Framing Latin American Art: Artists, Critics, Institutions and the Configuration of a Regional Identity

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Art, Art History and Visual Studies in the Graduate School of Duke University
2015
ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates how non-academic agents (i.e. artists, curators, and institutions) helped construct the current canon of Latin American art. It takes as case studies key exhibitions held in Brazil in order to examine how the central concepts of anthropophagy, geometric abstraction, and the political came to characterize the art of the region. Drawing on extensive archival research and interviews, this work traces a local genealogy, thus offering a different starting point for understanding the Latin American art canon that has been recently institutionalized in such places as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York as part of the global turn in art history.

Citing their different language and colonial history, Brazilian artists and critics have tended to view their art production as distinct from that of the rest of the continent. This dissertation, by contrast, recognizes Brazil as a fundamental player in the shaping of both a Latin American cultural identity and an expanded notion of the Americas. This expansion of Latin American art influences how artists represent themselves and how such production is actively being inserted into collections around the world.
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This is a dissertation that was born out of an impossibility. In 2006, when first thinking about pursuing my doctoral studies in Brazil, I was strongly advised to choose a research subject that would investigate “international” contemporary art, namely U.S. or European art. Being put in the paradoxical position of having to leave the country in order to study it, I was fortunate to be accepted at the department of Art, Art History & Visual Studies at Duke University. My gratitude goes first and foremost to my advisers, Kristine Stiles and Esther Gabara, for their expertise, valuable guidance, and encouragement to pursue this direction. I would also like to thank my committee members. Patricia Leighten for making me think about the difference between primitivism and indigeneity as well as how the relationship between the avant-garde and the primitive is altered in a region like Latin America. John French for cordially welcoming me at the Global Brazil Lab and for our conversations about Brazilian culture over the past year. Gustavo Furtado for generously joining us in this conversation. Additionally, I would like to extend my most sincere gratitude to Walter Mignolo, whose guidance over the past six years has helped to shape this dissertation. Finally, I wish to thank the staff of the art history department, especially Robin Crow and Marion Mason for their assistance during these years.

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Last my profound gratitude to my parents, as ever.
## List of Abbreviations

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>IBLA</td>
<td>I Latin American Biennial</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAC</td>
<td>Council of Art and Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAyC</td>
<td>Art and Communication Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIAR</td>
<td>Center for Inter-American Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-Map</td>
<td>Contemporary and Modern Art Perspectives in a Global Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBAVM / NDP</td>
<td>Archive of the Mercosul Visual Arts Biennial Foundation / Documentation and Research Nucleus (Porto Alegre)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FBSP</td>
<td>São Paulo Biennial Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICAA-MFAH</td>
<td>International Center for the Arts of the Americas at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAC/USP</td>
<td>Museum of Contemporary Art of the São Paulo University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAM/RJ</td>
<td>Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAM/SP</td>
<td>Museum of Modern Art, São Paulo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MASP</td>
<td>São Paulo Art Museum Assis Chateaubriand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFAH</td>
<td>Museum of Fine Arts, Houston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoMA</td>
<td>Museum of Modern Art, New York</td>
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<td>no.</td>
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Introduction

In the mid-1970s, the Brazilian government, operating under the dictatorship of General Ernesto Geisel, sanctioned postcards that were distributed and sold in newspaper stands all over the country. They portrayed scenes of the Bororo Indigenous group in an ethnographic fashion. The postcards had a clear didactic function and showed men and women in daily activities. Titled “Native Brazil,” they revealed an ideal image of the country—a more pristine and essential Brazil, still untouched by modernization. In this period this national construction paradoxically pleased both the most radical left and the extreme right, although the Military Junta, in power since 1964, represented only the latter.¹

In 1977 Brazilian artist Anna Bella Geiger created an artwork in which she juxtaposed personal pictures of herself, family, and friends with the nine postcards issued under the Brazilian dictatorship (Figure 0.1). In Geiger’s work, the postcards were carefully arranged vertically. In a second column, the artist placed corresponding photographs depicting the same gestures re-enacted this time in the urban context of the city of Rio de Janeiro. Juxtaposed to a group of Bororo women, a photograph of Geiger

¹ In 1975 the Brazilian military government issued the document “Política Nacional de Cultura” (National Politics of Culture). The text emphasized the necessity to protect the national culture from colonialism disseminated by the cultural industry that threatened to make “Brazilian men” less genuine. This cultural campaigning screened the official modernization politics, which had a devastating effect on the indigenous people of Brazil. Ironically, the search for a national/regional culture also pleased the Left, which aimed to create a “national-popular” culture in order to create a common idiom uniting the intelligentsia and the people, along the lines of Gramsci’s model of the organic intellectual. Therefore, in the mid-1970s, the search for a cultural identity was understood in Brazil (and in Latin America, for that matter) as a way to promote national integration and defend the territory against U.S. imperialism. See: Marcos Napolitano, 1964. História do Regime Militar Brasileiro (São Paulo: Editora Contexto, 2014). See especially chapter 7.
in a similar group shows her posing with her daughters and friends in a garden in Rio (Figure 0.2). Next to the image of a young woman, who is crumbling manioc to make flour, Geiger tightly holds a supermarket plastic bag (Figure 0.3). Next to a young teenage girl, who appears to express joy in her own reflection in a mirror, Geiger performs the melancholia of Narcissus contemplating his image in a tropical pond (Figure 0.4). Next to the exemplary anthropological image of a young man stretching a bow and arrow, Geiger, wearing a blue dress with tropical flowers, performs another farcical imitation (Figure 0.5). Presenting two columns neatly arranged side-by-side on a large white passe-partout with pre-fabricated postcards and photographic register of performance, the artwork can be described as a work of conceptual art, which is titled, “Brasil Nativo/Brasil Alienígena” (Native Brazil/Alien Brazil, 1977).

The images in the second column are not exactly an appropriation of the first. Appropriation, a key term for postmodern photography, would imply that the artist was quoting preexisting image, with little or no transformation. Instead, I would like to suggest that Geiger proposes a misplaced mimicry. By replicating the gestures of the Bororo in an urban environment, Geiger’s mimicry presented an “inappropriate difference,” to borrow postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha’s famous term, in order to describe her exposure of a threatening gap.² Here the imitator is a female artist born in Brazil, the daughter of Polish immigrants living in an urban city in South America during a dictatorial regime. The “inappropriate difference” surfacing between the two

² Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London; New York: Routledge, 1994). See especially chapter 4.
images did not result from the colonized aping the colonizer, as in Bhabha’s classical example, but from her hybrid identity. As a result of this difference, I draw on the literary critic Roberto Schwartz’s famous adjective, “misplaced.” In 1973 Schwartz coined the term “misplaced idea,” a quote from the nineteenth century novelist Machado de Assis, to tackle the problem of cultural dependency in the periphery.³ Schwartz’s expression did not merely refer to a known fact—the inadequacy of some imported ideas to certain social contexts—but rather illuminated a process: the desire of the colonized to end their subordinate status by creating a more autonomous order. Such order is generally conflated with Western constructions of the nation state and believed to be more firmly inscribed into the “universality of civilization.” Geiger’s positioning of these images side-by-side revealed the unfeasibility of a national construction according to the Western mold during the repressive regime of dictatorship. If anything, the inappropriateness of Geiger’s comparison arises from the impossibility of a linear continuum, according to discourses of Western modernity, between two traditions that composed Brazil as well as Latin America: indigenous and urban.

