

SUBVERSIVE PRACTICES
ART UNDER CONDITIONS OF POLITICAL REPRESSION
60s–80s / SOUTH AMERICA / EUROPE
Iris Dressler

0. Network

Framing the backdrop for the exhibition *Subversive Practices* was the research project *Vivid Radical Memory* (2006–2007)¹, which had been initiated by Antoni Mercader, a media arts historian at the University of Barcelona and former member of the Grup de Treball,² and was carried out in cooperation with the Württembergischer Kunstverein and with the Center for Culture and Communication Foundation in Budapest. With an aim to establish an online database, the essential idea was to further the exchange and pooling of research (both recent and from the past decades) involving the survey, critical analysis, and redefinition of Conceptual Art practices, ranging from the nineteen-sixties to eighties, which were generated under conditions of military dictatorship and of communist and socialist regimes in Latin America and Europe. Thus in focus were artistic practices of the so-called peripheries that were being marginalized and disregarded within the Western canon—an approach still going on today with the exception of but a few positions—yet where strategies for dealing with all kinds of political measures of repression were simultaneously being cultivated.

Over the course of *Vivid Radical Memory* the idea arose to conceptualize, based upon the various different research approaches involved, an exhibition which—similar to the project *On Difference*³ (WKV, 2005 and 2006)—was to take form through different sections that would be developed by different curators, thus offering a multiperspectival view of the subject matter. Both the exhibition and the symposium⁴ held in Stuttgart were ultimately realized within the scope of a project partnership between the Württembergischer Kunstverein, the Center for Culture and Communication Foundation in Budapest, and the Arteleku contemporary arts center in San Sebastian. Moreover, Arteleku organized a series of

¹ See <http://www.vividradicalmemory.org> and “Vivid Radical Memory,” *Papers d’Art*, Nr. 93 (2007), ed. Fundació Espais d’Art Contemporani, Girona, Spain, pp. 23–229.

² The Grup de Treball (working group), in existence from 1972 to 1975, was an open affiliation of various artists, designers, architects, and educators from Barcelona and other towns in Spain. See *Grup de Treball*, exh. cat. Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (Barcelona, 1999). The catalogue is printed in Spanish, Catalan, and English.

³ See *On Difference #3: Politics of Space: On the Expropriation and Re-appropriation of Social, Political, and Cultural Spaces of Action*, ed. Iris Dressler and Hans D. Christ, exh. cat. Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart (Stuttgart, 2007).

⁴ Audio recordings of all contributions to the symposium (in English and Spanish) can be accessed at <http://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/programm/2009/ausstellungen/subversive/symposium>

workshops,⁵ and select works from the exhibition were subsequently shown at the Trafó Gallery in Budapest.⁶

1. Approaches to Redefining Conceptual Art

Attempts at defining and redefining Conceptual Art seem to be as old as the introduction of the concept itself through its “discursive fathers” Joseph Kosuth, Seth Siegelaub (both at the same time being experts at marketing it⁷), and Sol LeWitt.⁸ And, notwithstanding the fact that some of the “best advocates” of Conceptualism have long been “united in thinking... that the episode is essentially concluded,”⁹ the shifting and expansion of the concept of Conceptual Art is still today being discussed from the most varied perspectives, as is its relevance for contemporary art.

Speaking against an imminent end to this “episode” is the fact that representatives of quite different generations participated in both *Vivid Radical Memory* and *Subversive Practices*. Involved in both projects were curators and art researchers born from the nineteen-forties to the eighties as well as artists born between the nineteen-twenties and sixties. Here we are dealing with a time frame encompassing artistic, aesthetic, and curatorial practices and discourse that spans over sixty years and that was influenced by a multitude of events: European fascism, the Second World War, the Cold War, the 1956 uprising in Budapest, the Cuban Revolution, the Vietnam War, the military dictatorships in Latin America, the feminist, homosexual, and Black Power movements, the legendary year 1968 (Prague Spring, Paris May, student protests in Mexico, the passing of Marcel Duchamp), the death of Mao, the antinuclear and peace movements of the nineteen-eighties, the year 1989 (the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Tiananmen Square massacre in Peking, the U.S. invasion of Panama), the dissolution of the

⁵ *The Dictatorship of Democracies*, workshop with Isidoro Valcárcel Medina, Concha Jerez, and Pilar Parcerisas, July 6 to 17, 2009; *Conceptualismos otros (1960–80)*, Seminar with Eugenio Dittborn, Javier Aguirre, José Luis Isasa, Juan Carlos Eguillor, and Morquillas, March 22–25, 2010 (both Arteleku, San Sebastian).

⁶ *Subversive Excerpts*, January 29 to February 28, 2010, Trafó Gallery, Budapest, <http://www.trafo.hu/programs/1866>

⁷ See Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Boston, 2003), pp. 42ff.

⁸ Also noteworthy are Henry Flynt and Edward Kienholz who, in addition to Kosuth, take credit for having coined this term. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” in *October: The Second Decade, 1986–1996*, ed. Rosalind E. Krauss (Cambridge, MA, 1998), note 1. An earlier version of this essay (“From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique”) was published in 1989 in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *L'art conceptuel: Une perspective* at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

⁹ Thomas Crow, “Unwritten Histories of Conceptual Art,” in *Art After Conceptual Art*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann (Cambridge, MA, 2006), p. 56. Here Crow is primarily referencing Buchloh’s aforementioned text (see note 8), Charles Harrison’s text *Art Object and Artwork* (in the same catalogue as Buchloh’s contribution), and also Jeff Wall’s publication *Dan Graham’s Kammerspiel* (Toronto, 1991).

Soviet imperium and the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the “triumph” of capitalism and the Western democracies (and their failures), the growing importance of the new “megacities,” the breakneck development of new information and communication media, and many other events of local and global import. It is against this diversified background that art since the nineteen-sixties must be considered: especially those artistic practices which, still effective today, radically thwart the narrow-minded, self-referential models prevalent within the art world; practices which could be summarized under the term “Conceptual Art,” given that this term would be understood—as pertains to its methods, aesthetics, discourses, and spaces of agency—as both a heterogeneous and a decentralized term. Considering the major shifts in the previously familiar world order as especially started coming to the fore in 1989, a serious analysis of the past and present of art that rests upon an excluding US- and Eurocentric viewpoint has long lost any semblance of feasibility.

