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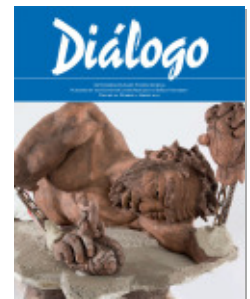
## Mail Art in 1960s-70s South America: Tactical and Tactile Operations

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# Mail Art in 1960s-70s South America: Tactical and Tactile Operations

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**Abstract:** This article examines the practice of mail art during the Cold War in South American countries under repressive military regimes, and with comparisons to examples occurring in the Communist Block in Eastern Europe. The study explores the establishment of underground networks of artistic exchanges and ideas in the 1960s-1970s decades by artists, some in exile, who found mail art as a strategy to sidestep censorship, and how this production has been preserved.

**Key Terms:** Cold War mail art; South American mail art; Mail art networks of artistic exchange; Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo (MAC-USP)

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The search for alternative channels for circulating artistic production and ideas, as well as strategies of distribution alien to the market and to institutional limitations, mobilized artists around the world during the Cold War. Marginal publications, such as inserts that highlight artistic projects in widely circulated periodicals and newspapers, and collective and/or anonymous actions through an extensive network by means of mail art, were important tactics for information exchange to, from, and *within* Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s. Those zones of contact galvanized during this post-world war period, through the circulation of artistic information and successful artists' collaborations, were far richer and more dynamic than those visible today, despite the ease in communication facilitated by the Internet. Certainly at first glance, mail art and digital-born artistic works present a compact proximity in focus as proposals that question the economic value of art, by privileging an exchange circuit and raising issues regarding authorship. But unquestionably, in the peripheral countries where these rhizoid communicative projects emerged, the postal system continues to be a far more democratic enterprise that greatly exceeds the potential outreach of our current digital "network."

The 1960s and 1970s was the territory of sensory, tactile mail art. Under the contemporary financial paradigm (heightened globalization), artistic exchange assumes an intangible geography operating as an anti-system of unterritorialized interactivity. In the mid-twentieth

century, there existed a common sense of urgency not definable by the form of the object that artists created (the "work of art"), but rather by the reach of poetic and political, collective and creative interventions. This urgency revealed itself through artistic processes tied to a consolidated network of information exchange which emerged during the critical decades post-world war, when Latin America's political history was tangled in coup d'états and military regimes.

During the long Brazilian military dictatorship (1964–85), the urge to leave the country due to political and ideological convictions affected its middle-class, particularly artists and intellectuals. Massive migrations were also a defining factor during similar regimes in Argentina (1976–83), Chile (1973–90) and Uruguay (1973–85). More than weaving a national history of artists and poetics during the fractured 1960s and 1970s—a moment of deep mutations in the social fabric of these countries—my aim here is to present some tactics that worked as emancipatory strategies for the artists of Latin America, and to position these proposals within a grid of collaboration extending beyond the region to Eastern Europe (Poland, Yugoslavia, Hungary and the former Czechoslovakia in particular).

Today, such artists' strategies remain largely unknown. The market economy developing in the transnational neo-liberal societies of Latin America offers a possible explanation, as well as the modern and depoliticized paradigms accepted and naturalized into the regional museums. The ineffectiveness of comprehensive

explanatory categories, and the consequential obliterations caused by a canonical art historical narrative, suggest that one must “brush history against the grain,” in Walter Benjamin’s words, and seek out artistic strategies and practices that would, otherwise, remain condemned to oblivion.<sup>1</sup> Paradoxically, the duplicitous nature of our own environment also requires that we consider the risks of fetishizing such process-based works in a market avid for them.

As I have argued elsewhere, the South-East mail art axis of the 1960s and 1970s established relations beyond the dominant political and ideological poles.<sup>2</sup> Despite different orientations in the totalitarian regimes of each world region during the Cold War (military dictatorships in Latin America and Communism in Eastern Europe), a robust mail art network bound them together in a common field of shared poetic/political action. Rather than affirmations of local identities, the network and exchange system galvanized similar social utopias and shared communal ideals of freedom. Moreover, its organic flow extended beyond national boundaries anticipating an alternate geopolitical network of information and artistic exchange. Revisiting the collective exhibition and publications projects generated from within the mail art network reveals an alternate synergy. This flow of energies not only opened platforms of true interchange during the 1960s-1970s but also begs us to question the meanings and directions of contemporary networks of artistic exchange.