What Geiger revealed is how for Brazil there were no straightforward solutions to the problem of a fabrication of a myth of origin—a coherent and continuous cultural identity within which intellectuals could reconcile Brazilian art. This situation was also valid for Latin America, revealing the tenuous slippage from national to regional—

which is at the crux of this study. Nevertheless, especially since the 1970s, several factors created the impetus for the formulation of a coherent artistic identity for Brazil and Latin America, including the emergence of an international circuit of exhibitions, artists’ diaspora, an art market avidly pursuing new names and territories, and the enlargement of the narrative of art history beyond the hegemonic canon. This doctoral dissertation examines the intellectual efforts of artists, critics, curators, and institutions to create something that could be identified as “Latin American art.” The dissertation surveys regional articulations from the 1970s onwards in order to trace the methods that Latin American art professionals employed to create a canon that could then be deployed both internally and externally. The ultimate goal of this study is to assign a local origin to the construction of the Latin American canon currently being enshrined in major collections around the globe as part of a new mapping of the art historical narrative.

The first chapter of this dissertation concentrates on the 1970s in order to examine early attempts to foster and institutionalize a unified regional identity for Latin American art. This debate revolved around the problem of how to assert Latin America’s cultural identity as politically charged and thus able to counterbalance cultural imperialism and the totalitarian regimes in the region. I situate the symbolic start of the decade in the 1969 international boycott of the 10th São Paulo Biennial, which mutated into a regional protest, spurring responses including the artists’ publication _Contrabienal_ in 1971 and the first and last Latin American Biennial promoted by the São Paulo Biennial Foundation (FBSP) in 1978. The exhibition’s curatorial framework was
organized around the theme “Myths and Magic” and attempted to infuse into the region a coherent origin myth anchored in racial characteristics. Artists and critics rejected this vision and accused the exhibition of dismissing urban vanguard art and of having an anthropological and folkloristic bias that reinforced colonial stereotypes. The strong criticism of the show resulted in its failure to recur. Therefore, the regional articulations and networks of the decade reached their symbolic end at the 1980 Consultative Meeting of Art Critics of Latin America in which art critics from all over Latin America voted against the transformation of the São Paulo Biennial into a regional show.

The second chapter takes as a case study the *I Bienal de Artes Visuais do Mercosul* (Porto Alegre, 1997), known as the Mercosul Biennial, in order to examine the curatorial project to construct a canonical Latin American art centered on vanguardism. The biennial was conceived subsequent to the signing of the eponymous economic treaty, which created a common market for South America in 1995. By adapting previous theories and debates that were rehearsed in the 1970s, Frederico Morais designed a unified canonical construction for Latin American art based on his 1970s achievements as a promoter of experimental art. Morais rejected the anthropological approach displayed in the 1978 Biennial. By greatly privileging conceptual art, pop art, and the constructive movements throughout South America, Morais aided the rise of conceptualism and geometric abstract art that came to dominate Latin American art from the 1990s to the present.
The third chapter is dedicated to how the Brazilian modernist concept of anthropophagy or cultural cannibalism (1928) gained renewed currency in the art world after the 1998 São Paulo Biennial made it its central theme. I analyze how anthropophagy was used in the exhibition both as a theme that directly influenced the work of an artist like Adriana Varejão, and as a method that is still useful in the construction a Latin American identity. I argue that in its latter methodological capacity, the concept of anthropophagy suggested new ways of absorbing and altering the history of art. By critically examining how anthropophagy became a method to obtain Latin Americaness in exhibitions, this chapter also offers a proposal for how to create a non-hegemonic narrative for art history, which cannot be achieved by merely inserting artworks from other geographies into an already existing narrative.

To conclude, I examine the Contemporary and Modern Art Perspectives in a Global Age Initiative (C-MAP) at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA) and The Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative. Both initiatives aim to expand curatorial expertise and incorporate art from non-hegemonic areas, including Latin America. I examine these two initiatives in order to understand why and how they are incorporating Latin American art into their collections.

One of the main problems with the category “Latin American art” derives from the term “Latin America” itself. The French writer Michel Chevalier coined the nomenclature in 1836 as a way to associate the newly independent colonies of Portugal and Spain with an imagined “Latin” Southern Europe, imagined against the Teutonic
North, represented by Germany, England, and the United States at that time. Similarly, subsequent geopolitical measures seeking to align the countries in the Americas imposed related forms, such as the Monroe Doctrine (1823), Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s “Good Neighbor Policy,” initiated in 1933, and John F. Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress in 1961. All of these policies cemented U.S. imperialism in Latin America under the disguise of Pan-Americanism. The designation Latin America, therefore, is not geographical, but a sociopolitical construct fraught with economic interests. Further complicating this scenario is the relationship between Brazil and Latin America. Historically, Brazilians have viewed themselves as separate from the rest of the continent, claiming a unique “discovery” in 1500 and citing their different idiom and colonial history. Nevertheless, from the mid-1960s on, conjointly with struggles for

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4 About the construction of Latin America, see Walter Mignolo, The Idea of Latin America (Walden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2005), 77-82.

5 The Monroe Doctrine, which stated that further efforts by European nations to colonize or interfere with states in the Americas would be understood as acts of aggression requiring U.S. intervention, became an excuse for neo-colonialism. See Brian Loveman, No Higher Law: American Foreign Policy and the Western Hemisphere Since 1776 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 39-64. The “Good Neighbor Policy” was envisaged to win Latin America over to the Allies, see Frederick B. Pike, FDR’s Good Neighbor Policy: Sixty Year of a Generally Gentle Chaos (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995). Behind Kennedy’s Pan-American promises, there was the context of the Cold War and of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, which radically altered U.S. politics in the area. This change had a direct impact on how the visual arts were promoted in the area. About constructions of Latin American art during the cold war see: see Claire Fox, Making Art Panamerican: Cultural Policy and the Cold War (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013). It is important to remember the sequences of coups-d’état, supported by the U.S. government, that followed the new U.S. intervention in Latin America that included Argentina’s three coups (1962, 1966, 1976); Ecuador in 1963; Brazil and Bolivia in 1964; Panama and Peru in 1968, and Chile and Uruguay in 1973.

6 This tension between Brazil and the rest of Latin America is highly visible in the field of visual arts. For example, in 1974 Argentine art critic Damián Bayón published Aventura plástica de Hispanoamérica: pintura, cinetismo, artes de la acción: 1940-1972 (Plastic Adventure of Spanish America: painting, kineticism, action art: 1940-1972) that clearly did not include Brazil. In 1988, invited to write an updated version by Unesco, Bayón invited Brazilian critic Roberto Pontual to author the part about Brazil. The fact that the narrative presented two discrete parts—Hispano-America and Brazil—revealed, however, that a unified concept of Latin America was no easy task. Pontual’s title, Le Brésil: anthropophagie et construction (Brazil: anthropophagy and
decolonization and formulations identifying a “Third World” as a way out of the Cold War binary, a fundamental change in the articulation of Latin Americaness emerged. As Brazilian curator Paulo Herkenhoff noticed, in the late twentieth century the focus of the dialogue in the lower part of the continent mutated from pan-Americanism into Latin Americanism, gaining anti-imperialist tones. Thus, from the 1970s on, art professionals systematically claimed the imposed identity—Latin American—and rearticulated it as an independent and political label. Such a history of Latin America, which is a history of ideology, is the focus of this dissertation.

