cero Vigo promoted different types of new poetry such as the sound poetry of French artist Henri Chopin and the concrete poetry of Brazilian poet Haroldo de Campos. Vigo’s activities as editori resulted in international recognition. For example, in 1966 the French poet Julian Blaine invited him to exhibit his work in the “Premier inventaire de la poésie elementaire” in Paris. His prominence was acknowledged within Argentina as well, notably by the eminent Jorge Romero Brest who invited Vigo to curate an exhibition of visual poetry at the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella in 1969. This was the first exhibition of concrete and visual poetry in Argentina. De Campos had suggested Vigo as an ideal organizer for such an exhibition to Romero Brest, given that, “as

102 Ades, The Dada Reader, 12.
103 Magdalena Pérez Balbi, “Movimiento Diagonal Cero: Poesía Experimental Desde La Plata (1966-1969),” Escaner Cultural, 13, accessed August 13, 2015, http://revista.escaner.cl/node/277. There is little agreement as to the proper categorization and subsequent designation between visual poetry, concrete poetry, sound poetry and the likes. Throughout this paper, I will refer to all forms of poetry by the name given to them by Vigo: Novísima Poesía. The term is the most adequate not only because it is the term used by Vigo himself but also because in its use of the Latin ‘novissimo’ it points to what is perhaps the only common denominator to all this heterogeneous practices: their ambition towards innovation from the perceived archaism of poetry.
105 Davidson, Paulo Bruscky and Edgardo Antonio Vigo, 70.
director of *Diagonal Cero* he is already in touch with concrete poets from all over the world [...].”

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In *Diagonal Cero*, Vigo drew on strategies from earlier Argentine magazines and adapted them to the pursuit of his own goals. Translation of texts previously unavailable in Spanish and their juxtaposition with local texts and artworks created a horizontal platform where readers could make their own associations between the international and local material presented. This strategy was extended to *Diagonal Cero*’s reviews and texts about modern and contemporary art. In these texts, European art is presented not as a dogmatic canon that has to be inexorably followed by young Argentine artists who lack in knowledge and skill. It is presented as merely a historical precedent of artists who in their circumstances produced art. In *Diagonal Cero* European art provides lessons but not compulsory ones. Locating collaborators outside of Argentina was another step in Vigo’s creation of a multilingual editorial platform formed by both local and foreign contributors, which would explore artistic expressions through non-hegemonic structures. As will be explored in the next chapter, Vigo’s network of collaborators grew and the political situation in Argentina and abroad became more dire, he soon found himself looking for new channels of communication.

Issue 14 of *Diagonal Cero* features in a double spread a poem and a woodcut print by Vigo under the headline “A los dominicanos todos (1965) (fig. 12).” The poem plays with the distribution of the letters by placing the word “descending” actually descending. It is unclear

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what the metaphor alluding to “white mushrooms tainted in red” refers to. However, the reference to the Organization of the American States and a compass “tragically pointing North” is clear enough. Vigo accuses the OAS of determining its policies—in this case the intervention in the Dominican Civil War of 1965—based solely in the interests of the United States, the most prominent Northern member of the Pan-American organization. The clenched fist featured alongside the poem points towards Vigo’s commitment to raise his own fist in this struggle. Yet it seems that he had no way of distributing Diagonal Cero and this image included there in the Dominican Republic. For an artist so focused on communication this must have appeared as a troubling hindrance. In spite of his international promotion of visual poetry and art through magazines his network was a limited one. In 1971, two years after the last issue of Diagonal Cero was printed, we find Vigo experimenting with the postal system, sending letters to unknown addresses and waiting in La Plata to see what came back. While Diagonal Cero itself did not make it into the 1970s, its editorial model would survive through and inform Vigo’s experiments with mail art. It is in this manifestation that his nuanced form of politics makes its clearest appearance.
CHAPTER II

Hexágono ’71 and Mail Art’s Rhizomatic Network

In 1971, I conducted an action in the postal sphere: I invented a character that I called Otto Von Mach. I sent him twenty-five proposals with mistaken mailing addresses I had put together. I mixed the addresses around and sent, for example, [a letter] to Peru with postal information that corresponded to Mexico. They were all returned to me. The travel history of each letter was registered on the envelope: their entrance, their departure, the date, their return by the postal authorities; some say unknown. These all happened with the envelope still closed. Little by little the letters came back to me within a normal period. I received the last one a year later, because they sent it to Europe and it was supposed to go to Japan. [...] To be sure, the envelopes were very interesting.107

This anecdote chronicles Vigo’s first foray in the postal system. The envelope of one of these letters, preserved by Vigo’s archive in La Plata embodies it (fig. 13).108 Together, they point to the essence of his political use of mail art: as a form long-distance communication that through interventions such as deliberate wrong addresses could be unsystematized and decentralized. Furthermore, the inclusion of a legend bearing the words “Diagonal Cero, Trimonthly Argentine magazine,” links this mail art experiment with the magazine Diagonal Cero. Had any of these letters fallen into the hands of some unsuspecting addressee somewhere in the world, he

107 Edgardo Antonio Vigo, quoted by Fernando García Delgado and Juan Carlos Romero in “Todo lo que usted quería saber sobre arte correo” in Davidson, Paulo Bruscky and Edgardo Antonio Vigo, 86. Spanish: Durante 1971 realicé una experiencia en el ámbito postal: inventé un personaje al que llamé Otto Von Mach. A él le fueron dirigidas venticinco propuestas con direcciones inventadas con direcciones que tenía, las intercambiaba y mandaba, por ejemplo, a Perú con una dirección que correspondía a una ciudad de México. Me las devolvieron todas. En cada sobre quedó registrada la historia del viaje que tuvo cada una: la entrada, la salida, la fecha, la devolución de las administraciones; algunas dicen desconocido. Todo fue manejado sin que el sobre fuera abierto. […]De a poco me fueron llegando las cartas dentro de un período normal. La última la recibí al año, porque la mandaron a Europa y tenía que ir a Japón […] Eso sí, los sobres quedaron muy interesantes.