### COLLECTIVE EXHIBITIONS

Some art exhibitions in Brazil are relevant to this narrative, particularly those experimental ones which incorporated new technologies of communication organized by Walter Zanini during the 1960s and 1970s at the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo (MAC-USP). As a vanguardist scholar, Professor Zanini integrated a generation of Brazilian idealist intellectuals who intended to see their country in a close dialogue with the world, leaving behind the geographic and economic isolation of previous decades.<sup>3</sup> Under Zanini, the MAC-USP organized frequent international exhibitions through open calls and distributed invitations through increasingly more consolidated mail art networks. At a moment when Brazil, as well as several countries in Latin America, were living under military dictatorship, the postal system became a great partner of the MAC-USP. It enabled the participation of Brazilian artists in

international exhibitions while allowing the museum to receive and present artworks from all over the world. Through it, Zanini established and built active transnational, professional and affective networks that were based on solidarity and trust. Ultimately, these networks created a territory of freedom at the museum. By stimulating artist experimentation, interrogating institutional practices, and questioning places of creation and display, the MAC-USP upended the notions accepted and naturalized in an otherwise linear and exclusionary history of art.

As a public university museum, distant from the market’s rhythms and will, its program placed emphasis on the communication of contents and on the de-centered exchange of artistic information. This focus on the postal system heralded not only a change in traditional channels for art circulation, but also in the profiles of institutions such as the MAC-USP. Particularly inasmuch it shifted its focus *away from* the traditional tasks of preserving, storing, and exhibiting artworks. Mail art connects the museum to the archive and these collective exhibitions became an active public space of participation. Moreover, the international contacts, favored by exchange lists, boosted the internationalization and diversity of the institutional collection: the works received from all over the world were never returned to the artist, instead becoming an integral part of a growing MAC-USP’s permanent collection.

Small catalogues serving as a minimal record of exhibitions, sometimes with just a list of names and images, were sent to each participant in fulfillment of the network’s motto: no juries, no fees, no returns and



Fig. 1: *Prospectiva 74*, 1974. MAC-USP Collection.

catalogues to all participants. Such was the case of the exhibition, *Prospectiva 74*, which MAC-USP organized in August and September of 1974. (Fig. 1) These types of exhibitions stood as a meeting point of an imaginary community of artists who never met personally, but who shared art projects in common. This sort of exhibition was important for public visibility of the mail art network.

The ephemeral artistic practices of Latin American and Eastern European artists preserved in the MAC-USP's permanent collection also help to reveal the ideological and material dimensions of these exchange circuits of the 1960s and 1970s. A shared utopia is discernible from these points of contact: an imagined community that enabled, at least in those crucibles, a free-flowing society. One that erected itself in spite of the repressive Cold War political climate that excluded the possibility for actual physical encounters between these artists. At the same time, works in the collection illustrate how some strategies and tactics were similarly used by all artists involved. It is well known, for example, how the mail system could be employed efficiently to circulate artistic information produced by easily accessible technological reproduction means. Artists on either side of the Atlantic aligned their interest in what were at the time new techniques—such as the Xerox machine, a fast and cheap means for reproduction—with the comprehensiveness and universality of mail art, which further multiplied itself outside a limited and closed circuit of galleries and museums.

The mail system enabled artists under dictatorships to have their works exhibited in other geographical locations, and thus evade censorship at the local level or confront travel restrictions. For the MAC-USP, too, the mail system provided a territory for freedom. It became an ideal channel and device within this network, as it answered at least two urgent needs: first, it sidestepped the museum's lack of economic resources; and second, it provided the framework for an expedited increase in its international collection. With the opening up of accession requirements, the institution also effectively did away with the modern expectation of quality for these exhibitions in favor of heightened pluralism in artistic propositions and participating nationalities.