The reverberation of the Cuban Revolution provides the symbolic beginning of the 1960s in Latin America. The success of the young revolutionaries, who made their way from Sierra Maestra into Havana between 1956 and 1959, surprised the world and promised new possibilities for economically dependent nations. However, by the end of the decade, this potential had transformed into a cheerless result. The period brought a realignment of American politics, which severely curbed the field of possibilities. As literary critic Jean Franco proposes, the Cold War in Latin America started in the 1960s. U.S.-sponsored coup d’états took place across the region and Cuba grew economically and politically dependent upon the Soviet Union. Parallel to this repressive scenario, the

construction), discloses that by 1990, anthropophagy and geometric abstraction were deployed as methods of obtaining “Brazilianity” in the visual arts. By the late 1990s these two tropes could easily be viewed as representative of Latin American art. See Bayón and Pontual, La peinture de L’Amérique latine au XXe siècle: identité et modernité (Paris: Mengès, 1990).


8 See Jean Franco, Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 3.
massive entrance of consumer goods (including television), the rise of an urban middle class, the explosion of counterculture, and numerous modernization endeavours carried out in Latin America radically altered the economic and social landscape of the region, which no longer could be referred to as rural and underdeveloped while it was still not sufficiently “modern” according to western standards. This context greatly informed the articulation of “visual Latinamericanism.” By visual Latinamericanism I refer to a socially engaged criticality that appeared in the region in the 1970s supported by local art historians, including Juan Acha and Néstor García Canclini. The praxis was spurred by a desire to create differentiated criteria for the art narrative and production for Latin America. The main characteristic of this visual Latinamericanism was the attempt to analyze the poetics, the politics, and the immaterialities of the artwork in order to produce independent visual theories. As Juan Acha emphatically stated in the 1975 Latin American symposium in Texas (analyzed in the first chapter of this dissertation), the aim of the art critic in Latin America as an engaged intellectual was the construction of an independent visual theory. To that point, these new theories incorporated the conceptual framework of other fields that had historically examined the region’s vernacular and popular production, including sociology and anthropology. The next natural step of this theorization would be the creation of a distinct art form, which would no longer be considered derivative of the U.S.-European production.

In the 1970s, the formation of an independent Latin American identity (both in theory and practice) became not only an ontological problem, but also an urgent political
issue. While works like Franz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and Eduardo Galeano’s *Open Veins of Latin America* (1971) provided theoretical tools for new articulations of Latin America spurred by the Cold War polarization, the international success of the Latin American literature boom, which promoted writers like Gabriel García Márquez and Julio Cortázar, provided a status and cultural aspiration for Latin American visual art. The effort undertaken to build a cultural identity during this period undergirds the framework for this study, together with the criticism, adaptations, and revisions, which this model received in the 1980s and 1990s.

The use made of the term “Third World” is comparable to the emphasis upon the geopolitics of the name “Latin America.” Currently, in its most general sense, the phrase “Third World” has an economic denotation, interchangeable with the more neutral expression “developing countries.” I employ Third Worldism as an alternative to the binary of “East” and “West” or “North” and “South,” which highlight Latin America’s interstitial position, geographically in the West but politically outside it, geographically in the Americas but, being in the South, economically and culturally outside the North. Moreover, the concept of the “Third World” was mobilized as an expanded identity, one

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9 In the 1960s and 1970s Latin American literature operated as an example for the articulation of visual arts in the region. For instance, in 1966, during the 14th Unesco General Conference in Paris, Latin American intellectuals decided to systematically investigate the contemporaneous cultural production of the region, which was conceived of as a cultural unit—a decision that was prompted by the literary boom in the region. In the following year, during a meeting in Lima sponsored by Unesco, intellectuals organized the book series “América Latina en su cultura” (Latin America and its culture) published by the Mexican press siglo veintiuno and Unesco. The first volume, *América Latina en su literatura* (Latin America and its literature, 1973) edited by Julio Ortega César Fernández Moreno, analyzed the region’s literature. This book served as a model for the anthology *América Latina en sus artes* (Latin America and its arts, 1974) edited by Damián Bayón. The Brazilian art critic Mario Barata participated in the book with the essay “Épocas y Estilos.” He wrote on Latin American colonial art and largely employed art historian George Kluber’s theory of time.
that became increasingly popular among Latin American artists in 1970s-1980s—both for those living in the Americas and in exile. Artists as diverse as Artur Barrio, Ana Mendieta, and Luis Camnitzer identified themselves as “Third World artists” throughout this period as a way to underscore their political engagement.\textsuperscript{10} The epithet allowed artists (as well as exhibitions like the Havana Biennial) to place the artistic production outside hegemonic parameters as a means of challenging cultural imperialism. As a result, the term “Third World” enabled transcontinental cultural articulations, encompassing Africa, Asia, and Latin America—areas that are currently being incorporated by institutions in North America in the construction of a global art history.\textsuperscript{11} The nomenclature of “Third World” was also deployed to designate marginalized communities living in the center, including Chicano artists in the United States. Conceptualized cross-regionally, the term defies national autonomy as a way to frame local cultures. It escapes national borders, creating communities organized around common political causes.

The Third World, and the inherent racism of the term, has been the focus of London-based artist and founder of the magazine Third Text, Rasheed Araeen. Writing on issues in contemporary art, he affirms that the forces that “affect culture as a whole

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\textsuperscript{10} Artur Barrio used the term in his 1969 “Manifesto;” Ana Mendieta curated the show Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States (New York, NY: A.I.R. Gallery, 1980); Camnitzer employed the term in several writings, see, for example, “Wonderbread and Spanglish Art” (1989).

\textsuperscript{11} See, for example, the exhibition Modernités Plurielles de 1905 à 1970 (Centre George Pompidou, Paris, 2013-2015) and the publication Modern Art in Africa, Asia and Latin America: An Introduction to Global Modernisms (Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).
\end{flushleft}
[are] also reflected in art activity.” As a result, Araeen denounces the covert racism of the term “Third World,” which enables the maintenance of a colonial mentality in the art world. Such a mentality, he explains, renders the visual arts in Africa, Asia, and Latin America as the “backwaters of Western civilization or what Paulo Freire calls the ‘culture of silence’ of the masses.” Espousing a methodological social art history, and citing Freire, Araeen’s manifesto explained that other areas of the globe contribute to contemporary art on their own terms. As a consequence, he suggests that artists working from so-called peripheral positions should be judged by different criteria in order not to be considered as the backwater of the so-called center. Indeed, much of the discussion about the formation of a Latin American artistic identity in the 1970s would revolve around the demand for autochthonous theories. During the 1970s Latin American artists and critics proposed the development of local epistemologies and forms as a mechanism that would enable them to foster and analyze local art and to avoid (neo)colonial dynamics.