“Off-Center” Perspectives

Being challenged since the early nineteen-nineties at the latest has been the self-referential Anglo-American discourse of Conceptual Art—having been reduced to linguistics and just a few (usually male) protagonists from the USA and Western Europe—which ended up becoming stranded upon its own tautological pitfalls,¹⁰ especially from the perspective of artistic practices that were becoming established beyond the “art centers” of New York and London: challenged by—to name but a few—authors like Mari Carmen Ramírez,¹¹ Luis Camnitzer,¹² Ana Longoni,¹³ László Beke,¹⁴ or Edit

¹⁰ Buchloh 1990 (see note 8), pp. 89ff.

¹¹ See, for example, Mari Carmen Ramírez, “Blueprint Circuits: Conceptual Art and Politics in Latin America,” in *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Waldo Rasmussen et al., exh. cat. The Museum of Modern Art (New York, 1993), pp. 156–67; Mari Carmen Ramírez, “Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960–1980,” in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, ed. Luis Camnitzer et al., exh. cat. Queens Museum (New York, 1999), pp. 53–71. German translation of this text: Mari Carmen Ramírez, “Taktiken, um in Widrigkeiten zu Gedeihen: Konzeptkunst in Lateinamerika, 1960–1980,” in *Vivências / Lebenserfahrung / Life Experience*, ed. Sabine Breitwieser, exh. cat. Generali Foundation (Cologne, 2000), pp. 61–104.

¹² See, for example, Luis Camnitzer, “Wonderbread and Spanglish Art,” in Breitwieser 2000 (see note 11), pp. 105–19; Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin America: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin, 2007).

¹³ Ana Longoni, “Tucumán Arde heute: Zwischen Mythos und Museum,” in *Tucumán Arde: Eine Erfahrung: Aus dem Archiv von Graciela Carnevale*, ed. Tucumán Arde (Berlin: b_books, 2004); Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, *Del Di Tella a “Tucumán arde”* (Buenos Aires, 2000); Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, “After Pop, We Dematerialize: Oscar Masotta, Happenings, and Media Art at the Beginnings of Conceptualism,” in *Listen Here Now! Argentine Art of the 1960s. Writings of the Avant-Garde*, ed. Inés Katzenstein (New York, 2004).

¹⁴ See, for example, László Beke, “Conceptualist Tendencies in Eastern European Art,” in Luis Camnitzer 1999 (see note 11), pp. 41–51; László Beke, “Dulden, verbieten, unterstützen: Kunst zwischen 1970 und 1975,” in *Die zweite Öffentlichkeit: Kunst in Ungarn im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Hans Knoll (Dresden, 1999), pp. 212–33.

András¹⁵ in anthologies such as *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*,¹⁶ *Rewriting Conceptual Art*,¹⁷ or *Listen Here Now*;¹⁸ through archives like the Artpool Research Center in Budapest¹⁹ or the archive of Graciela Carnevale in Rosario (Argentina);²⁰ through research networks like the *Red de Investigadores sobre Conceptualismos del Sur* (Network for Researching the Conceptualisms of the South);²¹ and—not least—by the curators contributing to *Subversive Practices*.

One of the groundbreaking exhibitions in view of the reevaluation of Conceptual Art was without doubt *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, curated by Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, and Rachel Weiss along with eleven further curators.²² It was held in 1999 at the Queens Museum of Art in New York and sketched a multicentric cartograph of Conceptualism, displaying various geopolitical points of origin. In the preface to the exhibition catalogue, the project initiators made a point to differentiate between *conceptual art* as a “term used to denote an essentially formalist practice developed in the wake of minimalism”²³ and *conceptualism*. The latter not only “broke decisively from the historical dependence of art on physical form and its visual apperception” but also implied a wide array of artistic practices that “reimagined the possibilities of art vis-à-vis the social, political, and economic realities.” Moreover, the aspect of dematerialization was not necessarily linked to the disappearance of the object but was rather said to zero in on the redefinition “of the role of the object as a carrier of meaning.”²⁴ The eleven sections within the exhibition were grouped according to geopolitical parameters. They comprised six continents and were concentrated on the respective local situations and relevant specifics as decisive factors of a global, multicentric Conceptualism.

If one follows the contributions by the *Global Conceptualism* curators to the catalogue, and also the numerous additional research approaches on the redefinition of Conceptual Art from the perspective of its so-called peripheral

¹⁵ See, for example, Edit András, “Transgressing Boundaries (Even Those Marked Out by the Predecessors) in New Genre Conceptual Art,” in Alberro and Buchmann 2006 (see note 9), pp. 163–77.

¹⁶ Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson eds., *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge and London, 1999).

¹⁷ Michael Newman and Jon Bird, eds., *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (London, 1999).

¹⁸ Katzenstein 2004 (see note 13).

¹⁹ www.artpool.hu

²⁰ See Graciela Carnevale, “Zur Entstehung des Archivs,” in Tucumán Arde 2004 (see note 13), pp. 8–12; *Inventario 1965–1975: Archivo Graciela Carnevale*, exh. cat. Centro Cultural Parque de España (Rosario, 2008).

²¹ See www.conceptual.inexistente.net; Cristina Freire and Ana Longoni, eds., *Conceptualismos do Sul / Sur* (São Paulo, 2009).

²² Camnitzer 1999 (see note 11).

²³ *Ibid.*, p. VIII (preface).

²⁴ *Ibid.*

spaces of agency—or, to borrow a term from Ana Longoni, its “off-centers”²⁵—then indeed a complex, heterogeneous portrait emerges of artistic practices and methods, whose regional and time-specific contexts proved equally important as the effects of the global information society that had been being shaped at least since the nineteen-sixties.

From this vantage point, the works of Latin American artists, for example, may be viewed, as emphasized by Ramírez, “not as reflections, derivations, or even replicas of centre-based Conceptual Art but, instead, as local responses to the contradictions posed by the failures of post World War II modernization projects.”²⁶

Thus a reevaluation of art from the nineteen-sixties to eighties cannot simply consist of accommodating within the existing maps and registries of global art history some of those names that have been wrongfully left unconsidered. It must instead again and again involve a self-initiated reorganization of these maps and registries. This would, for instance, also mean that artists like Lygia Clark, Cildo Merieles, Ion Grigorescu, or Sanja Iveković, who have meanwhile attained recognition on an international scale, no longer be viewed as isolated phenomena but rather within their artistic, intellectual, and sociopolitical contexts, be they local or global, historical or current.