## MAIL ART AND EXHIBITIONS

The book *Grammar / Gramatyka* (1973) by Jarosław Kozłowski (b. 1945), for instance, was sent by post to Brazil for an exhibition in 1974. It is an interesting representative

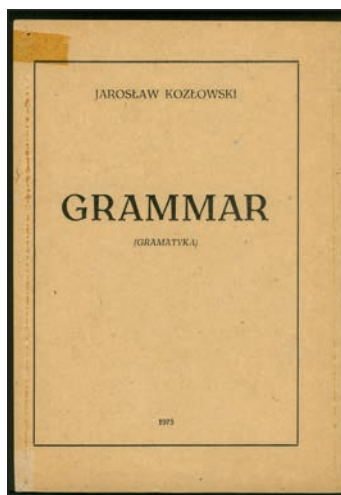


Fig. 2: *Grammar*, Jarosław Kozłowski, 1973. MAC-USP Collection.

of the dynamics of this sort of exchange (Fig. 2), and also a testimony and living example of the SIEĆ/NET Manifesto written and sent, in 1972, by Kozłowski and Andrzej Kostołowski (b. 1940) to hundreds of artists all over the world, proposing a more ample and generous network of artistic exchanges and ideas beyond the limitations imposed by political regimes or economic restrictions.<sup>4</sup> In the unsigned manifesto, Kozłowski and Kostołowski announce another cartography, capable of drawing closer artists in distant places—like Poland and Brazil—within an alternative regime of artistic exchanges that found new territories by the proximity of purposes and a stake holding in a kind of collective utopia:

These are artists that, in the words of Kozłowski, came together on the fringes of the official scene, outside institutional circulation, in semi-shadow, there were other artists at work, artists who were not interested in careers, commercial success, popularity or recognition: artists who devoted more attention to the issue of their own artistic, and therefore ethical, stance than to their position in the rankings, whether the ranking in question was based on the highest listing on the market, or the highest level of approval from the authorities. These artists professed other values, and other goals led them onward,

they were focused on art, conceived as the realm of cognitive freedom and creative discourse ...<sup>5</sup>

This definition clarifies the meaning of the artistic practice and personal ethics of many of those artists, at least at that time. With such a project shared through mail art networks, the artist is not defined by the kind of object that he creates, which we call “a work of art,” but principally by the nature of creative intervention that he is capable of performing in society. The mail network as a principle of open exchange is involved in cultural dynamics by closing distances, redefining and redistributing roles. In this measure, the solidarity for elective affinities becomes the principal operative beyond the privileged circles and social distinction allowed by the system of art.

In *Grammar*, for example, the verb “to be” is conjugated in all its variations. The declensions of the verb suggest a reflection on the meaning that one may give to words and to actions. The simplicity in the making of the crafted, quasi-precarious book is revealing. Edited by the artist himself in Poznań (Poland), the quasi-utopian character of the edition of ninety-nine printed copies is evident. The conjugation of the verb “to be” extends throughout the sixty-eight pages of the book as a result of the artist’s actions with that verb within a three-month period during 1973. His action expresses language’s performativity character. It becomes a gesture that is expanded within the communication circuit of the mail art network and is completed upon the reading of its addresses.

Upon being sent by postal service to Brazil, the book strengthened the efficiency of other more open, supra-institutional, circulation channels for art—capable of welcoming from beyond the economic or political imperatives—other declensions of significance. In the same year that Kozłowski brought forth his enunciative catalogue of the verb “to be,” the Brazilian artist, Ângelo de Aquino (1945–2007), circulated his “Declaration” through the same mail art network. A post card, signed by Aquino, reads in English “I am Jaroslaw Kozłowski,” together with the stamped printing that belies this statement: “lie.” (Fig. 3) Of course, if not in Polish or Portuguese, the language of international exchange was English, which also meant a sort of false identity for the artists. A language that, in turn, made possible some kind of communication, but not identification. In other words, the internationalism

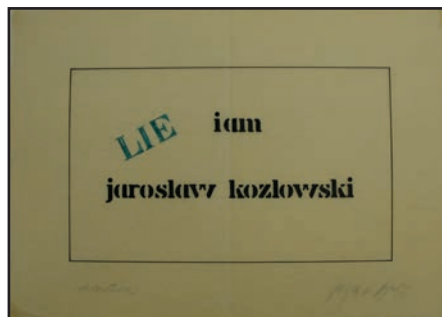


Fig. 3: *Declaration*, Ângelo de Aquino, 1973. MAC-USP Collection.

expressed here was not ideological but had an instrumental purpose.