108 Diagonal Cero was not only the magazine studied in the previous chapter but also an appellative that Vigo used for other projects. Vigo often stamped other works such as his early Señalamientos with the phrase, “Diagonal Cero editó.”
or she would have been made aware of the existence of Vigo’s magazine. It is important to remember that by this time Vigo was not publishing *Diagonal Cero* anymore. Thus, the inclusion of the magazine’s title operates as a reference to his previous labor. Aside from this link to one of his previous projects, the envelope exhibits some of Vigo’s characteristic design choices: a paper of unusual texture and color, different typefaces and colors and a mauve line running horizontally across the vertically oriented envelope that conveys a sense of composition. On this envelope is also something previously unseen in Vigo’s work: the markings of other people. Argentine postal stamps, Japanese characters stamped in red ink, cross-outs, and underlines are all present on the envelope, which is now not only the work of Vigo but also a bearer of signs generated elsewhere. The envelope and its markings are the material embodiment of the postal system that they moved through. For an artist so invested in both materials and communication, it must have been fascinating to see these signs stamped on the envelope by an anonymous person on the other side of the globe. What Vigo refers to as “registers of their travel history”—entry signs and exit signs—become the manifestation of what he referred to as “communication at a distance.” In a letter sent to Kenyan artist Sarenco Githai in 1993 he comments, “Mail art permits me, with the arrival of each letter or proposal for work, to have the sensation of entering into a world where common rules disappear and a cry of freedom is clearly heard.”

As mentioned previously, Vanessa Davidson describes Vigo’s isolation as twofold: first from the major art centers of Europe and North America by being in Argentina, and second from the Argentine centers of contemporary art like Rosario and Buenos Aires. The envelope and its impromptu journey must have seemed to Vigo like an opportunity to transcend that isolation, and to do it through carefully crafted material objects and publications such as *Hexágono ’71*. For

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110 Ibid.
Vigo, mail art represented an possibility to articulate local concerns unto an object and to share that object with an audience elsewhere.

Vigo began developing a mail network since 1962 through his international activities as editor of Diagonal Cero. But it was not until the 1971 Otto Von Mach experiment that he became aware of the possibilities for seemingly unhindered distribution inherent to this network. It was this awareness that led him to using the mail art networks as distribution channels for Hexágono ‘71. This magazine ran for thirteen issues between 1971 and 1975 and was published trimonthly. Its name refers to the year of its inception and to the courthouse building where Vigo worked as a clerk, which reportedly had six walls.¹¹¹ In an interview, Vigo stated that he began publishing Hexágono ‘71, “trying to make a different type of magazine, something experimental,” and that the impetus behind it was very much informed by Argentine and foreign politics.¹¹² Vigo himself assembled each issue in La Plata, and then issued print runs of five hundred copies.¹¹³ Collaborators varied, but relied on a series of recurring authors that included some of the most recognized Latin American artists of the period such as Horacio Zavala (Argentina, b. 1944), Jorge Glusberg (Argentina, 1922–2012) Guillermo Deisler (Chile, 1940–1995) and Clemente Padín (Uruguay, b. 1939). Regarding the editorial process behind the publication, Juan Carlos Romero—a frequent collaborator—commented, “It was always upon request by Vigo… it was always him that said when to turn it in and more or less what to do. After that you were free to do whatever you wanted, it could be a big sheet, a little piece of paper… He would fold them and do his thing. He was a paper artisan.”¹¹⁴ Romero’s anecdote is

¹¹⁴ Personal communication between Juan Carlos Romero and Ana Liza Bugnone in Bugnone, La revista Hexágono ‘71: 1971 - 1975, 5. Spanish: “Siempre era a pedido de Vigo, siempre él te decía cuándo tenías que hacer, qué tenías
important because it confirms that other than the original prompt by Vigo, contributors were free to do more or less whatever they wanted with their contribution.

Mail art networks provided the means by which Vigo received contributions and distributed the magazines. Once each issue was assembled he redistributed the magazine throughout his contacts in the network. Vigo called for contributions without overly limiting the nature of the material that was to be submitted. This open editorial approach, together with the capability of the mail art network to put him in touch with people both in Argentina and around the world resulted in publications that made reference to seemingly disparate events in different spoken and visual languages. More importantly, the fact that the magazines were later scattered through the mail art network meant that these composite publications could reach people who would read and comprehend them from their own standpoint, thus generating a new reading of these events.

Vigo’s apprehension of mail art as offering the possibility of fully material expressions communicated at a long distance becomes evident in his text, “Nuevos canals de comunicación de sentido marginal,” published in the Buenos Aires magazine *En Marcha* in 1981. The text reveals his belief that mail provided artists with a hitherto unseen means of disseminating their work: “The creative laborer, unrepresented and unsatisfied by the communicative circuits proposed by the System and by its lack on instrumental and material means, has decided to channel his occurrences towards exchange. He has chosen the method herein defined as *at a que hacer más o menos para la publicación. Después, la publicación era libre, podá ser una hojita, una grande, chica, mediana, él la plegaba, hacía lo que hacía él: era un artesano del papel y con eso resolvía el problema.”

Juan Carlos Romero’s comment also begs the question of what degree of authorship or of editorial control constitutes an assembling magazine. It is hard not to see a wide gap between Assembly’s call to send whatever the artist wanted and Vigo’s “always telling you more or less what to do.”

115 Ibid., 8.
distance, denomination of everything not grounded in physical contact, the mail for example.”

It is also key to emphasize that he regarded this communication at a distance as granting him the capability to circumvent the System [sic]. In the text, the capitalized system appears to refer to the art system, given that this new form of communication can occur anywhere in space and not necessarily a gallery or museum. As museums and galleries in Argentina increasingly became more and more targeted by government censorship, the need for communication systems alternate to art systems became more pressing. For Vigo, as Vanessa Davidson points out, mail art provided “a lifeline to artists around the globe.”

Vigo extended the use of mail art to his work as a magazinist, an operation best demonstrated by the case of Hexágono ‘71—an assembling magazine. Curator and historian of alternative artists’s publications Stephen Perkins defines assembling magazines as little magazines (much like the ones discussed in the previous chapter) where the collaborators are invited by the editor to send their collaborations not as texts but as the actual material that will be contained within the magazine. In these publications, the editorial prerogative is discarded and the collaborators are freed to contribute with whatever they want both in terms of content and of editorial design. This operation shifts the roles of the publishing process as the contributors

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116 Vigo, “Nuevos Canales de Comunicación de Sentido Marginal,” n.p. Spanish: No estando representado ni satisfecha por los circuitos comunicativos propuestos por el Sistema, con la pobreza instrumental y material de los medios desechados, el realizador y/o trabajador creativo, decidió canalizar sus ocurrencias [sic] hacia un intercambio. Eligí el método denominado a distancia, denominación de todo lo que no se cimenta en el contacto físico, el correo por ejemplo.