In addition, Brazilian modernism provided artists and intellectuals with an auxiliary tool in the making of a heterotopian identity—to use Michel Foucault’s term for spaces that operate in non-hegemonic ways. Anthropophagy constituted a

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12 Rasheed Araeen, “Preliminary Notes for a Black Manifesto,” *Studio International*, vol. 194, no. 988 (1/1978): 58. Paulo Freire coined the phrase “Culture of Silence” in the book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). According to Freire, the system of dominant social relations creates a culture of silence that assigns a negative, silenced self-image into the oppressed. This condition can only be surpassed with the development of a critical consciousness that recognizes that this culture of silence is created to oppress.

13 In the article “Of Other Spaces” (1984), Foucault coined the term heterotopia in reference to spaces that did not operate as utopias or dystopias, but as a place for otherness. Exemplary of heterotopia are, for instance, cemeteries and prisons. In the context of the rise of post-modern theory, the term was viewed as
powerful method for cultural construction in the ex-colonies. Cannibalizing the avant-garde’s favorite vehicle, Brazilian intellectual Oswald de Andrade wrote the “Anthropophagite Manifesto” in 1928, which became the most celebrated methodology in Brazil, first used for the construction of a national autonomous identity. Like the cannibals who devoured their enemies to absorb what was most valuable in them, de Andrade urged the Brazilian intelligentsia to freely appropriate imported references in their construction of a national and “cosmopolitan,” sophisticated culture. Anthropophagy identified hybridism as typically Brazilian, resolving the impasse of reconciling national identity with modernization. Anthropophagy augmented the construction of a local and original avant-garde within a postcolonial site.

The study of anthropophagy clarifies the interdependence of the binary national/international in the construction of Brazilian cultural identity. Moreover, although the concept was first created to formulate a national culture, intellectuals remobilized it and deployed the method in the formation of a regional cultural identity, as mentioned above. The use of the national concept of anthropophagy to construct a Latin American identity demonstrates how artists, curators, art historians, collectors, and institutions mobilize the triumvirate nationalism/regionaism/internationalism to explaining the contemporary emergence of cultural, social, political, and economic difference and identity as a central issue in larger multicultural cities. The term was also deployed as a curatorial tool in several exhibitions, including Catherine David’s Documenta X (Kassel, 1997) and Mari Carmen Ramirez and Héctor Olea’s Inverted Utopias (MFAH, 2004).

assist the entry of the region—“Latin America”—into the global art arena. To that point, this trio acts in tandem and not in opposite terms, assisting the conflation of the national with the regional in the making of the global in art history.

The hybridity of anthropophagy is sometimes conflated with the concept of mestizaje, another crucial (if problematic) term in the fabrication of Latin American national identity. Mestizaje (or mestiçagem in Portuguese) is employed by art historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and political theorists to encompass the complex process of racial and cultural mixture. The concept is understood as positively resolving the confrontation between European, indigenous, and black bodies and cultures. Unlike the word miscegenation, mestizaje has been transformed during the 20th century to carry positive connotations, and the term has helped to nurture the myth of the existence of racial democracy in Brazil and beyond. Therefore unlike anthropophagy, which allows different identities to coexist, mestizaje erases identities while creating a pseudo-positive category.

But, how to frame the art of the region if not as Latin American? In the drawing *Amuleto, a mulata, a muleta, América Latina* (Amulet, the mulatto woman, the crutch, Latin America, 1976) (Figure 0.6) Anna Bella Geiger provided an apparently easy solution to

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15 *Mestizaje* and hybridity as culture is a much-debated concept in Latin America, especially after Néstor Canclini’s publication of *Hybrid Cultures* in the 1990s in tandem with the emergence of postcolonial discourse and its critiques of Occidentalism in the region. For me, the racial genealogy of the concept of hybridism (or mestiçagem) dims the recent enthusiasm for the term, in particular because the mestiço category is inseparable in Brazil (and in other countries of Latin America) of whitening projects implemented in the beginning of the 20th century. About racial construction (especially in Brazil) see: Lilia Moritz Schwarz, *The Spectacle of the Races: Scientists, Institutions, and the Race Question in Brazil, 1870-1930*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999).
the question: using pencil and charcoal on paper—identified by critics such as Argentinean-born Colombian based Marta Traba as the quintessential Latin American medium—she placed images side-by-side, in a direct and didactic manner. Sketched in a traditional figurative style, the images include: an amulet, an index of Latin America’s religious devotion; a mulatto woman, an index of the continent’s miscegenation and symbol of its alleged racial democracy; a crutch, an index of Latin America’s inability to be freestanding; and, finally, the cartographic representation of Latin America itself. In order to persuade viewers of the connection between these archetypes and Latin America, Geiger drew a strong formal similarity among the images and the region. The Latin American signifiers are all depicted in black and white and confined in the characteristic inverted triangle that frames the lower part of the Americas. Even the mulatto woman, with a curvaceous body, a cliché of Latin women, appears as a geometric figure in order to fit into the mold. The tropes were all represented: mysticism, mestizaje, cultural dependency. Geiger spelled out the nouns of the depicted images in the artwork’s title in alliteration, which is present in the original Portuguese title. The message is simple and direct; the visual and auditory correlate. More than offering a satisfactory answer, Geiger’s straightforward solution clarifies the pitfalls of the search for an essential Latin America. Geiger’s two artworks interrogate the construction of Brazilian national culture, the other of Latin American art, and reveal the mutual dependency between the concepts of the national and the regional.
Throughout the seventies, a practical, theoretical, and institutional call to construct a distinct Latin American art existed, as evinced by Geiger’s critical response. Faced with cultural imperialism, several artists and theoreticians built a Latin Americaness in the visual arts based on an organicist perspective of identity, namely the understanding that the kernel of identity lies in nature and the landscape. Such essentialist views lent themselves to the metaphors describing Latin America’s fauna and flora as distinct and unique.16 In order to safeguard the region’s originality from imported, alien art forms, Latin Americans who defended the organicist view believed that the region’s production should be separated from cultural centers of the art world like New York and Paris. Traba, for example, offered the concept of arte de resistencia (art of resistance) to describe an art that did not follow international art trends, was based on traditional drawing and figurative techniques, and exemplified Latin Americaness. Diverse critics advocated this position, which, by the 1980s, was largely subsumed under the category of the “fantastic,” which emphasized surrealism, magical realism, and an irrational and exotic sense of Latin American culture.17 Simultaneous with this essentialist vision, however, other artists and critics embraced international movements and promoted avant-garde art in Latin America. Even if during the 1970s the idea of a

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16 This view diverges from Peter Bürger’s notion of an organic artwork, which implies the idea of the work of art being an indivisible totality. See, Peter Bürger, Theory of Avant-Garde (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

17 Traba delineated her notion of arte de resistencia in the book Dos décadas vulnerables en las artes plásticas latinoamericanas: 1950-1970, which is analyzed in chapter 1.
local organicist avant-garde was controversial, it emerged as a driving force in the
construction of Latin American art.