Also in 1973, and perhaps, inspired by the exhibition put together by Kozłowski at the Akumulatory 2 Gallery in Poznań, Poland (1972–1989), Ângelo de Aquino organized some exhibitions in a shop window in Rio de Janeiro. The Akumulatory 2 Gallery, founded and run by Kozłowski from his home, was the result of a process on the network, meaning the possibility of an exchanging relationship among artists beyond the pre-established axis of institutional structures. The precariousness of the means, in combination with the urgency of communicating beyond the limited, exclusionary channels, at that point in time related to the totalitarian political regimes, identifies many of the works that circulated within this mail art network. Beyond the canonical narratives of art, these exchanges denote the path of artistic relations between Brazil and Poland in those 1960s and 1970s, and express the multiple and the most improbable manifestations of the verb “to be” in the field of art.

In the 1970s, the release of information about atrocities committed by military regimes in Latin America (supported by the U.S.) further activated the mail art network, causing a strong public pressure and even the review of lawsuits against artists persecuted by the dictatorships. News about the forced exile of the Chilean artist Guillermo Deisler (1940–1995) by the Pinochet coup d'état, the torture and imprisonment of the Uruguayans Jorge Caraballo (1941–2014) and Clemente Padín (b. 1939), as well as the disappearance of Palomo Vigo in 1976 (son of the Argentinean artist Edgardo Antonio Vigo, 1928–1997) to name just a few, circulated in the mail art network.



Meanwhile, a few German artists, for example, enabled the publication of booklets made by Latin American artists such as Padín, which frequently denounced the situation experienced during the period of Uruguayan dictatorship (1973–84). Therefore, *Instruments 74* (1974), *Omaggio a Beuys* (1975) and *Sign(o) Graphics* (1976) were published in Olbenburg thanks to the contact with Klaus Groh through the International Artists Cooperation (AIC). Klaus Staeck, from Edition Staeck in Heildelberg, published the book *Instruments II* (1975). As such, various de-centered communities of artists were united outside the market and oblivious to the institutions' imperative, geographically apart though united by communal survival tactics in oppressive environments. When Uruguay reentered democracy, Padín retrieved his passport which had been forfeited by the military junta.

Padín's trajectory during his more than forty years of artistic activity encapsulates several profiles: poet, critic, curator, editor and networker acting in a territory where art and activism mingled. It reveals an effort to overcome the canonical forms of artistic creation and circulation, as well as the limits imposed by the Uruguayan military regime. In his works, Padín applies strategies of reproduction and dissemination of information according to technological, social and subjective changes related to the transformations of artistic circuits of communication. He also followed the variations in techniques of reproduction over time: typewriter, off-set printing machines, photocopy, serigraphy, video, photography and, finally, digital art. In the mail art network orbit of exchange established among artists from all over the world, Padín represented a point of reference in South America. Living in Uruguay, his past and current participations into mail art networks inverts the fate of exclusion, undoing the geographical isolation and enabling multiple exchange channels.

Within the mail art network, many collaborative publications circulated during the 1970s. Many archives resulted from the active participation of the artists in these mail art networks of exchange. Actually, Padín's archive (currently publicly accessible at the Universidad de la República) is exemplary of the turbulent period that some Latin American artists lived. Its history trails along the fact that in order to narrate a true history of Latin American art, knowledge of the region's political history is indispensable.

The lacunae in Padín's archive are gaps that highlight the blows that were taken by the artist in losing twice:

first, upon the occasion of the military coup d'état in Chile, where a significant part had been sent when the fall of Salvador Allende's democratic government administration came full swing, and second, whatever was saved was confiscated by the Uruguayan military when the artist was arrested in 1977. His imprisonment mobilized the mail art international network to gain his release. So the history of many archives of artists in Latin America holds nothing linear or homogeneous, but is marked by alarming events and clashes so as not to speak of the recent migrations from international acquisitions of entire collections and archives exiled and sold to museums and metropolitan collections.

Mail art represents a process of artistic decentralization in which artistic messages may be sent to any corner of the world, as opposed to the "upstanding" hegemonic postures set in place after World War II, where a system of galleries, museums, critics and curators would control a restricted apparatus of marketing and prestige. Mail art arose with the desire of creating new processes of artistic signification within an ideological project that Padín summed up as "new objects for new subjects."<sup>6</sup> In this definition, the utopian halo of Latin American conceptualism shines through.