117 Davidson, Paulo Bruscky and Edgardo Antonio Vigo, 86. A point raised by Davidson worth highlighting is that while Vigo conducted mail art experiments of his own before becoming aware that there was such a thing as an international mail art network or an eternal network, he did reference Fluxus, Ray Johnson, Arman, Filliou and Shiomi as precursors to his practice, see ibid.

118 Hexágono ‘71 is almost always defined in previous literature as an assembling magazine. So far as I can surmise, the first to do so was Geza Perneczky. See Perneczky, The Magazine Network: The Trends of Alternative Art in the Light of Their Periodicals, 1968 - 1988.

now become the editors as they select a portion of the content as well as its editorial design.\textsuperscript{120}

Thus, the editor becomes an initiator and coordinator by first putting out a call for contributions and later on by assembling them, containing them together in one single publication and finally distributing them.\textsuperscript{121} *Hexágono* ‘71 was assembled through the mail art networks as Vigo would often –yet not always– use the postal system to invite his collaborators and to collect his contributions.\textsuperscript{122} This method echoes with Juan Carlos Romero’s narration of how Vigo requested contributions to *Hexágono* 71.\textsuperscript{123}

More importantly, most of the five hundred copies of the magazine were disseminated through the mail art network, that is to say, to postal addressees who collaborated with Vigo.\textsuperscript{124} *Hexágono* ‘71 was thus assembled and enabled by the mail art network but was not a work of mail art, it was an assembling magazine making use of the mail art networks as a way to reach its audiences worldwide. Like the interviews collected by Perkins reveal, some of the first editors of assembling magazines shared in a perceived sensation that there was a need to provide alternative circuits for artists to exhibit their work. Alternative is thus meant to signify a place independent of the usual art centers and art publications dedicated to more “conventional art” such as museums, galleries, commercial magazines and newspapers. According to Ana Liza Bugnone, “this marginality can be understood as a response to the dominant society, where another form of understanding culture is broadcasted.”\textsuperscript{125} These definitions are helpful in as much as they help understand *Hexágono* ‘71 not only as innovative in its confection but also in

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{122} In the case of artists whom he met regularly in person it seems more likely that he would have invited them and collected their contributions physically.
\textsuperscript{124} An anecdote quoted by Vanessa Davidson is worthwhile mentioning regarding the distribution of the magazine. According to Horacio Zavala, Vigo would leave a copy of *Hexágono* ‘71 in train cars whenever he travelled. Hoping it would fall into the hands of an unsuspecting reader.
the role that it was to play within Argentina. The pursuit for alternate spaces of exhibition would evolve into the impetus to establish channels of communication alternate to those encroached by censorship such as public and private museums and galleries, and mass media outlets such as newspapers and radio broadcasts.

Vigo deployed the techniques of assembling magazines and mail art to defy the regime of censorship under which he lived during the government of General Juan Carlos Onganía, the military leader who took over the government after deposing the democratically elected President Arturo Umberto Illia in 1966. In Argentina, the period between 1966 and 1976 witnessed violence increasing on all fronts, as popular armed opposition groups such as Montoneros and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias engaged in what they designated “Popular justice” and proceeded to kidnap and murder high profile figures of the Military and industrial tycoons. The authorities fought back by making use of increasingly deadliest tactics such as kidnapping and murder. After the Cordobazo of 1969 –the largest organized insurgence against the government led by students and factory workers in the provincial capital of Córdoba– proved the incapacity of his government, Onganía was briefly replaced by General Levingston who after little more than a few fruitless months in power yielded his seat to General Alejandro Agustín Lanusse, who David Rock considers, “the only military leader with the political clout to oversee the difficult process of retreat.” Continuous economic and popular struggles since the deposition of Perón in 1955 made it evident to the military high command that it would be impossible to return the country to a more stable position without negotiating and eventually allowing Perón to return from exile and take over the country once more. Despite this apparent retreat to a democratic regime, Lannusse’s transitional government put into practice –

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127 Ibid., 194.
experimented even with techniques of repression that later became the main trait of the military government of the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional. One of the most arresting episodes to occur during this period was the Trelew Massacre of 1972. In the wee hours of August 21st 1972, nineteen detainees of the Rawson Detention Center were gunned down by members of the Argentine Navy in the military of Almirante Zar, near the town of Trelew. The victims were members of different Peronist armed resistance forces imprisoned in the Rawson Center. The day following the massacre, Navy officials publicly stated for newspapers and radio broadcasts their version of the events. When asked by one of the reporters present at the newspaper briefing whether any of the Navy elements had been injured in the alleged shooting that had occurred inside the prison, the officer replied that it was now a secret.

While there were a couple of minor newspapers that highlighted the contradictions and unlikeliness of the explanation given by the military, the quick response and backing that the story received by the major newspapers demonstrates that a form of censorship was already at play in Argentina. The front cover headline of La Nación, the newspaper with the largest circulation in the country read, “15 Terrorists Killed While Trying to Escape from Trelew Base.” Thus, de-humanization and omission became the two instruments through which the military government exercised its itinerary of silence. The government’s framing of dissidents as un-Argentine or non-Argentine, as contrary to the Argentine self was synonymous to robbing them of their humanity, which in turn justified their killing. In this context, the action of

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128 Rock, Argentina 1516-1987, 78.
131 Ibid., 137.
132 Ibid., 131.
disseminating information other than the official version became an act of resistance against censorship. As the journalist Rodolfo Walsh wrote as part of his Cadena Informativa journalistic research initiative in 1976, “Cadena Informativa can be yourself, and instrument with which to liberate yourself and others from the terror. Reproduce this information, circulate it through any means available: by hand, type it, mimeograph it, Send it to your friends… millions want to be informed. Terror is based in in-communication.” As the quote by Walsh so aptly expresses, accurate information on otherwise obscured or distorted events amounts to not only a form of political dissent but also the articulation of an instrument capable of undermining, however slightly, the hegemonic discourse and authority of the regime.