Terminological Differentiations

The question ultimately arises as to whether the term Conceptual Art, especially in the sense of a homogenous style or movement, even evinces relevance, considering that Benjamin Buchloh already—in his retrospective reflections from 1989, in which he solely references the “historical moment of Conceptual Art” in the USA and Western Europe—attests to it being “such a complex range of mutually opposed approaches” that he felt prone to warn against those “forceful voices... demanding respect for the purity and orthodoxy of the movement.”²⁷

In any case, most artists in Latin America and Eastern Europe of the nineteen-sixties and seventies didn’t lay claim to this label in reference to their works. And some, like Juan Pablo Renzi, a member of the strongly politically motivated Grupo de Vanguardia de Rosario (Group of Avant-Gardists in Rosario),²⁸ even vehemently rejected the term: as a fashionable term that was said to only serve to periodically reanimate the art market and to utterly conform to the bourgeois

²⁵ With this term, Longoni is referencing both that which lies outside of the center as well as centers that are not recognized as such. See Ana Longoni, “Other Beginnings of Conceptualism (Argentinean and Latin-American),” *Papers d’Art*, Nr. 93 (2007), ed. Fundació Espais d’Art Contemporani, Girona, Spain, p. 202. (Manuscript s. http://www.vividradicalmemory.org/htm/workshop/workshop_barcelona_Essays.html).

²⁶ Ramírez 1999 (see note 11), p. 54.

²⁷ Buchloh 1990 (see note 8), pp. 117 and 119.

²⁸ The group was involved in various projects, including the project *Tucumán Arde*. See Tucumán Arde 2004 (see note 13).

conception of culture.²⁹ In contrast, the Peruvian critic Juan Acha, as an example, has spoken of postmodern “no-objetualismos” (non-objectualisms) whose most important aspect was said to consist “in destroying in us the humanist Renaissance tradition.”³⁰ Here Acha is referencing artistic practices that have eluded the commodification of art, have made use of simple, transient materials, have integrated traditions of indigenous and popular cultures, and have first and foremost produced social spaces of agency.³¹

In making a distinction from the Happening, the Argentine intellectual Oscar Masotta introduced the term dematerialization in 1967 during his lecture *Después del Pop: nosotros desmaterializamos* (After Pop, We Dematerialize)³² at the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, at what was then the most significant locale for advanced art in Buenos Aires. Here he was alluding not to Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, who weren't to publish their text *The Dematerialization of Art* until the following year, but to El Lissitzky's essay *The Future of The Book*³³ published in 1926, in which the author asserted that, in an increasingly materialistic world, dematerialization (for instance through radio) was paradoxically evolving into a pervasive social phenomenon. Masotta, who had close ties to the media-interventionist Grupo de Arte de los Medios de Comunicación de Masas (Art with Mass Communications Media), highlighted an informational art whose immaterial, invisible “material” was made of “none other than the processes, the results, the facts, and / or the phenomena of information set off by the mass information media.”³⁴ Thus, for example, the Grupo de Arte de los Medios penned varying press releases about an executed Happening that in fact never took place, disseminated these through the media, and finally, in a second media briefing, denied the pretended event.³⁵

²⁹ Juan Pablo Renzi, *Panfleto no. 3: La Nueva Moda* (Pamphlet No. 3: The New Fashion), 1971, cited from Longoni 2004 (see note 13), p. 101. Here, Renzi was, for one, reacting to how Lucy R. Lippard and Jorge Glusberg chose to classify the Grupo de Vanguardia de Rosario as Conceptualism.

³⁰ Juan Acha, “Teoría y práctica no-objetualistas en América Latina,” in *Ensayos y ponencias Latinoamericanistas* (Caracas, 1984), p. 236, cited from Ramírez 1999 (see note 11), p. 61.

³¹ See Augusto del Valle Cárdenas and Jorge Villacorta Chávez, “Uncertainties in Recent Peruvian Art: Imageries of Lima in Transformation, 1980–2006,” in *Post-ilusiones. Nuevas visiones. Arte crítico (1989–2006) / Post-Illusions: New Visions: Critical Art in Lima (1980–2006)*, exh. cat. Fundación Augusto N. Wiese (Lima, 2006), p. 51; Miguel A. López, “How Do We Know What Latin American Conceptualism Looks Like?,” in *After All* 23 (Spring 2010), p. 12.

³² See Oscar Masotta, “After Pop, We Dematerialize (Excerpts),” in Katzenstein 2004 (see note 13), pp. 208–16 (abbreviated English version), first published in Oscar Masotta, “Después del Pop: nosotros desmaterializamos,” in Oscar Masotta, *Conciencia y estructura* (Buenos Aires, 1969).

³³ El Lissitzky, “The Future of the Book,” in *New Left Review* 1, no. 41 (January–February 1967), pp. 39–44, first published in 1926.

³⁴ Masotta 2004 (see note 32), p. 214.

³⁵ See Roberto Jacoby et al., “An Art of Communications Media (Manifesto),” in Katzenstein 2004 (see note 13), pp. 223ff. Masotta himself carried out similar attempts to manipulate the media; see Masotta 2004 (see note 32).

The Argentine artist Ricardo Carreira uses the term “*deshabitación*” (dishabituation) in the sense of a process of alienation that relates to the political transformation of the environment.³⁶ And Edgardo Antonio Vigo speaks of “aesthetic deviation” or “appointment” (*señalamiento*)³⁷ in terms of a tactic that shifts the perspective to those everyday things and signs which have been permeated with power politics, thus allowing their poetic, resistive dimensions to emerge. At the same time, he thereby disaffirms the role of the museum as the exclusive location of aesthetic experience as well as of art that is geared toward the production of “new” works.

In Hungary, Gyula Pauer in 1970 defined his sculptural practice as pseudo-sculpture. “The PSEUDO sculpture,” according to his *First Pseudo Manifesto*, “does not seem to be what its genuine form actually is.”³⁸ Pauer fathoms the presence and absence, materiality and immateriality, illusion and reality of sculpture with an aim to expose how the artistic object has been manipulated into a consumer good.