## COLLABORATIVE PUBLICATIONS

In the 1970s, with the recrudescence of military regimes in the region, the idea of participation is concretized via an underground network of mail art exchanges. Artist publications such as assembling magazines, in which many artists could participate sending a work to an artist-editor, were abundant and were also distributed by the international postal service. The relation among artists, writers and poets was staged by the use of language which frequently unites mail art and visual poetry through processes, ideas, indexes and maps, in addition to text-projects for actions and situations.

In 1974, Brazilian poets Torquato Neto and Waly Salomão launched the sole edition of *Navilouca*, a publication that remained as a landmark of the epic countercultural production, circulating among the poet-inventors who appeared in the 1960s and 1970s. The edition further relied on the participation of São Paulo concrete poets Augusto, Haroldo de Campos and Décio Pignatari. The magazine featured articles on art, cinema, graphic arts, etc., of artists such as Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, musicians Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil,

and filmmaker Ivan Cardoso, among many others within the total composition of the countercultural movement. The title of the magazine invoked *Stultifera Navis*, that satirical “Ship of Fools” that contained 110 prototypical deranged and excluded people in Sebastian Brant’s homonymous moralistic poem (1494).<sup>7</sup> The relation among artists, writers and poets—Brazil’s own countercultural “fools”—is staged by the use of language that frequently unites mail art and visual poetry.

In 1970, some publishing houses appeared in São Paulo, in casual association between artists and poets, financed and operated by themselves: The Sindicato dos Trabalhadores na Indústria Poética (Syndicate of Poetic Industry Workers, S.T.R.I.P.) Editions published the books *Reduchamp* by Augusto de Campos, (1977); *Poética/Política* (1977) and *I Ching Change* (1978), both by Spaniard Julio Plaza and *Edições Invenção*, an initiative of the concrete poets. The S.T.R.I.P. editions were a reaction to the fictional editions that have absurd names. In Portuguese, Abstract Control Totalitarian Ideological and Commercial of Art whose acronym ironically was C. O. I. T. A. D. A.<sup>8</sup>

For these artists, inter-media publication was, first and foremost, a language laboratory, and for many, it was the possibility of direct political intervention particularly by the opening of unofficial channels of communication. In the assembly magazines, the precariousness of the media, as a single sheet in off-set or a handmade postcard, suggests the dynamism of the proposition in opposition to the reification of its market value. As concerns these publications, it is of interest the idea that the artist’s intervention in a single product, in a magazine page or in a conventional newspaper, is not enough. Their engagement is necessary in the very environment, insistently opening new channels of circulation and distribution of art.

Assembly magazines, as *On-Off* editions in Brazil, for instance, functioned as opened and mobile platforms of exchange. In this sort of collective publication, the emphasis moves from the magazine’s contents to the ritual of editing and distributing them throughout the network, having assured democratic access to reproduction means. Today, these publications compose the fragmentary

reports of this underground history. Absolutely articulated by international postal circuits, the assembling magazines still today present a snapshot of the mail art network in a particular moment. That is to say, they reveal its connections as well as some aspects of the work done by each one of its members. (Figs. 4 and 5)

In these handmade publications,

the precariousness of the materials, such as an off-set leaflet or a postcard suggests the dynamism of the proposition, opposed to the auratic artistic value. The artists’ intervention in a magazine page or conventional newspaper was not enough within this logic. It was necessary to somehow intervene in the media itself, opening other channels to artistic circulation and distribution. In the context of the museum, these works suggest pending problems to the curator, such as themes related to the transitory nature of the artwork, to the real definition of the art object and to the dialectal relations between art and documentation, as well as the urgent necessity of new parameters for the documentation, preservation, exhibition and storage of contemporary art, above all a forefront to the new technological means utilized by artists.