Yet, despite organicist influence on the identity of Latin Americaness, the
ubiquitous presence in exhibitions and publications in the 1990s and 2000s of artists like
Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark demonstrates that the Latin American canon came to be
based on experimental art. Backing this regional visual construct, recent studies have
mobilized Latin American avant-garde as a geopolitical construct. For instance, literary
scholar Fernando Rosenberg has argued that, as Latin American vanguardism could not
deploy the various futurisms and primitivisms that European movements presented to
disrupt the bourgeois art world, Latin American avant-gardes operated as a critique of
modernity, including the modernity imbedded in the narratives of the historical avant-
gardes.18 His thesis is that the temporal axis of the European avant-garde operated as a
spatial one, proclaiming their viewpoint from Latin America. In analyzing avant-garde
literature, he contends that the problem of the locus of enunciation (namely, the
conditions of possibility for Latin American artists and writers to intervene in the larger
debate about modernity) took precedence for the vanguardistas. As a result, this
geopolitical emphasis resulted in redefining the problem of identity, placing it outside of
the immediate concerns of the local.

18 Fernando Rosenberg, The Avant-Garde And Geopolitics In Latin America (Pittsburgh, PA: University of
Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 1-8. Similar to Rosenberg, I alternate between avant-garde and vanguard for reasons
of style.
A number of concepts framed as positive in western culture, including modernization, authenticity, and originality, explain why artists and critics alike preferred being associated with the avant-garde. Moreover, such concepts directly addressed the fear of having their art and theory subsumed within the context and connotations of being the product of ex-colonies. Although the implicit hierarchy imbedded into the concept of a progressive temporal linearity could place the Latin American art production as “behind” and derivative, as Rosenberg noticed, artists and theoreticians did find solutions for this impasse. Many artists and curators were inspired by Joaquín Torres-García’s famous drawing, América Invertida (Inverted America, 1936) (Figure 0.7), in which the Uruguayan artist flipped the map of the Americas, inverting North and South. Spurred by this foundational defiance against the supposed inferiority of Latin American art (as below the North) and the South’s subsequent exclusion and marginalization from international discourses of art, the Latin American intelligentsia realized that they too could invert routes, undo points of origin, and claim avant-garde movements as originating in the region.

In addition to flipping the map, Torres-García’s drawing fused constructive art with a Pre-Columbian visual vocabulary. Following Torres-García’s rationale, in 1975 the Brazilian art critic Frederico Morais composed his concept of a “constructive will,” associating Latin American art with European constructive movements under the premise that constructive art was in reality indigenous to the region. Morais materialized this theory in the 1997 Mercosul Biennial (analyzed in the second chapter of
In 2004 curators Mari Carmen Ramírez and Héctor Olea presented *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America* (MFAH, U.S.) in which they characterized Latin American avant-gardes as going back to “their glorious, untainted past in search of the chimerical elements for their avant-garde approach,” and in opposition to the “forward thrust” of the historical European avant-gardes. This exhibition globally disseminated a new image for Latin American art as modern and sophisticated. This exhibition and publication also legitimized a new canon for the art of the region, entirely removing it from association with the previous conflation of the organisist and the fantastic.

Nonetheless, the so-called fantastic art of Latin America had already established a popular framework for the reception of Latin American art in the United States, especially during the 1980s. Presentation of the fantastic capitalized on the success of the Latin American literature boom in the 1960s, and these works were displayed in exhibitions like *The Art of the Fantastic: Latin American Art 1920-1987* (Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1987) and *America: Bride of the Sun* (Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp, 1992). By the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, the dominance of this framework also provoked substantial criticism on the part of Latin American and Latino

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19 Morais first conceived of a “constructive will” guiding Brazilian art in the essay “A crise da vanguarda no Brasil” (The crisis of the vanguard in Brazil), published in the book *A Crise da Hora Atual* (The crisis of the present hour, 1975). After his participation in the 1975 Latin American symposium at the University of Texas, Austin, he expanded the theory to encompass Latin America. He published this expanded theory in *Artes Plásticas na América Latina: do transe ao transitório* (Visual Arts in Latin America: From Trance to Transitoriness, 1979). I analyze this trajectory in the first and second chapters of this dissertation.

critics, who accused it of blatantly embracing a U.S.-European point of view shaped by long-standing prejudices against the culture of the region. Ramírez summarized the qualms of the Latin American and Latino intelligentsia in the 1992 essay “Beyond the ‘Fantastic’: Framing Identity in U.S. Exhibitions of Latin American Art,” which codified Latin American criticism together with the post-modern wave in the 1990s.\(^\text{21}\)

In addition to the desire to move beyond the fantastic, there were other reasons for the promotion of the vanguard in the construction of a critical regional cultural identity from the 1970s onwards—reasons that went beyond the capitalization of the avant-garde image as modern.\(^\text{22}\) First, the early Latin American vanguard movements of the 1920s were concerned with the construction of a critical nationalism/regionalism, for which they developed a “collage-like structure,” which was adapted to the context of a political regional identity associated with the monolithic projects of military dictatorships.\(^\text{23}\) For instance, the introduction and use of the modernist concept of

\(^{21}\) See Gerardo Mosquera (org.), Beyond the Fantastic. Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996). Mosquera discussed post-modernism in the introduction, drawing a parallel between the new criticism of Latin America and the principles of post-modern theory; see especially pages 10-14.

\(^{22}\) I am purposely not engaging here with Peter Bürger’s famous distinction between historical avant-garde and neo-avant garde—nor with Hal Foster’s subsequent criticism of it. In Constructing the Avant-Garde, Brazilian art scholar Sérgio Martins used Foster’s discussion as a framework in order to create his argument that Brazilian avant-garde “hijacked” the past in order to create their own present. His critique of Foster is based on the premise that the U.S. theoretician did not acknowledge the provincialism of his own argument: “his rupture with modernism swaps Duchamp for Mondrian and Rauschenberg for Pollock, but the vertical and exclusive link between the most advanced North American art of its time and its European predecessors is left untouched.” Cf. Sérgio Martins, Constructing an Avant-Garde Art in Brazil, 1949-1979 (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013), 4.

\(^{23}\) I am building here on Vicky Unruh’s 1994 book Latin American Vanguards. She proposed that modernist movements in Latin America overcame an idea of national/regional identity rooted in colonial tropes such as the idea of an original nature and landscape. She built on Bürger’s Theory of Avant-Garde and his notion of the nonorganic character of the work of art, namely the possibility to put together different components in
anthropophagy was vital both for the establishment of the 1950s Brazilian concrete movements and of the mid-1960s vanguards, and was internationally broadcasted as a tool to compose a new art historiography diverging from Eurocentric patterns in the 1998 São Paulo Biennal, examined in the third chapter of this dissertation.

Furthermore, artists (including Oiticica) and critics (including Morais) understood experimental art as action, operating as an actual intervention in the world. As result, in the repressive context of the dictatorships and authoritarian governments of the 1960s-1980s, avant-garde art acquired new political potential, making it hard to accept dismissals of the avant-garde as apolitical and/or neocolonial (as implied in Traba’s *arte de resistencia*). In the discourse promoting the avant-garde as political, the experimental artist was compared to the guerrilla fighter. Morais wrote in 1970:

> The artist is, today, a kind of guerrilla soldier. Art is a type of ambush. Acting suddenly, where and when s/he is least expected, in an unusual way (because everything can be transformed into a weapon, a tool for either war or art), the artist creates a state of permanent tension…²⁴

Later, Luis Camnitzer would be one of the most prominent advocates of art as guerilla tactic, a concept that he discussed in the exhibition catalogue for *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950-1980* (Queens Museum of Art, 1999) and in the publication of *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (2007). In the 1990s, aided by

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other Latin American artists, curators, collectors, and theoreticians, Camnitzer successfully merged the triad of experimental art/political art/conceptual art in the region. Camnitzer theorized conceptualismo, his preferred term for Latin American conceptual art, in contrast to U.S.-European conceptual art, which he viewed as excessively tautological and institutionally focused. Thus, even if critics like Traba viewed the avant-garde as a threat to a more genuine Latin Americaness, it was vanguard art—mostly in the form of the geometric abstraction and conceptual art—that prevailed as the canonical representative of Latin American art from the late 1990s on into the twenty-first century.