Hexágono ‘71 did precisely that, circulating a form of information about what had happened in Trelew. As opposed to broadcasting accounts or news briefs or even his own opinion on the subject, however, Vigo merely stamped the word Trelew on red ink inside of a circle on the inside of the folder containing issue df of the magazine (fig. 14). Within Argentina the very mention of the word Trelew would have elicited association with the massacre, however, to the international audience that comprised a large part of Hexágono ‘71’s readership, it would have been only another word. Through the workings of the international mail art network the act of stamping the word Trelew takes on new significance. Detached from local partisan readings, the word Trelew travels through unseen and unpredicatable paths to far-away audicences that grant it a new meaning by the mere fact of encountering it. It is not impossible to

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134 The most important precedent of this act of directing public attention towards an event concealed by the autorititarian regimes that ruled Argentina in the period was the Tucumán Arde exhibition of 1968. See Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, Del Di Tella a “Tucuman Arde”: Vanguardia artística y política en el ’68 argentino (Buenos Aires: El Cielo por Asalto, 2000).
conceive that the word Trelew would have made its way to mail artist Milan Knizak in Prague.¹³⁶ This Czech reader upon opening issue df of Hexágono ’71 might not have known about the Trelew massacre. But for Vigo, the very act of presenting the word to this hypothetical reader, of making him read either to himself or out loud the word Trelew constitutes a form of transcending the isolation and censorship under which Argentines lived. Vigo’s broadcasting the word Trelew through the mail art network constituted a stand against the regime of silence of the Argentine authorities and their de facto collaborators in the media.

The political dimension of the word Trelew were echoed by the other elements and contributions assembled in issue df of Hexágono ’71. This issue is comprised of thirteen contributions from Argentine and foreign artists. They are all printed in papers of more or less different size, color and texture (fig. 15). More importantly perhaps, they contain different visual or spoken languages and their subjects vary from Cold War tension to the “Little Nemo in Slumberland” cartoon mentioned previously. Horacio Zavala contributed a map of the northern section of the South American continent, from 15° N to the Equator and from 80° W to about 60° W (fig. 16). The map, which bears the headline of “Mapa Político de América del Sur” has the words “Tension = Formula (over) Area.”

When he created it in 1974, the countries that appear in the map (with the exception of Brazil) were living relatively tranquil periods in their history. The tension between social turmoil and stability signaled by Zavala is thus left as an enticing consideration, as an invitation to consider these seemingly quiet nations as the site of future clashes. Another equally enticing contribution is the copy of a telegram sent by by Brazilian artist Amelia Toledo (b. 1926) to Brazilian critic Mario Pedrosa (1900–1981) (fig. 17). Both of them living in exile, Toledo in

¹³⁶ Milan Knizak (b. 1940) was a prominent practitioner of mail art. See Crane and Stofflet, Correspondence Art.
Argentina and Pedrosa in Spain, the telegram reads like a poem on murky communication, “bouncing itinerant tactile mechanisms (break) uncommunicated emotion.” The telegram communication between two exiles and its referencing to ruptured and disoriented emotions echo another element present in all of the contributions: seals bearing the postal address of the contributors. This element, together with the unbound construction of the issue that we observe how *Hexágono '71*, more than a publication, was a launching pad for these divergent forms of communication. Each contribution ran the risk of falling off the folder at any point along the postal network that it traveled. The presence of the postal address of the author meant that whoever so decided could later on trace back the work and send something to its author, therefore enlarging the network through de-centralized means.

In order to comprehend the ways in which mail art networks enabled Vigo to establish a platform of resistance against censorship in Argentina it is helpful to characterize these networks parsing for these potentially subversive attributes. As Bruno Latour aptly notes, the word network is so ubiquitous in contemporary critical lexicon that it has become almost useless. He further notes that whenever using the term people often refer to a either a technical network, such as a power or transportation grid, or the un-systematized association of human agents. Both of these concepts are commonly represented as a map or grid. These ambiguous definitions together with their visual representations fail to account for the most important characteristics of a network. For Latour, one of the key attributes of a network is its constant fluctuation. Fluctuation is one of the key characteristics that pertains to the present analysis of *Hexágono '71*. In a time when the established channels of communication became coerced by the de facto

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138 Ibid.
139 Ibid., 71.
powers’ itinerary of silence, the capacity of a magazine to disseminate in an unpredictable and ever-shifting network of artists became one of its most subversive qualities.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s rhizome model provides additional poignant insight into the subversive potential of Vigo’s use of mail art networks and their inherent unwavering fluctuation. According to their definition, a rhizome, is constructed by:

lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification… the rhizome is made entirely of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature.  

A rhizomatic network is an aberrant assembly of ever-rupturing offshoots. Contrary to an integral and hierarchical system, it is constructed not through kinship but through divergence. An illustrative metaphor for this contrast is the one provided by Deleuze and Guattari themselves: the rhizome is weed without center, contrary to any centralized arborescence. The expansion of a rhizomatic networks is not dictated by an unequivocal direction but, on the contrary, juts out in fragmented lines any which way. Much like a weed, the rhizome’s lines of flight move through underground strata and rupture into planes of signification that cannot be predicted given the lack of centralization. This characteristic is precisely what deterritorialization means: the rhizome’s capacity to move in unexpected and unseen routes only to appear elsewhere – metamorphosed– as a completely different object. The capacity of Hexágono ‘71 to deterritorialize itself through the weedlike paths of the mail art network grants it its most subversive capability and substantiates its stance of defiance. For example, the Argentine

140 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 21.
141 Ibid., 16.
authorities would have been unable to determine exactly where the word “Trelew” and its inherent accusation would end up. Vigo’s quest for alternative spaces becomes a form of resistance as it seeks to voice news of an event that the military government attempted to obliterate through its itinerary of silence.

Persecutions suffered by mail artists throughout Latin America stands as an unfortunate yet veritable proof of the perceived threat of their dissent against authoritarian regimes. In 1977 Clemente Padín was incarcerated by Uruguayan authorities for his mail art activities, specifically for the continuous publication and distribution of his magazine *OVUM*. Founded and directed by Padín, *OVUM* emerged in response to, “the needs of communication provoked by censorship and outrage at the dictatorship imposed in our country since June 1973,” and to report, “the urgent need of making public the crude violations of human rights which our people suffered.”¹⁴² Brazilian artists Paulo Bruscky and Daniel Santiago were likewise briefly imprisoned for their organization of Brazil’s “Second International Mail Art Exhibit” in Recife in 1976. Three days after the exhibition—sponsored by the Brazilian postal service—opened to the public, authorities visited the show and upon finding a wide array of “subversive materials” among the more than three thousand mail art works on display, incarcerated the artists.¹⁴³ The most crushing blow was perhaps the one dealt to Vigo by Argentine military authorities. During the massive wave of disappearances and executions that swept through the entire country during the first months of the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional after March 1974, Vigo’s eldest son—Palomo Vigo—


was kidnapped, likely as a retaliation for the artist’s subversive efforts. He was never seen again. The sacrifices of all these artists evidence their commitment towards freedom of speech and stand as scars embodying their defiance and struggle against ruthless oppression.