The instruments of producing and reproducing the works are revealing factors of a determined sensuous form characteristic of this recent past: typewriters, off-set printing machines, portable mimeographs and household photographic amplifiers are material evidence of production and reproduction from a fondly tactile



Fig. 4 (left) and Fig. 5 (right): *On-Off*, Julio Plaza and Regina Silveira, 1972. MAC-USP Collection.

collective memory. A typewriter, for instance, is capable of developing individual marks by pressing one's hand on the keys, characteristic of an intermediary moment between manual force and machinery. The mimeograph, which in some places in Brazil had to be registered at the police department (as it was considered to be a weapon in the hands of social movements) is also an appropriate instrument for this moment. The manual force in reproducibility and its distribution by the postal service are the sensuous ramrods in the tactile form and the corporeal sensibility of artistic production and circulation.

This is an important differential, above all in these times that we live, when physical archives migrate to the digital record of virtual networks. Many of these works were not carried out for being exhibited in galleries and museums, but instead circulated hand-to-hand in networks alternative to the official system. Private space touches public space and the personal and political spheres mingle. It was not by chance that this type of tactile, collective manifestation escaped from the legitimizing circuits. In artists' publications, the precariousness of support, like a simple off-set page, xeroxed page or artisanal postcard suggests the dynamism of the proposition opposing the economic value of art. These publications strike the idea that it is not enough for the artist to intervene in an isolated product or in the page of a conventional magazine or newspaper, for instance. It is necessary to intervene in the medium itself.

The fact is that in the 1960s, and mostly through the following decade, the art market was formed in Brazil as a result of the "economic miracle" insuflated by the military dictatorship. Artwork was traded like corporate stock to feed a totally artificial effervescence. The art expectancy corresponded to the dominant official taste by the ruler classes. At the same time, the repressive discourse dealt with eliminating the divergences and depoliticizing

content but supported, diffused and stimulated a certain approach for cultural and artistic productions, such as the introjection of the premises of speech consistent with the authoritarianism in force.

If, in the 1970s, the tactile circulation of the postal service and precarious means are concrete alternatives to a limited, repressive context, the change in the meanings

of networks is evident, and the role performed by the Internet is fundamental within a new sensorial relation. In the worldwide computer network, some artists' projects have appeared that, in a certain way, ascend the futurist strategy, revived by mail art, of organizing collective actions. However, some differences are quite significant in the relationship between the networks established by mail art and Internet art. Mail art and artists'



Fig. 6 (left) and Fig. 7 (right): *Revista Ovum 10*, Clemente Padín, 1973. MAC-USP Collection.

publications mingled at that moment and, of course, there were many hybrid projects that join mail art with artist books. Upon assembling magazines, for instance, an artist-editor or a group of artists would organize the publication. The print run was determined by the number of participants who would send their works in the format and quantity previously arranged, in response to an invitational letter. Loose sheets in envelopes, plastic bags clipped or spirally bound together, confers the character of precariousness to these publications.

A number of collaborative magazines that Padín edited circulated in this open exchange system, which he summarized so aptly: *Los Huevos del Plata* (1965–69), *OVUM 10* (1969–72) and *OVUM* (1973–76); *Participación* (1984–86) and *Correo del Sur* (2000). In the critical panorama of the New Latin American Poetry—as the experimental poetry is conventionally known in the continent—Padín surpasses the ordinary visual poetry to the elaboration of the idea of art without objects, expressed only through action, what he named “Arte Inobjetal.” Its offshoot, the “Poesía Inobjetal,” binds itself to a set of



propositions consonant to other poets and artists from the 1960s which have wide participation as a fundamental premise, turning the role of the “public” into something as problematic as the definition of authorship. (Figs. 6 and 7)

The performance, “The Artist at the Service of the Community,” completed when Padín was under close surveillance by the Uruguayan dictatorship, was sent to another artist with instructions on how to explain works of art to visitors of the exhibition *Prospectiva 74*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art of University of São Paulo. (Fig. 8) These notions of the artist as mediator, as a simple channel of communication at the service of others, is at the core of the idea that art must be shared by all. It is an art without objects, a “poem” realized through action. Bonds of friendship and many sorts of exchanges connect Padín to the most creative Latin American poets of his generation, still little known in their different, yet convergent compositions. Among the Brazilians, the mathematical-spatial language of the *Poema-Processo* by Wladimir Dias-Pino, Álvaro and Neide de Sá and many others, besides the *Poesía para y/o Realizar* of the Argentinean Edgardo Antonio Vigo, are some examples.