The PSEUDO sculpture is a sculpture representing itself as a manipulated sculpture, thus proving the existence of the state of manipulation. PSEUDO reveals itself as a false image, or at least as a complex object that also gives a false image.³⁹

The concept of “empty action,” as phrased by the Moscow group Collective Actions, on the other hand, sets out to instigate a shift in perception of the viewer. Through the introduction of “an extra-demonstrational element,” the viewers of an action are meant to become aware of how the action is not about that which is playing out before their eyes, but rather about that which is occurring within the viewers’ own consciousnesses—and can only be captured through their own memories.⁴⁰ Moreover, in the context of Moscow Conceptualism, which equally encompasses both literary and artistic practices, terminology like “subversive affirmation”—in the sense of an exaggerated imitation of totalitarian discourse—has been introduced.⁴¹

Going beyond the implementation of new “isms” that are meant to construe a movement or a style, the primary concern of the definitional approaches named above appears to be a differentiation of critical mindsets and stances with an aim to transcend the narrowly conceived frame of self-referential art

³⁶ Ricardo Carreira, *La deshabitación*, unpublished manuscript, cited from López 2010 (see note 31), p. 12.

³⁷ See Edgardo Antonio Vigo and Fernando Davis elsewhere in this publication.

³⁸ See Gyula Pauer elsewhere in this publication.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ See Andrei Monastyrski elsewhere in this publication; Andrei Monastyrski, “Vorwort zum ersten Band der ‘Reisen aus der Stadt’,” in *Präprintium: Moskauer Bücher aus dem Samizdat*, ed. Günter Hirt and Sascha Wonders (Bremen, 1998), pp. 92ff. (See also <http://conceptualism.letov.ru/Andrej-Monastyrskij-Vorwort-zum-ersten-Band-der-Reisen-aus-der-Stadt.htm>).

⁴¹ See Inke Arns and Sylvia Sasse, “Subversive Affirmation: On Mimesis as a Strategy of Resistance,” in *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, ed. IRWIN (MIT Press 2006), pp. 444–55.

discourse. And this in view of the power dispositifs of the mass media, of capitalism, of Eurocentrism, and colonialism; in view of the concrete political systems of power; and in view of theories of structuralism, semiotics, mass media, information, philosophy, or psychology. Frequently decisive here is the objective of using art to influence, alter, or manipulate (private, public, media-related) reality and the perception thereof.

Furthermore, local or content-related specifications of the term Concept Art have become established, such as “Moscow Conceptualism” or, more recently, “Conceptualisms of the South.” In the nineteen-seventies, the Spanish art historian Simón Marchán Fiz coined the term “ideological conceptualism,”⁴² with which he was striving to emphasize the sociopolitical character of conceptual practices in Argentina and Spain. This approach has meanwhile been received critically, especially its extrapolations by Ramírez and others in terms of an essentialization of Latin American Conceptualism. For it is inclined toward a reductive definition of “political art,” toward a dichotomy of content and form, as well as toward a hardly feasible codification of political Latin American art versus apolitical U.S. American art.⁴³

... under Conditions of Political Repression

A decisive aspect of the Conceptual Art practices from the nineteen-sixties to eighties, which became established in contexts of extreme and, at the same time, complex political, cultural, and economic forms of repression, manifested in a creation of free spaces for thought and agency. Here Mail Art played a crucial role, for it facilitated on a worldwide scale—independent of the exclusive distribution channels integrated within the West-dominated art sector as well as relatively safe from censorship measures—an exchange of ideas and artistic experiments that could be inexpensively and inconspicuously produced. Of central focus here were collective working processes involving a heterogeneous public as well as the subversive appropriation of a system for communication. The collaborative relationships between artists from Latin America and Eastern Europe—for instance between Robert Rehfeldt (DDR), Clemente Padín (Uruguay), and Guillermo Deisler (Chile, and later Bulgaria and the GDR)—can be principally traced back to Mail Art. It was possible to send entire exhibitions around the globe at insignificant cost, as was the case with the exhibition *Festival Hungría '74*, which arrived at the Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAYC, Center for Art and Communication) in Buenos Aires by mail as a collection of ideas and propos-

⁴² Simón Marchán Fiz, *Del arte objetual al arte de concepto (1960–1972)*, Madrid 1972.

⁴³ See, for example, López 2010 (see note 31), pp. 11ff.; Zanna Gilbert, “Ideological Conceptualism and Latin America: Politics, Neoprimitivism and Consumption,” in *rebus: a journal of art history & theory* (online magazine), issue 4 (Autumn / Winter 2009), <http://www.essex.ac.uk/arhistory/rebus/PDFS/Issue%204/Gilbert.pdf>

als put forward by Hungarian artists.⁴⁴ And even in a state as isolated as Romania was at the time, artists like Iosif Király succeeded in establishing international contacts through the Mail Art scene.

The methods of Conceptual Art, Mail Art, of Happenings or Actionism, which emerged under conditions of censorship and political violence, cannot be contemplated independently of these conditions. Considering this situation, the dematerialization of art also implied not leaving any calamitous traces behind. Here, “aesthetic of administration” (Buchloh) implies not a self-critical and atopic mimesis of a “totally administered world”⁴⁵ but, more frequently, a subversive appropriation and critique of the rigid bureaucratic structures of totalitarian regimes.

While conceptual practices in Western Europe and the USA connote a critique of modernity, this was certainly not the case in Hungary, as noted by Edith András, “since modernism was an active agent in the opposition to an ideology-driven official culture.”⁴⁶ Although Ileana Pintilie summarizes under the phrase “Romanian Actionism”⁴⁷ the most varied artistic working methods having emerged between the nineteen-sixties and eighties in Romania—despite, and beyond the reaches of, the official art doctrine—one can hardly compare this with phenomena like Wiener Aktionismus. She is referencing strongly heterogeneous performative practices pursued by individual artists or artist groups. Due to strict censorship measures, these practices were carried out in private spaces or in nature with only a very small, select audience watching, or even no audience at all, that is, just accompanied by photographic and film cameras. The body, as a first and last entity for maintaining resistive practices, played a central role here, as it did in other countries of Eastern Europe or Latin America: ranging from an auto-destructive stance (e.g. Letícia Parente, Petr Štembera, or Dan Perjovschi)—as a radicalized form of surrender—to transgender enactments (e.g. Carlos Leppe, Ion Grigorescu, or Sergio Zevallos)—as a form of radical noncompliance with totalitarian biopolitics.