During the 2011 conference “Entre la teoría y la práctica: Reconsiderando el arte latinoamericano en el siglo XXI” (In Between Theory and Practice: Reconsidering Latin American Art in the 21st Century), Mexican curator Cuauhtémoc Medina contentiously stated that Brazilian art was not Latin American. He argued that Brazilians do not feel part of the region, unlike other nations and individuals that self-identify as Latin American, citing as an example Ernesto Che Guevara’s eloquent 1964 speech at the United Nations in which Guevara declared himself to be “Latin American.” What

25 Cf. the second chapter of this dissertation.
26 As part of the Cuban delegation, Che Guevara gave a speech on December 11, 1964, at 19th General Assembly of the United Nations in New York. Medina quoted Che’s famous replica in which he stated that as he felt Latin American, he would happily give his life to the liberation of any of the countries that composed Latin America. Subsequently, to keep up with his argument that Brazil does not belong in Latin America, Medina chose as a case study the 1978 I Latin American Biennial in São Paulo (which is examined in the first chapter of this dissertation). His whole analysis of the exhibition is flawed since he believed that Peruvian Juan Acha together with Brazilian Frederico Morais curated it. Rather, the show was curated by Acha together with Argentinean semiotician Silvia Ambrosini. This dissertation hopes to address precisely this problem: the lack of knowledge of Latin American critics of events that happened inside the region,
Medina was stating is that Brazil, due to its hegemony in the area, cannot be inserted as part of the construct “Latin America” without causing internal imperialism—an argument that also could be easily made about Mexico. Despite Medina’s assertion, Brazilian artworks and theories do play a crucial role in the making of a new Latin American artistic identity. Tropes such as anthropophagy, abstract geometry, conceptualismo as guerrilla, in addition to Brazil’s position simultaneously in and out of Latin America, provide the region as a whole with powerful strategies to assert art as “Latin American.” These tropes enable Latin American art to enter and exit modernity (to use Néstor García Canclini’s phrase) in a manner similar to Geiger’s artworks, which can be merged into the larger conceptual art movement, or claimed as conceptualismo, or examined as pieces that provide new ways of thinking about nation and art.27 This dissertation focuses on Brazilian participation in the new articulation of Latin Americanism in artistic events and exhibitions since 1971—when Latin American art was being conceived as an authonomous and political form.

The institutionalization of the São Paulo Biennial, which was inaugurated in 1951 as the second biennial in the world, promoted and made internationally visible the vanguard art that preceded it in Brazil by decades. The São Paulo Biennial also put an active body of artists and critics on an international stage where they undeniably became key contributors to the country’s artistic prominence in the region. Art

which generates all sort of polemical (and often erroneous) statements. The video of the conference (in Spanish) is available online. See: http://www.mali.pe/not_detalle.php?id=54.

27 Néstor Canclini, Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).
professionals like Walter Zanini, who was the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art of the São Paulo University (MAC/USP, 1963-1978), and Mário Pedrosa, who was the vice-president of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA, 1957-1970), advanced visual arts in and out of the country, emphasizing vanguard artistic techniques and in lively international debate.\footnote{For example, Zanini promoted video art in Brazil by organizing exhibitions exclusively devoted to the medium, buying equipment available for artists at the MAC/USP, and inviting multimedia artists, including the French Hervé Fischer (1975). About Zanini and his promotion of experimental art inside the museum, see Cristina Freire (org.), \textit{Walter Zanini: Escrituras Críticas} (São Paulo: Annablume; MAC USP, 2013).} While the Brazilian coup-d’État in 1964 intervened in, and had a direct impact on, every cultural sphere in the country, impeding the progress of internationalization. The dictatorship did not altogether put the cultural scene of the country on hold, even after the proclamation of the infamous Institutional Act Number 5 (AI-5) on December 13, 1968, when the military forged the legal means to torture and censor. (Pedrosa, for example, had to resort to exile from 1970 to 1977.) Nevertheless, the abuses of the military regime incited a vigorous reaction from the artistic community, uniting artists and intellectuals and compelling them to take a political stand, which in the 1970s meant re-considering the concepts of nationhood as well as of regionalism. As initiatives like the artists’ led publication \textit{Contrabienal} (analyzed in the first chapter) demonstrate, the intelligentsia viewed dictatorial regimes and Euro-U.S. imperialism as closely connected and fomenting cultural neocolonialism. Therefore the creation of a regional identity signified the possibility to escape official demarcations and politics, and to find an alternative common ground that would
contrast to the modernization politics and “economic miracles” backed by the militaries.29

Espousing a socio-political art history, one that takes into consideration the context of the region, I pay special attention to exhibitions in this study. I examine them as privileged vehicles in which practice (artworks) and theory (curatorial discourse and criticism) come together. This is especially important for the field of Latin American art, since in the conception of a regional artistic identity theory and practice were often at odds. This conflict is exemplified by the 1978 São Paulo Biennial in which little articulation between the show, the accompanying symposium, and the documentation section existed. I grapple with the field of exhibition history methodology by examining how the conception of Latin American art exhibitions is interwoven into the social-historiographical structure and fabric of culture in which they were created. Surveying the development of the Latin American artistic construct through exhibitions, including aborted projects such as the 1978 Latin American Biennial in São Paulo, my research diverges from the current direction of exhibition histories and biennial studies, which tends to emphasize exhibitions in isolation from history, and centers on crucial years,

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29 In tandem with the interrogation of the national borders, the official state demarcations inside Brazil were also being questioned—especially after the modernization projects implemented by the militaries in the 1960s-1970s evinced the socio-economic disparities between the regions that composed Brazil. In 1967, the geographer Pedro Pinchas Geiger, who is married to artist Anna Bella Geiger, proposed the geo-economic division of Brazil into three main regions: Amazonia, Northeast, Center-South. These three regions disregarded the 21 states arrangement that compose the map of Brazil in order to better reflect the socio-economic and political problems of the country. It is important to notice that parallel to the discussion of the creation of a Latin American regionalism there was an internal debate about Brazilian regionalism. This internal debate was incorporated in the São Paulo Biennial projects, especially in the National Biennials that happened in the 1970s—as discussed in chapter 1.
like 1968 and 1989, in the creation of a global contemporary art historiography.\textsuperscript{30} However the methodology of viewing exhibitions in isolation from other cultural experiences erases local artistic scenes and histories.