One of the unlikeliest indications of the effectiveness of mail art and magazines were as a form of political action is the fact that later on, during the years of the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional between 1974 and 1982, mass distribution magazines directed to the general population aligned with the hegemonic discourse of the authorities devised similar projects. A vivid example of such a practice can be found in the widely-distributed and still-extant magazine Para Ti. One of the magazines with the largest print-runs in Argentina, Para ti was directed to middle-class housewives. Between 1978 and 1979, the magazine ran a campaign in its pages titled “Argentina: Toda la Verdad,” which invited the readers to send a pullout postcard depicting happy children, peace, stability and a “country living and growing in peace” to someone abroad (fig. 18). The participants were also encouraged to write a few lines detailing how tranquil and prosperous life was in Argentina. Unfazed by their duplicitous and cynical move, many of the housewives who received the magazine and whose sons and daughters had been kidnapped by the authorities, did in fact send the postcards. Yet instead of describing the allegedly joyous life in Argentina, they wrote down the name and date of disappearance of their loved ones and sent them to acquaintances abroad.

144 There is very little or no information in any of the archival material left behind by Vigo to determine to what extent Abel–AKA Palomo–Vigo was politically active on his own right. In a letter sent by Vigo addressed to an unknown recipient called Daniel and held in the Papers of John Held Related to Mail Art in the Smithsonian Archive of American Art he touches on the subject of the disappearance of his eldest son. Vigo narrates the night in which Palomo was kidnapped by the authorities but closes the conversation stating that, “I do not like to tell you more about that sad matter [sic].”
146 Eduardo Varela-Cid, Los Sofistas Y La Prensa Canalla, Colección Sin Censura (Córdoba: El Cid Editor, 1984), 82. Spanish: Un país viviendo y creciendo en paz.
147 Ibid.
Much like in the case of the word Trelew that Vigo stamped in the cover of *Hexágono* ‘71, writing the names of the victims of the regime’s persecution can hardly be equated with a threat to the military regime. Both of these expressions, however, evidence a refusal to allow these events to slip into the oblivion into which the regime sought to bury them. Uttering these names, these dates and these places constitutes a repudiation of the regime’s itinerary of silence. Another eloquent similarity between Vigo’s political engagement through his magazines and mail art activities and the gesture of the Argentine housewives that subverted the *Para ti* postcard project is the somewhat cryptic nature of their efforts. In both of these cases, the utterance amounts to little more than half-spoken political speech. Neither of them articulate an overt political cry or even an explicit accusation. The postcards do not read “The government kidnapped my son on this date,” but merely bear the name and date of disappearance of the victim. It was left to the addressee to fill in the gaps and therefore finish constructing the accusation. Similarly, the word Trelew bears no mention of the people executed there but stands in for the whole event. It is precisely these forms of cryptic political utterance that constitute Vigo’s nuanced approach to political activity.
CHAPTER III

*Hexágono ‘71 and Novísima Poesía as Semiotic Deteriorization*

*Novísima Poesía* constitutes the other element in Vigo’s project to create through his magazines an editorial platform for the enactment of a nuanced form of politics. *Novísima Poesía* was a term coined by Vigo that begins to make its appearance in his archive around the year of 1969.\(^{148}\) The term—with its emphasis on acute novelty—refers to all forms of poetic statement or work that disregard the semantic and semiotic region of spoken language. A rhizomatic model of Vigo’s *Novísima Poesía* would point towards the way in which it incorporates elements belonging to different semiotic regions such as that of mathematical symbols, written Spanish verse and bureaucratic signs that mimic those of the authorities, among others. Under the term of *Novísima Poesía*, Vigo encompassed visual poetry, sound poetry, Brazilian concrete poetry and his own mathematical poetry. Mail art networks provided Vigo with the capability to transcend Argentine censorship through international dissemination. *Novísima Poesía* granted him a similar capability by allowing him to cipher political commentaries and express them not as explicit written statements but as a nuanced and suggestive mix of text and image. In this chapter I analyze Vigo’s involvement with *Novísima Poesía* and his use of it in *Hexágono ‘71*, elucidating for the mechanisms through which Vigo ciphered political comment.

Throughout his career Vigo labored tirelessly in the creation, study and promotion of visual poetry.\(^{149}\) In this regard it is important once again to bear in mind that *Diagonal Cero*

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\(^{149}\) As stated in the introduction, Mario Pacheco describes Vigo as the “most important promoter” of mail art in Argentina while Luis Camnitzer altogether ignores him.
consistently featured both original contributions of visual poetry as well as critical texts on the subject. Visual poetry’s value to Vigo is made clear in the texts published in the catalogue for the *Expo Internacional de Novísima Poesía / 69* which he organized in 1969 and was mentioned briefly in Chapter One. In the catalogue of the exhibition, Vigo included brief texts and quotations from a wide array of contributors. One by Vincenzo Accama states that in “this new poetry” the roles traditionally assigned to the categories of writer, reader, seer and hearer are destabilized. This destabilization occurs, according to Accama, because it demands that whoever so wishes to engage with this type of poetry performs all of these roles when engaging with it. In Vigo’s own brief contribution to the catalogue, he emphasized the capacity of visual poetry to articulate a form of language that never fully discloses a concrete meaning: “Unlike surrealism, which makes mystery subjective through metaphor, the hermetic conveyor makes the concept of mystery objective.” Thus, *Novísima Poesía* does not explain or de-mystify a mystery by granting mystery subjective guise. It rather materializes it as it stands, as an hermetic and yet un-procesed mystery. Both quotations address the way in which visual poetry destabilizes the common or traditionally established scheme of communication by favoring the role of addressee of the poem. In the so-called traditional schema, a writer conveys a certain meaning through language and its resources: spelling, grammar, typography, editorial design, etc. In the case of *Novísima Poesía*, what used to be read, now has to simultaneously be seen and heard. Meaning is conveyed by each individual’s ability to engage with the poem on his own.