A further crucial aspect of Conceptual Art forms to become established in Eastern Europe and Latin America deals with the exploration of educational theories and practices. For example, starting in the mid-seventies the Hungarian artist Miklós Erdély developed (in collaboration with, among others, Dóra Maurer)

⁴⁴ Whereby in this particular case it remains unclear as to whether the exhibition conceptualized for the CAYC was actually held at the museum or whether it merely consisted of the folder with suggestions for artistic realizations. See Mercédesz Kutasy, “Spuren der ungarischen Ausstellung(en) im CAYC (Zentrum für Kunst und Kommunikation), Buenos Aires, 1973–74,” audio recording of her lecture on May 30, 2009 at the Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, <http://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/programm/2009/ausstellungen/subversive/symposium> (in Spanish).

⁴⁵ Buchloh 1990 (see note 8), p. 140 and p. 155.

⁴⁶ András 2006 (see note 15), p. 166.

⁴⁷ Ileana Pintilie, *Actionism in Romania During the Communist Era* (Cluj, 2002).

alternative models for teaching art, with the intention of providing an antithesis to official art doctrine. Up to his death, Erdély continued to hold different workshops⁴⁸ in which interdisciplinary, collaborative, performative, and processual working forms were investigated. “The creative ideas,” wrote László Beke about Erdély’s workshops, “during this period were interconnected with a utopian mentality, with ideas from the underground, and thus also with theory and practice of political protest.”⁴⁹

For Luis Camnitzer, whose publication *Conceptualism in Latin America* was given the subtitle *Didactics of Liberation*,⁵⁰ education, politics, and poetry count among the most important anchor points within Latin American Conceptualism. He traces its origins, first of all, back to the activities of the Uruguayan guerilla troop Tupamaro from the nineteen-sixties and seventies and, secondly, to the intellectual approaches of the educator and author Simón Rodríguez (1769–1854). The latter tutored Simón Bolívar, among others, and later published his ideas on art, politics, and education in his didactic writings, the graphic configuration of which could be said to anticipate concrete poetry. Yet, according to Camnitzer, for “both, the Tupamaros and Rodríguez, the central concern was not aesthetics, but the erosion of information.”⁵¹

Valentín Roma, in his reevaluation of Spanish Conceptualism during the Franco dictatorship, especially as regards the Grup de Treball and its environment, highlights at various points⁵²—and this, incidentally, reflected the essence of the section constellated by Roma and Daniel García Andújar within the exhibition *Subversive Practices*—the pronounced interlacement between the realms of art, architecture, design, and education. In doing so, he explicitly turns against certain museographical and art-historical tendencies in Spain that pursue an “artification” of the Grup de Treball and attempt to classify them within a specific style or art movement. Moreover, Roma has indicated that the Grup de Treball is to be viewed as an interdisciplinary, critical working platform of art and knowledge production and can be understood solely within the context of their direct intellectual surroundings: as for instance in the case of the design schools Elisava and Eina founded in the nineteen-sixties in Barcelona, of the exhibition and event

⁴⁸ See Sándor Hornyik and Annamária Szöke, eds., *Kreativitási gyakorlatok, FAFEJ, INDIGO: Erdély Miklós művészetpedagógiai tevékenysége 1975–1986* (Creativity Exercises, Fantasy Developing Exercises [FAFEJ] and Inter-Disciplinary-Thinking [InDiGo]: Miklós Erdély’s Art Pedagogical Activity, 1975–1986) (Budapest, 2008), with a summary in English; Dorá Maurer, *Creativity Exercises*, 1976, black-and-white film, 25 min. (available with English subtitles).

⁴⁹ Beke 1999 (see note 14), p. 231.

⁵⁰ Camnitzer 2007 (see note 12).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵² See, for example, Valentín Roma, “Some ‘De-considerations’ Regarding the Grup de Treball and its Historical-aesthetic Context,” *Papers d’Art*, Nr. 93 (2007), ed. Fundació Espais d’Art Contemporani, Girona, Spain, pp. 214–215. (Manuscript s. http://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/fileadmin/WKV/2007/vivid/roma_en.pdf).

venues opened by the design store Sala Vinçon or by the Association of Architects of Catalonia (COAC), of Ricardo Bofill's Taller de Arquitectura (architecture workshop) with the participation of architects, sociologists, and engineers, or of the Madrid publishing house Ariel and its graphic designer Alberto Corazón.

2. Exhibition Approaches

The "artification" and stereotyping of artistic practices within Conceptual Art stemming from the so-called peripheries is a recurring motif,⁵³ one that inhibits a more complex understanding of recent art history. Yet, conversely asked: What consequences ensue when we assume that, as Alexander Alberro writes, "many histories and legacies of Conceptualism" exist?⁵⁴

The redefinition of canonized art forms can occur through the expansion and / or "false" appropriation of their codified terminological facets, or through the actual mechanisms and effects of this terminology being made the subject of analysis.⁵⁵ Or, it might occur when the variety of interconnected and simultaneously divergent artistic practices along with their intellectual, sociopolitical, both local and global contexts is repeatedly taken into consideration in ever different ways—under continually changing terminologies.⁵⁶ Whereby these three possibilities are to be understood not as options for "either / or" but rather inclusively as "as well as."

⁵³ Such as, for example, at the exhibition *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, which was put on by The Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1992 in the scope of the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the "discovery" of America but was first shown in Spanish Sevilla. See López 2010 (see note 31), pp. 10ff. On an interesting note, during the same year and in parallel to the Olympic Games in Barcelona, the exhibition *Idees I actituds: En torn del'art conceptual a Catalunya 1964–1980* curated by Pilar Parcerisas took place, which stylized "Catalan Conceptualism" (incidentally in line with Antoni Tàpies, who in 1973 had written an article for *La Vanguardia Española* expressing harsh criticism of the Spanish Conceptualists, hence inciting a dispute) as a fundament of democratic, modern Catalonia. See Jesús Carrillo, "Conceptual Art Historiography," *Papers d'Art*, Nr. 93 (2007), ed. Fundació Espais d'Art Contemporani, Girona, Spain, p. 192. (Manuscript s. http://www.vividradicalmemory.org/html/workshop/bud_essays/carrillo.pdf). Tendencies of "artification" are in turn detected by Ana Longoni in the art-historical discourse on the project *Tucumán Arde*. See Longoni 2004 (see note 13), p. 100.