The anti-establishment activity against the repressive environment in Uruguay caused Padín's imprisonment by the dictatorship in 1977. He was released thanks to pressure from the international mail art network, but remained on probation until the end of the military regime in 1984. Unfortunately, during this period, his archives generated through the network activity were destroyed. Upon the return of democracy, many artists

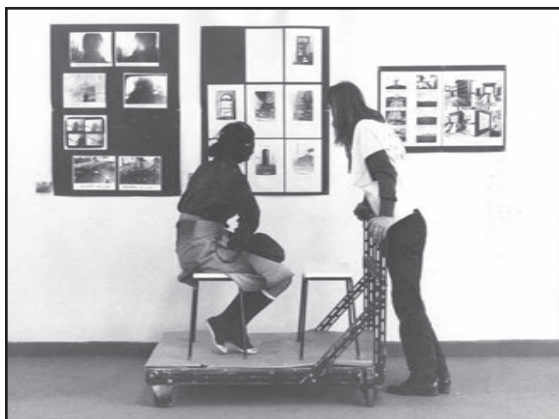


Fig. 8: *The Artist at the Service of the Community*, Clemente Padín, 1974. MAC-USP Collection.

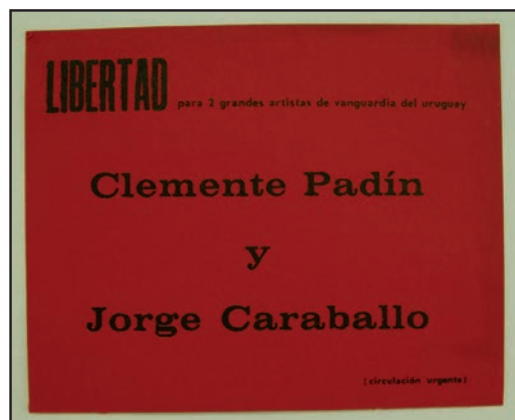


Fig. 9: *Anti-Fascist Poem*, Dámaso Ogaz, c. 1977. MAC-USP Collection.

and friends returned to Padín those mail artworks that could be redone or reproduced, allowing him to gradually reconstruct his archives. (Fig. 9) The auratic notion of the unique work of art, authentic and original, does not apply or make sense in this mail art universe of exchanges. The differentiation between the original and the copy has been obsolete, for a long time, despite the market's claims and a current *rescue* of this sort of conceptual production.

In Argentina, Edgardo Antonio Vigo published the magazines *Diagonal Cero* (1962–1968) and *Hexágono* (1971), which were important vehicles for the dissemination of the so-called “New Latin American Poetry.” Guillermo Deisler in Chile published *Ediciones Mimbres* (1963–1973), a periodical of graphic arts and visual poetry, and later on exile, presented the avant-garde of Latin American artists; he also published *UNI/vers* (1987–95).

The exile experience lived by many of these artists point to a possible explanation for the need to search for other possibilities of creation and circulation of artworks during those years. In this existential condition, the urgency of artistic creation, as well as the circulation of information capable of extending beyond boundaries, is understandable. Here, we are talking about the physical displacement combined with a proscription (a sort of artistic and economic exile) from hegemonic and official circuits of artistic production and circulation. It appears that, in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, the desire for communication in marginal ways beyond the art market and cultural industries was enhanced.

Against this background, some artists used art as a means of communication, carrying out projects as editors of artists' books, organized archives generated by this international network of exchanges and created alternative art galleries as distinct forms of heterotopias, which means another place in the art system. For Michel Foucault, heterotopias effectively exist as a site for the possible, different from the utopias that are essentially unreal spaces. Foucault explains:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias [...].

Indeed, some artists materialized heterotopias, either as alternative editions or galleries/spaces of marginal art. Ulises Carrión (1941–1989), a Mexican artist who lived for years in Amsterdam, is one among several. He was also a librarian, poet, editor and organizer of exhibitions and of his own catalogues. He published several books (novels, short stories, plays) before starting work on the use of language outside the literary context. He also founded the alternative space and venue that gave way to his artist-archive, *Other Books and So* (1975), in a site in the Netherlands which hosted an international network of exchange of ideas, a sort of headquarters of an international network of postal exchange. He commented on this mix of book shop/gallery/archive:

Why should an artist open a gallery? Why should he keep an archive? Because I believe art as a practice has been superseded by a more complex, more rigorous and richer practice: culture. We've reached

a privileged, historical moment when keeping an archive can be an artwork.