The primacy given to the reader by *Novísima Poesía* took on a political meaning on the pages of *Hexágonon’71*, always shaped by the prevalent climate of politicization, whether local.

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151 Edgardo Vigo in Ibid. n.p.
or foreign. The legend “One more than the U.S.A.” appears stamped in the cover of the first six issues of the magazine, printed from 1971 through 1973 (fig. 19). Ostensibly a reference to the Pentagon, and its five sides, the stamp positions Hexágono ‘71 directly in relationship to a key institution of the United State’s military. Vigo chastised the Pentagon for its role in what he considered the imperialist agenda of the Vietnam War. The reference to U.S. interventionism is emphasized in the first issue –issue a– of 1971 in “Souvenir de Viet-nam,” a contribution by Vigo (fig. 20). A sheet of cardboard paper with a small transparent envelope pasted to it, it contains a legend underneath that reads: “Viet-nam souvenir: travel, choose a trench (any side), pick up a life and store it in the envelope.”152 Directly referencing the taking of life in the Vietnam war, Vigo’s contribution to the first issue of Hexágono ‘71 declares the magazine’s political intentions.

Issue cd from 1973 marked a turning point in the periodical’s history toward a much more forceful political tone, exemplifies the use of Novísima Poesía to assert this stance.153 This intensification of the political content of the magazine and its focus on Argentina was likely influenced by the previously mentioned events of 1973 and can be observed in editorial alterations to the cover: the sardonic phrase “One more than the U.S.A.” is replaced with “Though yes, the most dangerous” (fig. 21). A whimsical scoff gives way to stern warning. The magazine presents itself not as playful anymore but as dangerous. Vigo also incorporated a new element on the cover: a printed image of Adam and Eve being chased out of heaven by a


menacing Archangel swinging a sword over their heads. Vigo copied the figures of Adam, Eve, and the Archangel from a sixteenth-century woodcut engraving by Albrecht Dürer. This scene, together with the warning legend amount to a foreboding. The association would also have echoed with the dire political situation in Argentina and in other Latin American countries where Vigo sent the magazine such as Chile, Brazil and Uruguay. Starting from issue cd, explicit political references such as the Pentagon are replaced by more nuanced suggestions of struggle and repression. Another element that testifies to the more politicized nature of issue cd is the nationalities of the contributors. Ana Liza Bugnone highlights that in this issue Hexágono '71 only Argentine collaborators whereas all previous issues included foreign collaborators. Moreover, these collaborators all belonged to the artists’ collective Centro de Arte y Comunicación—or CAYC—whose work made constant allusion to political repression. Issue cd has nine pieces, two by Vigo and the others by Carlos Ginzburg, Horacio Zavala, Juan Bercetche, Luis Pazos, Marcos Paley, Eduardo Leonetti, and Juan Carlos Romero. Although the cover announces peril, inside the magazine there is no explicit mention of policy, government officials, or concrete events. Instead there is a range of seemingly apolitical works: an architectural drawing by Zavala, a woodcut print by Vigo, a list by Bercetche, and stamps by Ginzburg, among others. However, when evaluated through the reading mode of Novísima Poesía, their covert political tone is uncovered.

A comparison between the contributions by Luis Pazos and by Juan Bercetche reveals two divergent ways of articulating a political comment about the situation in Argentina (figs. 22 and 23). For his contribution, Pazos created an image of a person sprawling. Drawn with a simple line, the figure resembles a cadaver and out of the figure’s body an image of South

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154 Davidson, Paulo Bruscky and Edgardo Antonio Vigo, 79.
America emerges. The map image is oriented vertically and the figure of the person is rendered as if an outline, observed from above. The impression is that of viewing a splayed dead body from above. Pazos pays little attention to the precise representation of the figure’s features, instead rendering the trace of man like the chalk outline of a dead body at a crime scene. This reading of the work would in turn make the silhouette of South America appear not as a map but as a blood stain. Pazos presents both the continent and the person like components of the same crime scene. As previously mentioned, the magazine had both a Spanish-speaking and non-Spanish-speaking audience. Some of its readers may not have been able to understand the work’s title (which appears next to the drawing and to the artist’s name), *Herida*, which means wound. They would, however, identify the scene as violent.

In turn, Juan Bercetche contributed a work containing very little visual material and mostly consisting of written Spanish: ostensibly a printed list later manipulated by hand. A line in the center divides the word “Inventory” on the left from an actual inventory on the right, where items are either marked or crossed out. The items are, “seven dead bodies, thirteen wounded, two disappearances [the number two is manually crossed out and replaced with the number three], four trucks, one bar, one phone booth, one kiosk, five dwellings, once hospice, one temple.” To a reader with absolutely no knowledge of Spanish, Bercetche’s contribution will appear to be little more than a list. Words are listed and then crossed out through what appears to be a manual action, as one usually does when something on the list has been achieved. This reading, however limited, draws out the elements that inject the work with tension for the Spanish-speaking reader. For him or her, the inventory reads like a contradiction, a tension between two opposing orders. The first of these orders is that of the everyday: schools, churches,

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156 Juan Bercetche, “Inventario” [?], *Hexágono* ‘71, no. cd, (1973), n.p. Spanish: 7 muertos, 13 heridos, 3 desaparecidos, 4 camiones, 1 bar, 1 cabina telefónica, 1 quiosco, 5 viviendas, 1 hospicio, 1 templo.
kiosks. The second is an order that in a peaceful society would not be paired with the first: dead bodies, wounded bodies, and missing persons. Furthermore, whoever composed and then marked this inventory sought to accrue more dead bodies than dwellings. One is left to wonder, who wrote the list? The authoritarian government responsible for building hospitals and for kidnappings? Or maybe one of the insurgent factions? It is precisely this ambiguity, this destabilization of language, that allows the viewer to insert themself to make sense of what they’re seeing, not through a scheme laid out by the author, but through their own means.