⁵⁴ Alexander Alberro, "Introduction: The Way Out is the Way In," in Alberro and Buchmann 2006 (see note 9), p. 14.

⁵⁵ As suggested by Miguel A. López, for one. See López 2010 (see note 31), p. 9.

⁵⁶ Such as, for example, in view of gender theories. Related approaches in the context of East European (conceptual) art have for instance been pursued (more or less convincing) by exhibitions like *Gender Check* (2010 in Vienna and Warsaw) or *und jetzt: Künstlerinnen aus der DDR*, or can also be found in the case of authors like Piotr Piotrowski. See *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*, ed. Bojana Pejić, exh. cat. Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien; Zacheta National Gallery of Art (Cologne, 2009); *und jetzt: Künstlerinnen aus der DDR*, ed. Angelika Richter and Beatrice E. Stammer, exh. cat. Künstlerhaus Bethanien Berlin (Nuremberg, 2009); Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989* (London, 2009).

In any case, in the scope of *Subversive Practices* we decided early on to abstain from simply concentrating on an art term and instead chose to thematize the heterogeneity and divergence of resistive artistic practices and mindsets that had come into play at certain times, in certain places, and in certain ways. Of focus here were not only those practices and mindsets that had called into question the humanistic conception of the world from the Renaissance, the fetishizing of the art object, the art institution, the art market, as well as the margins between art and public (society, life, etc.), but also those that simultaneously opposed the existing political systems of power—from individual struggles for survival to collective insurrection. What is more, the exhibition shied away from exploring origins, including disagreements about who first established and discursively implemented what and where, and rather treated the significantly different varieties of artistic subversion that had taken form under very specific conditions.

Artificial Cartography

In addition, *Subversive Practices* from the outset purposefully lacked any claim to the presentation of a global or encyclopedic overview. The exhibition had its roots in a process that started with *Vivid Radical Memory* on the basis of various personal networks and brought together a group of stellar experts from a range of different generations, areas of interest, contexts, and methodological approaches. The research conducted by each of them does not, in its entirety, form a “grand narrative” but rather exposes in particular the exigency of specific and even incompatible viewpoints. As such, *Subversive Practices* pursued the conception of an artificial cartography whose junctures, fractures, and (especially) vacuities were to be an integral part of an experimental arrangement for disrupting the linear narrative of an art history striving for completion.

In alignment with the research fields of the participating curators, the nine sections of this artificial cartography introduced various aspects of conceptual, experimental, and subversive art from the GDR, Moscow, Hungary, Rumania, Catalonia, a Brazilian museum, Argentina, Peru, and Chile and fostered a temporary connection between them.

South America / Europe

Representing the point of origin for the exhibition, in lieu of a superordinate thesis, was a series of explorative questions and problems that were readily apparent due to the geopolitical constellation of the project. These problems are already reflected in the exhibition’s purposefully fragmentary subtitle: *Art under Conditions of Political Repression / 60s–80s / South America / Europe*. Thus, it was for instance not really possible to speak either of Latin America, which would have implied countries like Mexico or Cuba, nor of Eastern Europe, which would have left out Spain; and even grouping together the GDR and Soviet Union under the header Eastern Europe is not at all unproblematic, unless one relates “Eastern Europe” in

general to the former “Eastern Bloc.” This logic had already been led ad absurdum by László Beke and Gábor Pataki in 1980 with their *East Europe Questionnaire*, in which they included all communist- or socialist-run states, or all those that had been politically allied with the Soviet Union: “In the end, we reached the quasi dadaist or pataphysical conclusion that Eastern Europe extended across the entire globe.”⁵⁷

60s–80s

A further problem involved the temporal limitation of the exhibition, especially in respect to the curtailing of the time frame to the end of the nineteen-eighties, which might falsely lend the impression of a “zero hour” following the end of the military dictatorships or communist regimes: precisely as if, following this turning point, there was no longer any need for subversive practices. Also of interest would have been an exploration of the extent to which critically and politically motivated artistic practices of the nineteen-sixties till the nineteen-eighties were being instrumentalized and canonized in the course of democratization processes as flagships of a new, cosmopolitan image—an issue that is, for example, discussed in the Catalan context.⁵⁸

The question fundamentally arose as to whether it might not be important for the exhibition to refer to contemporary artistic practices so as to avoid a historicizing perspective.⁵⁹ But ultimately, the exhibition was concerned not with a presentation of continuities—which is without any doubt an important project, yet it was not the focus of this particular undertaking—but rather with a juxtaposition of different local and time-specific contexts of art and knowledge production and the analysis thereof from the perspective of various explorative questions of current relevance. Going beyond this scope would have overwhelmed such a densely constellated exhibition—or, in the worst case scenario, degenerated it. Moreover, the temporal limitation to the nineteen-sixties to eighties was to be taken as more of a broad framework than as an insurmountable line of demarcation.

Subversion

Even the term “subversion” fostered discussion. In the context of an exhibition focused on *Art under Conditions of Political Repression*, it is possible for the impression to arise that subversion presupposes a state of political violence. And, in turn, are political and societal repression only found in dictatorships? Both assumptions

⁵⁷ László Beke, “The Present Time of Conceptual Art. The Political Implications of Eastern European Art,” *Papers d’Art*, Nr. 93 (2007), ed. Fundació Espais d’Art Contemporani, Girona, Spain, p. 186. (Manuscript s. http://www.vividradicalmemory.org/htm/workshop/workshop_barcelona_Essays.html).

⁵⁸ Carrillo 2007 (see note 53).

⁵⁹ For instance, Edit András noted that in Hungary the avant-garde of the nineteen-sixties and seventies “has by now lost much of its credibility in the local art scenes,” after having attracted a great deal of Western attention, “by becoming one of the obstacles of the new, ambitious art of younger generations carrying on the legacy of Conceptualism.” András 2006 (see note 15), p. 163.

would be much too quickly stated. Yet the distinctiveness of the works shown in the exhibition was much more evident through the fact that their subversive ways of dealing with language, the media, communications systems, institutions, the body, or public space were pursuing a double strategy. This was accomplished by concurrently subverting both the inherent systems of these areas (language, media, etc.) and the concrete totalitarian power systems that possessed control thereof.