By contrast, art historians Kristine Stiles and Kathy O’Dell analyze global structures of international art in their book-in-progress, \textit{Mapping Experimental Art: Studies in Contemporary International Art Since 1933}, which both expands the discipline of art history and attends closely to local histories.\textsuperscript{31} Charting geographical areas in the context of colonial art educations and epistemologies, while identifying such locations as the sites for the emergence of multiple modernisms, their book constitutes an important example of how to theorize previously considered “peripheral” artists and artworks and their entrance into the international art arena. Also informing my approach is the work on regional biennials by scholars Anthony Gardner and Charles Green. In the article

\textsuperscript{30}In particular, I refer here to publications like \textit{Exhibition Histories} and \textit{The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds}, which survey important art exhibitions in both hemispheres. The main aim of these series—as their titles imply—is to expand the map of contemporary art to encompass “new” territories. In addition to this desire of “discovering” new exhibitions, the desire to create key years led to the artificial promotion of some shows. For instance, 1989, a crucial date especially for the aligned countries, led to the dissemination of \textit{Magiciens de la Terra} (La Villette, Centre George Pompidou, 1989) as the insurgent moment of global art and of the 3rd Havana Biennial (Cuba, 1989) as the most important edition of that show. These exhibitions were undeniably important, but are mobilized in this historiographical discourse in order to benefit Northern art historical constructions and do not necessarily make art history more global. See, Rachel Weiss, \textit{Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial 1989} (London: Afterall Books, 2011); Lucy Steeds, \textit{Making Art Global (Part 2), Magiciens de la Terre, 1989} (London: Afterall Books, 2013); and Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg, and Peter Weibel (eds), \textit{Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds} (Cambridge, MA/London: The MIT Press, 2013). Ultimately, the vital question to ask in this historiographical construction is: Who is benefiting from this new exhibition historiography?

\textsuperscript{31}Stiles and O’Dell generously shared with me very early drafts of the first three chapters their book on global contemporary art.
“Biennials of the South on the Edges of the Global,” they trace regional histories located in the Southern hemisphere in order to propose a separate genealogy for biennials.  

By examining the capital importance of exhibitions (and of the São Paulo Biennial, in particular), this dissertation also focuses on the institutional power relations involved in the construction of Latin American regional art. As conceptualismo was delineated in stark contrast to the U.S.-European movement understood as narrowly focused on institutional critique, the role of institutions in defining Latin American art is often downplayed. Therefore, this study also contributes to the critical revision of the historiographical construction of conceptual art in Latin America. Consequently, my dissertation contributes to the critique of institutional practices begun in the 1970s, in addition to debates regarding issues of cultural identity and the formation of a global art historiography.

Overall, in this dissertation, I argue that the full meaning of Latin American art is not to be found solely in the artwork, but rather continuously transforms in the interstices of institutions, artists, the public, curatorial discourses, artworks, and critical analyses. To do so, I examine and articulates the mechanisms by which cultural narratives are created, exposing how art world agents (i.e., institutions, exhibitions, and art professionals) have helped to design a cohesive canon for the art of Latin America.

32 Gardner and Green propose a radically different time frame for biennials’ studies in order to spotlight the category of “third world” and reveal regional constructions. They reject the Venice Biennial as a point of origin and start their narrative in 1955, year of the Bandung conference and of the first Mediterranean Biennial in Alexandria. Their genealogy is examined in the second chapter of this dissertation. See Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, “Biennials of the South on the Edges of the Global,” in Third Text, 27:4 (2013): 442-455.
and contributed to the global turn in art history. By connecting this recent history to older articulations of Latin Americaness from the 1970s on, my work reveals a local genealogy for the historiography of Latin American art that is fundamental to its current integration into the canon.
Chapter 1: The 1970s. Constructing a (Political) Regional Identity

*Introduction*

This chapter maps efforts to foster and legitimize Latin American art in the 1970s, revealing the importance that the political assumes in this construction. Within the larger framework of this dissertation, this survey places the creation of a regional identity for Latin American art among initiatives of Latin American critics and artists taking place across the Americas. In the 1970s, the construction of a recognizable canon for Latin American art was understood as an effort that would enable artists and critics to not only subdue their anxieties about the existence of an original artistic expression on the continent but also view their artworks as valid additions both to specific collections and, more broadly, to the overall narrative of art history. This first chapter focuses on the debate concerning how to assert Latin America’s cultural identity as a politically potent and active one in the American continent during this decade, with the politics of the São Paulo Biennial at the crux of this debate.

The 1970s began under the reverberation of the São Paulo Biennial boycott in 1969, initiated by a protest by intellectuals and art professionals against the authoritarian interventions of Brazil’s military government in the exhibition. The artists’ embargo spurred debates about the imperialist nature of the FBSP and its lack of a regional cultural politics, which culminated in the 1971 publication *Contrabienal* launched by
Latin American artists based in New York. In the turbulent socio-political context of the 1970s in the Americas, the regional identity fostered in the pages of Contrabienal quickly assumed a political tone. In the aftermath of the Alliance for Progress, initiated in 1961 by the U.S. to stop the influence of socialist ideology after the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the subsequent coup-d’états in the continent, the creation of a unified artistic identity for Latin America was conceived of as a defiant anti-imperialist signal. In the context of polarizing Cold War alliances, but faced with the region’s heterogeneity, artists and critics came to understand a precarious socio-political situation as the common denominator of the different Latin American countries, spotlighting the region’s underdevelopment, poverty, economic dependency, violence, and authoritarian regimes as a unifier. Therefore, the political as this response to precarity was the motivating force behind both the main artistic Latin American articulations in the 1970s and the formulation of a unified regional identity for Latin America.

By the mid-1970s, the conversations about how to foster a regional identity for Latin America were ongoing among artists, critics, and intellectuals, as demonstrated by the 1975 symposium Speak out! Charla! Bate-Papo!: Contemporary Art and Literature in Latin America at the University of Texas at Austin. By the end of the decade, this regional reflection culminated in the first Latin American Biennial organized in São Paulo, which, in this dissertation, is understood as a political statement in its own right. Nevertheless, the reigning curatorial penchant for anthropology and its dismissal of an urban vanguard art demonstrate a lack of consensus about what image of the continent should
be supported by its institutions. These regional articulations and networks reached a symbolic end in the 1980 Consultative Meeting of Art Critics of Latin America, in which art critics from all over Latin America voted against the transformation of the São Paulo Biennial into a regional show, opting instead to continue the biennial’s internationalist inclination that had characterized the event since its inception in 1951. Ultimately, this chapter traces the creation of a critical regionalism—a way of thinking about Latin America that would counterbalance the menaces of cultural imperialism and operate as an alternative to the authoritarian regimes in the area.

The events examined along the four sections of this first chapter—the 1971 Counterbiennial publication that followed the 1969 São Paulo Biennial boycott; the 1975 symposium in the University of Texas at Austin that set the terms for the debate about a regional identity during the decade; the 1978 I Latin American Art Biennial in São Paulo; the artist-led protest Mitos Vadios (Stray Myths); as well as the biennial’s disastrous aftermath, the 1980 Consultative Meeting of Art Critics of Latin America—are understood as a rehearsal for the Latin American art canon established globally in the late 1990s, which was disseminated together with the rise of global art. As this chapter shows, the vision of an independent, modern, and urban Latin America, represented by vanguard art, prevailed over more rural and essentialist views of the region, represented by more traditional art forms such as painting, as advocated by art critic Marta Traba. My objective, then, is to reassess the category of the political in art, aiming to understand the importance that the vanguards of the sixties (i.e., concretism and conceptual art)
acquired in the Latin American canon in the 1990s-2000s, which will be the focus of chapter 2.