The documental character of mail art also produced personal archives of artists fed by the fluctuating network from which came a dialectic among museum, library, home and archive; public domains in private spaces where a significant parcel of contemporary artistic memory resides.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is important to note how the growing interest and the resulting rescue of many of these propositions have arisen since the 1990s. It emerges, from the point of view of contemporary art memories, as a sort of return of the repressed. The presence of such works at museums represents the passage from the autonomous object to processes. They are, therefore, uproars against the hegemonic narrative and the traditional museological practices of documentation, conservation and exhibition. Thus, it is not enough to preserve the objects in their physical state of precariousness, but to provide visibility to the processes underlying their circulation beyond predictable routes. The task of preserving these artworks, frequently made with ephemeral and short-lasting media and materials, involves the reconstruction of an intricate symbolic mesh that engenders them and in which they are inserted. And this includes considering the historical, political, cultural and social context in which they were produced. Thus, preserving is reconstructing these meanings, attributing significance and, finally, providing intelligibility.

The current attention to alternative strategies and tactics of art production and networks of distribution in the 1960s and 1970s, allow us to think about what generates and feeds this interest today, when the concept of "network" is globally spread every single day by technocratic cultural premises. Many tactics of artistic resistance are quickly assimilated as marketing operations and the potential critique of some artistic propositions is neutralized by the market and by cultural institutions converted into businesses guided by neoliberal policies. This sort of mobilizing art of those decades, critiques—strictly contrary to economic interests—that which was moved away from the hegemonic poles of exchange, and may bear witness nowadays to a utopia that throbs and might still throb, some place, somehow, below the surface.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Walter Benjamin, Thesis VII, "Theses on the Philosophy of History/On the Concept of History." See Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, eds. *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings*, Vol. 4, 1938–1940, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2003: 392.
- 2 See Cristina Freire and Klara Kemp-Welch, "Artists' Networks in Latin America and Eastern Europe," *ARTMargins* (Los Angeles) Vol. 1, No. 2-3 (June-Oct. 2012): 3-13. Available at: <[http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/ARTM\\_e\\_00015](http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/ARTM_e_00015)> [5 May 2016].
- 3 Walter Zanini (1925–2013) returned to Brazil in 1963 after a long period of studies in Europe and immediately assumed the directorship of the newly-established Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo (MAC-USP), where he remained until 1978. During his tenure, he curated some of the most important experimental exhibitions in the country, always stimulating local artists to explore new technologies. He curated two Biennials of São Paulo in 1981 and 1983, and was the head of the School of Communications and Arts of the University of São Paulo. For many of his writings from 1963 to 2003, see Cristina Freire (org.), *Walter Zanini: Escrituras críticas*, São Paulo: Annablume Editora, 2013.
- 4 For an extensive discussion of *Grammar*, see Cristina Freire, "Utopia as a Gesture," in Jarosław Kozłowski, Bożena Czubak and René Block, *Quotation Marks*. Jarosław Kozłowski, Warsaw: Profile Foundation, 2010: 41-45.
- 5 Jarosław Kozłowski, "Art Between the Red and the Olden Frames." In Liam Gillick and Maria Lindt, eds. *Curating with Light Luggage*. Frankfurt AM Main: Revolver Books, 2005: 44.
- 6 About Padín, see: "El arte correo en latinoamérica." <<http://www.merzmail.net/latino.htm>> [12 July 2015].
- 7 See, for example, the digital copy of Sebastian Brant, the woodcuts from *Das Narrenschiff*, edition Basel, available through the University of Houston's Digital Library. <<http://digital.lib.uh.edu/collection/p15195coll15>> [Sept 23, 2016].
- 8 In Portuguese, the word "coitada" stands for "poor thing" and is used here as an ironic linguistic blague.
- 9 Clemente Padín. "Da Arte Inobjetal: da Representação à Ação." In Cristina Freire and Ana Longoni, *Conceitualismos do Sul/Sur*. São Paulo: Annablume, MAC-USP, 2009: 37.

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