The open text arrangements of Gyula Pauer's *Protest Sign Forest*—which, on the one hand, operate with a semantic overcoding and, on the other, run contrary to any kind of linear narrative style—play a deconstructive game with language. At the same time, they imply a potential deception of the censors, for their multiple interpretative possibilities hardly allow for evidence of an explicit critique of the power holders: a tactic that was found in many of the exhibition's works (whereby, in this concrete case, the authorities nevertheless destroyed the work). Ion Grigorescu, who in his film *Maskulin-Feminin* enacts his own naked body in both a narcissistic and hysteric way, reveals relationships between the camera and its regime of gaze, the disciplining of the body, and its connotation of gender—while simultaneously eroding them. Furthermore, Grigorescu with this film is not only counterposing the rigid art doctrine of Romania; he is also taking a stand, through the subtle revocation of a distinct assignment of gender as well as his autoerotic self-dramatization, against the biopolitics of a totalitarian state power. This work and others of his were not shown publicly during Ceaușescu's regime, but only in small circles. This meant that the moment of resistance in this case lay not in public protest but, quite substantially, in the creation of a parallel world that made it possible to evade the psychological and physical encroachment of the regime's power.

Counting among the essential tactics of the works shown in the exhibition were experimentation with language, interventions in public space—be it urban space, nature areas, the mass media, or communications systems—and the implementation of one's own body. Their subversive potency and political relevance were expressed in very different ways, yet they indeed coincided in one common point: in the creation of free spaces of thinking and agency, in smaller or larger collectives respectively, which initially made possible a resistive production of art and knowledge within and, at the same time, beyond the existing political, societal, and economic instances of repression. Not all works had political resistance and protest directly inscribed within them. Their political meaning rather manifested, following Jacques Rancière's theories on the relation between aesthetics and politics, in the "reframing of material and symbolic space," meaning in

reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible which defines the common of a community, to introduce into it new subjects and objects, to render visible what had not been, and to make heard as speakers those who had been perceived as mere noisy animals.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (Malden, MA, 2009), pp. 24–25.

This applies to “Trips out of Town” by the group Collective Actions, trips that generally led to an empty, snowy field outside of Moscow in order to “have a non-symbolic experience,”⁶¹ as well as to Carlos Ginzburg’s action *Tierra*, where the margins between museum and street were shifted; to Paul Neagu’s cosmologies developed within his graphics, paintings, and performances; to the participative public protest action of the Chilean group C.A.D.A.; to Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt’s typewritings distributed via Mail Art networks, whose typographic style was treated in such a way that it could not be traced back to the author in the GDR, where each and every typewriter was officially registered; to Miró’s action painting on the glass façade of Barcelona’s Association of Architects (COAC), which took a stand against the artist’s instrumentalization by the Franco regime; to Artur Barrio’s actions called *Situations* in Rio de Janeiro, where he worked with perishable materials in public space; to the filmic study of the relationship between art and insanity by Taller de Arquitectura; to the aesthetic analyses of weapons of mass destruction by the Indigo Group; or to Sergio Zevallo’s series *Rosa cordis* (Rose of My Heart), which intertwines cross-gender identities, sexuality, violence, and religion in an antagonistic manner.

Presentation

The spatial structure of the “artificial cartography,” which was created for *Subversive Practices*, was based upon an approximate grid that defined the spaces of the nine different exhibition sections. By simply turning the center of that grid, a variety of possible passages between the sections, which were more or less closely aligned to geopolitical contexts, could be offered. Here not only a segmentation between South America and Europe was avoided, but multiple geopolitical interconnections arose.

Besides being shaped by the different curatorial approaches, the nine sections also negotiated historical, political, societal, and cultural contexts, which in many respects are hard to compare: not only between but also within Europe and South America. These contexts were predominately imparted through the curatorial statements, which had been integrated into the exhibition, as well as through the explanatory information on the individual works: that is, purposefully not in the form of a comprehensive historical narration.

Presenting a further critical problem for *Subversive Practices* was the issue of the presentation of ephemeral and performative art practices, which often-times had been decidedly produced for spaces of agency and reception outside of the museum context. In many cases we had to rely upon secondary material. Yet instead of “artifying” and fetishizing these, the challenge is to develop a transparent and offensive treatment of practices of documentation and restaging

⁶¹ Monastyrski 1998 (see note 40), p. 94.

as well as of the gaps inevitably produced by exhibiting institutions presenting such works.⁶²

In the framework of *Subversive Practices*, the different curators not only were given free reign in conceptualizing the focus of content within their respective sections and in selecting the artists, but they were also invited to develop their own respective presentation concepts. Similar to *On Difference*, it was important that the heterogeneous curatorial discourses be reflected within the exhibition displays and architectures. Thus the point, too, was not to formulate an ideal or standard in terms of the presentation of ephemeral and performative art practices, but rather to bring into play various possibilities for the presentation thereof.

Sections

An initial cursory overview of the nine exhibition sections already reveals the heterogeneities within this artificial cartography. Seven of the nine sections delineated a geopolitical framework that in six cases referenced a nation (the GDR, Argentina, Hungary, Chile, Romania, and Peru) and in one case a region (Catalonia). One section was dedicated solely to one single artist group (the Collective Actions) and a further section honed in on a collection (the Mail Art Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art at the University of São Paulo [MAC-USP]). The latter accordingly showed works by artists of manifold backgrounds.

Moreover, the “Hungarian” section also was concerned with an art-historical or conservatorial challenge. This section, curated by Annamária Szóke and Miklós Peternák, was focused on the problem of reconstructing and reenacting works that had gone lost, been destroyed, and / or prompt questions—due to their ephemeral, performative, temporal- and site-specific character—about the limits and possibilities of their presentation. Here, Szóke and Peternák introduced highly divergent approaches, such as the scientific reconstruction, analysis, and interpretation of a missing work by Miklós Erdély, in which case they were not fixated on a formal rebuilding of the “original” but instead highlighted the process itself and also the gaps inherent in the reconstruction. On the other hand, they invited a series of artists to produce their own reinterpretations of their earlier works. As an example, Gyula Pauer developed from his *Protest Sign Forest*, an installation he had realized in 1974 at the edge of a wood (and that was nearly completely destroyed through censorship measures), a site-specific intervention for the exhibition foyer.