Further examples of this destabilized form of language can be found in issue *df* of *Hexágono ’71*, which was analyzed in the previous chapter. One of the submissions is a letter sent by Hungarian artist Endre Tót (b. 1937) to Jorge Glusberg (fig. 24). The elements (date, addresses, body) of the letter, reproduced by Vigo on pink paper and apparently typed on a typewriter, are placed as in a normal letter. The first lines, in Spanish, are clearly legible and read, “Dear Jorge, I am glad I can write to you and Amelia simultaneously. You will also hear it. I am recording it—Praised be God.” After these three sentences, the writing becomes illegible, evidently by Tót returning the cylinder to the same place on the page and repeatedly hitting the letter “o,” which intentionally impedes legibility. The only other two legible sentences in the letter come after. The first one reads, “This portable Remington is pretty good” and the last one—placed on the bottom of the page as a post scriptum—reads, “P. S. THIS IS AN AUDIO-VISUAL-LETTER!” This “letter” is thus a play on the supposed legibility of a normal letter. Perhaps the form of communication most recognizable and easiest to censor, a letter depends on a series of fixed characteristics such as addresses, body, signature, etc. However, in the case of this letter, the act of communication is disabled by the sender, who instead of communicating

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through the printed characters on the page, alludes to communication through sound. The reference to communicating simultaneously with Glusberg and his wife, together with the warning that “he will hear it too,” already sets up this alternative form of communication, which is not meant to convey meaning through alphabetical signs but rather through sounds. These sounds are not included in the letter, and thus the addressee, in this case Glusberg, has to produce them himself. Were he to take the invitation seriously, he would probably read the letter out loud, prompting a different form of communication. Novísima Poesía is thus presented as a form of communication that, by not depending on a specific semiotic regime, can be freely interpreted by the viewer. It is also worthwhile to note that Vigo made use of a similar strategy for rendering a text illegible in the editorial of Diagonal Cero’s issue 27 from 1968 (fig. 23).

In 1970, Vigo expanded his definition of Novísima Poesía by describing it as a participatory act in his text “La Vanguardia Poética: Desde La Poesía-Proceso a La Poesía Para Realizar” which was published in the cultural supplement of the Uruguayan newspaper El Popular:

It is in the process poem where we find this phenomenon, the unleashing “POETIC IMAGES” [sic] through “CODES” (words, visual images, objects), that allow for other elements to be incorporated. . .or removed, thus generating an ACTIVE PARTICIPANT that evolves from recrtor [sic] (who interprets the thing) to a creator (who modifies the image). A poetic object. . .basically counts with a series of elements whose final disposition, through no previous scheme, must be “composed” by the audience. . .

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According to Vigo, this avant-garde poetry is composed of a series of dissimilar elements that he dubs “code.” Words, visual images, and even objects conjugate and unleash poetic images. These poetic images are ultimately the result of the act of reading one of these works, and are not the result of interpretation but of the modification of the elements set forth by the author. Such a work must necessarily be composed by the audience, and one can claim that the work remains in the composition stage until it reaches its audience.

Further clues to the way in which Vigo ciphered politics through Novísima Poetry are found in the notes Vigo jotted down during a conference on New Art hosted by Centro de Arte y Comunicación.\textsuperscript{159} While the full meaning of the notes in Vigo’s archives is obscure, they themselves are an example of the form of signification that he advocated for. Underlined in a page that seems to correspond to the lecture delivered by Brazilian concrete poet Walter Dias Pino are the words, “hardship when reading writing.”\textsuperscript{160} Also featured prominently are the words, “creation of a new code.”\textsuperscript{161} It is precisely in the visual poems articulated by codes and fully activated by the active reader that we encounter the potential for subversion of these works. Hexágono ‘71 further enhanced the possibility of subversion, firstly by compiling the work of not only one artist but several, thus multiplying the number of meanings that could be generated by the audience of the magazine. Secondly, by the fact that through the mail art network, these visual poems would reach not only a greater number of people, but also people abroad, whose political sensibilities were different.

Vigo’s form of protest operated not only through explicit reference to contemporary political events but also, and perhaps more importantly, through a destabilization of normal forms of political engagement. One form of enacting protest is that of ciphering and coding. Vigo created, through his craft as an artist and visual poet, works that managed to be political despite not making an expressly political statement. This type of veiled communication was not unheard of in the context of political dissent during the 1960s and 1970s in Latin America. In Brazil, the regime of censorship resulted in “a stimulation of greater inventiveness among journalists, evinced in such practices as the creative use of metaphor and the publication of ambiguous messages hidden in rhymes or even classified ads.,” as Juan E. Corradi has noted.\textsuperscript{162} Ana Belén Gache further comments in her introduction to an exhibition catalogue on Argentine mail art that, “the art of ciphering became a vital form of communication for countries living under regimes of censorship, where correspondence was controlled and censored.”\textsuperscript{163} The use of visual poetry to articulate ciphered messages was not uncommon during this period, nor was Vigo the only artist to engage in such practices, as Gache continues: “visual poems, diagrams seemingly disconnected and displaced [. . .] efficient forms for conveying encrypted and hidden messages.”\textsuperscript{164}

As the editor of \textit{Hexágono '71}, Vigo employed his knowledge as a visual poet and the mail art networks toward the articulation, through the periodical, of a form of resistance that did not use overt political statements but rather ciphered utterances of dissent. In an interview with Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, Roberto Jacoby comments with a certain regret how the Tucumán Arde exhibition lacked artistic quality: “It was much more about the revolution than it

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
was about art. Back then I regarded art in a totally instrumental way: art as an instrument.”

For Vigo, art was at the core of political engagement. One of the key actualizations of this interweaving of art and politics is *Hexágono ’71* and its use of the tropes of *Novísima Poesía* to generate political statements referencing Argentine events that could later be scattered all over the world.

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165 Longoni and Mestman, *Del Di Tella a “Tucuman Arde,”* 300.
CONCLUSIONS

Working under a military regime that sought to obscure social dissent through a campaign of silence, Vigo articulated a subversive form of political commentary through his periodicals, which were shaped by his activities in mail art and visual poetry. On the pages of Hexágono 71 we find political utterances ciphered through the tropes of visual poetry. This refusal to concede to the government’s will and its hold on the mass media reached its full potential in the magazine’s dissemination through the international mail art network, which created an audience for the magazine that in its dissimilarity granted new meanings to its utterances. The origins of Vigo’s involvement with Novísima Poesía and the global network of collaborators who would eventually constitute the core of his mail art network can be found in an earlier publication: Diagonal Cero.