For her section, which concentrated on different subversive spaces of agency for artistic production within the GDR (Mail Art, original-graphic magazines, Stamp Art, performances, film, etc.), Anne Thurmann-Jajes commissioned

⁶² See, for example, Andrei Monastyrski elsewhere in this publication.

one of the involved artists to develop the section's display. Micha Brendel's labyrinthine concept referenced the state of constraint and insularity prevalent within the GDR and, at the same time, the niches occupied by artists living there. Thurmman-Jajes also included in this section works from the so-called transition period of the early nineteen-nineties, such as Cornelia Schleime's reenactments of her own Stasi files.

The content-related and spatial concept of the section curated by Miguel A. López and Emilio Tarazona followed the various political and ideological upheavals in Peru: from the military dictatorships of the nineteen-sixties and seventies to the violent radicalization of the left through the guerilla group Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) in the nineteen-eighties to Alberto Fujimori's self-coup in 1992. In doing so, this section, among other things, brought artistic projects and activities to light which integrated forms of indigeneous and popular culture.

The spatial center, or the "empty middle," of the exhibition was formed by Sabine Hänsgen's section, which was conceptualized as a diagrammatic interpretation of the Collective Actions' "Trips out of Town." It was comprised of four structurally identical wall constellations that each hosted a banner as well as a series of documentary photographs and a series of recent satellite shots. Printed on the four banners were numbered lists upon which the titles of all 118 actions carried out by the group were indexed (in German and Russian). The photographs documenting a selection of the actions and the satellite shots showing the respective action locations were numbered analogously to the lists of titles. Situated upon a working table was, among other items, an index box containing cards (that were likewise numbered) with printed texts related to the actions documented in the exhibition. The (nearly) empty field generated by this presentation alluded both to the spaces of agency created by the Collective Actions and to the processional squares of totalitarian systems, while the structure formed of numbers, lists, and "files" paid reference to the bureaucratic apparatus of dictatorships.

At the heart of the section curated by Paulina Varas and Ramón Castillo was an explorative analysis of archives or cultures of memory. They, for example, juxtaposed the archives of Lotty Rosenfeld and Cecilia Vicuña in the form of image or text montages. The Lotty Rosenfeld Archive encompasses a wide range of documents on the public and media interventions staged by the group C.A.D.A., which had massively opposed the political regime during Pinochet's dictatorship. The Cecilia Vicuña Archive, in turn, contains materials from the group Artists for Democracy, which employed their actions in London to bring attention to the fatal state of affairs in Chile. In addition, Castillo and Varas showed assorted artistic works that probe the archival practices in view of the relationship between individual and collective memory.

Interdisciplinary facets of the production of art and knowledge were given particular emphasis in the sections conceived by Valentín Roma and Daniel García Andújar, where the working contexts among artists, architects, designers,

and educators in Barcelona during the Franco dictatorship were traced. Alongside works by the Grup de Treball, Antoni Muntadas, or the filmmaker Pere Portabella, this section also included documents on the events of the Association of Architects of Catalonia (COAC) and the design store Sala Vinçon, as well as the covers of a series of theoretical publications by the Ariel publishing company. Architect Ricardo Bofill, or Taller de Arquitectura, was in turn introduced through an early experimental film.

Performative practices in Romania took center stage in the section by Ileana Pintilie. These practices manifested, aside from performances, in mediums such as drawing, painting, collage, photography, and film—as, for example, in the film performances by the Sigma Group, which comprised up to ten projections. Pintilie, like Thurmann-Jajes, integrated works from the early nineteen-nineties, including Dan Perjovschi's installation *Confessions*, which subjected the viewers to situation that is as intimate as it is oppressive.

Playing a pivotal role in the section curated by Fernando Davis was an exploration of the interlacements between totalitarian and administrative structures in Argentina, including their effects on the body and on public space: from Edgardo Antonio Vigo's, Carlos Ginzburg's, and Juan Carlos Romero's interventions in the urban and institutional order, to the stamp works and drafts of artist's jails by Horacio Zabala, to Vigo's action where a piece of wood was buried and exhumed while being accompanied by over-affirmative bureaucratic protocols.

Cristina Freire brought into play the ambivalent relationship between the practices of the museum and of Mail Art, which already found expression through the map introducing her section. Here the currents of global Mail Art all flowed into one hub, namely, the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo. This image, on the one hand, of course contradicts the fundamental parameters of the decentrally organized Mail Art movement while, on the other hand, it introduces—as a potential perspective—an institutional center that in the nineteen-sixties and seventies represented, far beyond the Anglo-American cartographies of Conceptual Art and Mail Art, an important zone of freedom for carrying out advanced and critical art practices.

The Mail Art works in this section, which had once been sent to the museum by mail, today only depart the museum in climate-controlled boxes and under the protection of a courier. Since they are now considered to be national heritage, such shipments are preceded by a tedious process of bureaucratic negotiations. One might say that this, too, contradicts the central concept of Mail Art. Yet if these works are officially recognized as national heritage, which is imperative for a more complex future within the art research field, then there's no reason why they shouldn't be treated with as much care as a Picasso painting.⁶³

⁶³ It plays no role here whether we view these works as artworks or as substitutes for an artistic action or an artistic network.

3. Perspectives

Here we are reaching an essential difficulty that extends beyond the capacities of exhibitions and projects like *Subversive Practices*: the preservation of works and documents concerning subversive and conceptual practices from Latin America and Eastern Europe. This problem is extremely complex. In the countries where these works originated, which actually should be responsible for them, a sustainable investment in their preservation and restoration often is missing. This task usually lies in the hands of motivated individuals. On the other hand, there seems to be an increasing number of institutions from the “old West” showing interest in promoting the conservation of these works and archives, an effort that is frequently coupled with the desire to procure and purchase the works. Such a practice would, however, run the danger of generating a neocolonialist dependency and of exploiting the archival and research efforts conducted in Latin America and Eastern Europe (mostly under precarious conditions)—or, in the worst case scenario, of repressing the critical approaches formulated within this research. Important, therefore, is the development of new and different models for cooperative transnational relationships.

Subversive Practices was conceived to embody a snapshot of various different research approaches to art from the nineteen-sixties to eighties in South America and Europe that was created under conditions of extreme political repression. The exhibition highlighted research approaches that, far from being concluded, are still being actively pursued by the involved curators and many others under constantly varying aspects. And it is precisely this that makes it possible, first and foremost, to overcome the canonizing codification of artistic practices—and to instead not only again and again develop different and accordingly diverging perspectives upon these practices, but also to engender connections to the present.