Vigo’s work is for the most part missing from the seemingly comprehensive historical accounts devoted to the region and period in question. It is of key importance to draw attention to his practice, not only because the variety and richness of his works, which offer so much potential material for analysis, but because it reveals the need to expand the models and limits of what is considered political engagement through art in modern Latin America. The unruly and sardonic work of Vigo, even in its staunch opposition to the Argentine government’s forceful obscuring of events detrimental to their hold on power, refuses to issue explicit political cries. Its mode of resistance follows uncertain paths that contradict the dictum that in order to mobilize social bodies it is necessary to appeal to them in terms they will clearly comprehend. Vigo’s form of politics, as Vanessa Davidson has pointed out, is one that never strays far from humor,
from a certain jouissance that refuses to concede to either the authoritarian government’s call for order and civility or to the revolutionary’s call for organized movements.\footnote{Davidson, \textit{Paulo Bruscky and Edgardo Antonio Vigo}, 3.}

In order to more fully comprehend how such a political stance was articulated over time it is necessary to study Vigo’s work not as isolated bodies of works, but in samples where all the strands of his practice can be seen in interaction with one another. Vigo the artist cannot be separated from Vigo the magazinist because it is in these publications where the links between Vigo’s different areas of work become the most visible and where they are the most clearly oriented toward making political statements. Vigo’s form of politics was a nuanced one. Weary of overly organized, normative politics, Vigo practiced open-ended and participatory forms of politics through his work as a magazinist. It is helpful to analyze these activities together with the wealth of archival material that Vigo preserved given that it offers further insight into the process that generated the works.

It is also important to point out the limits and boundaries that prevented this paper from fully exploring the terrain that it sought to include in its scope. As mentioned in the introduction, two of the most essential resources were the archive preserved in the Centro de Arte Experimental Vigo in La Plata, Argentina and the issues of \textit{Hexágono ’71} and \textit{Diagonal Cero} preserved in New York. It is in the comparison between these two bodies of archival material that one of the project’s most salient hindrances comes to light. Vigo, as has been repeatedly stated, was a master artisan of paper. The tactile dimension of his work is of such importance that it is necessary hold the works in order to fully grasp them. Computer screens are a poor substitute for the lavish textures, nuanced colors, and different weights of Vigo’s papers. The physical characteristics of Vigo’s magazines and mail art is important to analyze given that they
were another of the channels of communication that he so willfully developed. The papers that need to be unfolded, the strings that beg to be untied and the perforated papers that ask the viewer to put it against his or her face and look through them, these are all potential spaces for politicized commentary. To inspect Vigo’s works digitally is thus to experience them only partially. This is true also due to the fact that many references and images encountered throughout my research that are apparently preserved in the archive are not online. An area of Vigo’s practice that was mentioned only briefly here is Vigo’s woodcuts. One of the most important promoters and practitioners of this art form in Argentina in his time, proper material analysis and integration of this component into an analysis of Vigo’s oeuvre is necessary. Perhaps, more than a hindrance, these limits are in fact terrains that upcoming research can explore. A possible reading of these works based in the research done so far suggests that in their tactile quality, these works were intended to be handled and manipulated. As such, they would further the reading of Vigo’s work as one that constantly pursued new avenues of communication. Manipulation and touch would become two more spaces for the interaction between the audience and the artwork. This is of great importance and merits further research given that it would add another dimension of comparison between Vigo’s work and modern Latin American Conceptualism.

On this same note, a study of Vigo’s involvement with the mail art network like the one performed in the present paper points to different and unsuspected faraway regions. A more comprehensive study of Vigo’s work and of the potential for subversion inherent in the act of disseminating political utterances through such a global network entails a more expansive study. Tackling this would require an almost encyclopedic knowledge of the practitioners and participants of this “eternal network” together with an extraordinary linguistic dexterity. The
answer, however, may be found in the object of study itself. If collaboration constructed these works then collaboration might play a hand in comprehending them. Just as these platforms were once the meeting ground of an international web of like-minded artists so then must they become meeting grounds for the scholars devoted to their study. Object analysis is therefore the key to furthering the study of Vigo’s oeuvre. His investment in the material quality of his works cannot be disregarded.

In a similarly expansive framework it is also important to single out the many threads cast by Vigo’s practice that run into the past and the future. The Dadaist influence on the work of Vigo awaits further efforts to comprehend fully the process through which certain elements from the historic avant-garde became of such use to the progressive Argentine artists of the 1960s and 1970s. In an epoch of such oppressive politics, what was it that Vigo—and plausibly other artists—found so valuable in Dada? This historical inquiry emanates from the work of Vigo hand-in-hand with questions that tackle more contemporary issues. As some critics have noted, the mail art practices of the 1960s and 1970s anticipated the emergence of electronic networks and of the particular uses that artists gave them. This idea might seem idle; however, it is important to remember that Vigo’s collaborators—Clemente Padín, for example—lived long enough to produce work that engaged with the Internet. Vigo as an object of study also refuses chronological demarcation and invites future scholars to tackle his multifarious life and work.

Perhaps one of the most helpful insights in the present paper is the identification of specific examples in Vigo’s earlier editorial projects, such as Diagonal Cero, where incipient political strategies begin to appear. While Diagonal Cero is mostly characterized as a magazine devoted to woodcut engraving and visual poetry, it contains propositions that would eventually become political stances. Communication at a distance, ciphered messages, the international
struggle for freedom from abusive governments, all of these make their appearance in *Diagonal Cero* as early as the mid-1960s, before the political imperative became so pervasive in Argentine art. A further analysis of Vigo’s work could use this premise as a jumping off point: that the political dimension was already present in the work of Vigo before 1966, yet it was relegated to the background.

Another helpful takeaway from the present paper is the relevance of Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome. While the model they developed may seem a very unwieldy one that does not appear to lend itself to academic papers such as this one, it provides the flexibility and dexterity to engage with objects of study that are equally unwieldy. An analysis of Vigo’s manipulation of and work in alternative channels of communication like mail art and assembling magazines could gain much from the continuous use of the rhizomatic model as a means for comprehending how one object located in a determinate semiotic regime can go underground and reappear elsewhere completely transformed.

As demonstrated in the paper, Vigo was a political artist. He called attention to the abuses of the authoritarian governments that did so much damage to Argentina and to Vigo himself. Perhaps more importantly, he also called attention to the limits of politics. In a letter sent to mail art historian John Held in 1981, he confessed that he was “very weary of meetings and organized politics.” This confession is evident in his earlier works. Vigo was not one to make blanket or obvious statements. His life and work were artistic prompts, geared towards the production of forms of communication that would grant the viewer and reader the power to construct experiences where he or she could be free from fear, censorship and oppression.

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