1. The São Paulo Biennial in the 1970s: The crisis of a modernization endeavour

Created in 1951, the São Paulo Biennial was a direct development of the Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo (MAM/SP, 1948), founded by the industrialist Francisco Ciccillo Matarazzo Sobrinho and based on the project of the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA). ¹ At the core of the biennial’s mission was the internationalization of Brazilian art, as its first artistic director Lourival Gomes Machado clearly stated in the 1951 catalogue, citing the biennial’s model, the Venice Biennial.² In 1953 the exhibition was transferred to its current location, the pavilion built by the Brazilian modernist architect Oscar Niemeyer. In 1962, with the help of the art critic Mário Pedrosa, the biennial was separated from the MAM/SP and transformed into an independent and private institution, the FBSP. The move, paradoxically, enabled the newly founded

¹ The foundation of a Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo (MAM/SP) was a plan of the local elite from the early 1940s. Since 1942, intellectual Sérgio Milliet and U.S. magnate and Latin American art collector Nelson Rockefeller, who later donated important works for the MAM/SP’s collection, had been in an intense correspondence regarding the opening of a museum following MoMA’s regulations. Taking leadership of this plan, Ciccillo Matarazzo conceived of the museum’s opening exhibition during his encounter with the director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Karl Nierendorf, in Zurich in 1946. After Nierendorf’s premature death, Ciccillo Matarazzo invited the Belgium art critic Léon Degand to organize the inaugural show and to be the museum’s first director. Cf. Regina Teixeira de Barros. “Revisão de uma história: A criação do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo. 1946-1949” (Master’s thesis, São Paulo: ECA/USP, 2002).

² The biennial’s mission was twofold: 1) to introduce the latest artistic trends to local art professionals, and 2) to place the city of São Paulo on the international art map. The director of both the MAM/SP and the first biennial, Gomes Machado, wrote: “By its very definition, the biennial should fulfill two main tasks: to place the modern art of Brazil not in mere confrontation, but in lively contact, with the art of the rest of the world; and, simultaneously, to try to achieve for São Paulo the position of world artistic center. To have Venice as a reference was unavoidable...” Cf. 1 Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, (São Paulo: Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 1951), 15. Available at: http://issuu.com/bienal/docs/i_bienal_de_s_o_paulo

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private institution to receive public funds from the state and the city of São Paulo. After awarding the main prize for artists including Swiss concretist Max Bill (1951), and showcasing artworks like Pablo Picasso’s Guernica (1953), by the end of the 1960s the biennial was the most important venue for contemporary art in Latin America and had fulfilled its original aims: to put the city of São Paulo on the international map of art exhibitions, and to inform Brazilian artists of the newest trends of art, namely abstraction.

By the mid-1970s, however, this status was under jeopardy, as the FBSP was facing a financial and institutional crisis and was increasingly dependent on public funds.\(^3\) Indeed, the decade initiated with an international boycott of the 10th Biennial in 1969 as a protest against the Brazilian totalitarian regime and its censorship.\(^4\) This international effort to call attention to the abuse by the military regime catalyzed a series of debates that went beyond the immediate Brazilian political situation to denounce the power dynamics imbedded in the internationalist structure of the São Paulo biennial,

\(^3\) Architecture historian Rosa Artigas mentioned the Biennial’s growing dependency on public funds: “If we observe the evolution of the biennial, starting from the first to the tenth edition, that is, the period from 1951 to 1969, we come to the conclusion that Ciccillo [Matarazzo]’s financial contribution was always larger than that of the other businessmen who paid, exclusively, the amount of the prizes awarded. Ciccillo [Matarazzo] initially financed the expenses of the exhibition’s infrastructure—transportation, building, publicity, insurance, the team’s wages—but at each subsequent biennial the government’s participation grew in covering the expenses. The first three exhibitions had half of the expenses covered by the government; the 5th Biennial had two-thirds of its costs covered by governmental funds, and from the sixth edition, the biennials had four-fifths of their expenses covered by the three government levels. This ‘indicates the growing transference of the exhibitions’ economic costs to the State’s governmental arm.’ If, on one hand, the investment of public funds deemed its organization and expansion feasible, on the other hand, the Biennial became increasingly identified as an official event.” Cf. Rosa Artigas, “Ciccillo Matarazzo’s São Paulo,” in 50 anos da bienal de São Paulo, ed. Agnaldo Farias. (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 2001), 66. Available at: http://issuu.com/bienal/docs/bienal.

\(^4\) For more regarding the boycott, see note 15.
described in the following section in this chapter. Exacerbating this internal crisis, by the end of the 1970s, the FBSP had suffered the lingering effects of the national economic crisis and the death of its founder and main organizer, Ciccillo Matarazzo, in 1977.

However, this institutional crisis did catalyze an intellectual effort to alter the show’s original structure based on national representations. Thus, despite the fact that the 1970s were known in Brazil by the epithet of “cultural void” (vazio cultural), the decade was a moment of institutional crisis that culminated in the re-elaboration of the show in the 1980s and 1990s, as will be analyzed in the last chapter of this dissertation. Recently, the use of the term “cultural void” in reference to the Brazil of the 1970s has been questioned, particularly through renewed attention to the work of Vilém Flusser, the Czech philosopher who lived for a long period in Brazil and served as a technical assistant.

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5 As a structure generated in the Nineteenth century to propagate nationalism and colonial enterprises, the biennial format was questioned when these values came under attack—especially in the 1960s-1970s. The year 1968 remains a touchstone since student-led occupations, which started in France but soon became widespread, forced a re-examination of institutions from the Enlightenment, such as the university, the museum, and great exhibitions. Consequently, this period also marks protests against the Triennale di Milano and the Biennale di Venezia (1968). However, when examining the crisis of the FBSP in the 1970s, it is important to consider local problems—especially how they prompted a regionalist perspective—in Brazil and Latin America, as analyzed here. In 1970, contributing to this dialogue, Brazilian art critic Mário Pedrosa wrote the article “Por dentro e por fora das biennais” (Inside and Outside the Biennials). The article is analyzed in the third chapter of this dissertation.

6 Journalist Zuenir Ventura coined the term “vazio cultural” in 1971 to characterize the desolation of the Brazilian cultural landscape during the military dictatorship. Nowadays, most scholars see the 1970s as a moment of critical remodeling of the FBSP. For example, Spricigo explains: “Obviously we cannot consider the ‘cultural void’ of the 1970s in absolute terms. Much of the international artistic production and the experiences with new technologies in this decade were presented to the Brazilian public by the São Paulo biennial and the Museum of Contemporary art of the University of São Paulo. The idea of ‘void,’ which somehow returns to the 28th edition of the biennial is, therefore, linked to the absence of a political project capable of offering viable alternatives to replace the institution’s original project...” Cf. Vinicius Spricigo, Modes of Representation of the São Paulo Biennial: The Passage from Artistic Internationalism to Cultural Globalization (São Paulo: Hedra, 2011), 37. For more about the biennial in the 1970s, see also Isobel Whitelegg, “The Bienal de São Paulo: Unseen/Undone (1969-1981),” Afterall, no. 22 (Autumn/Winter 2009): 106–113. Available at: http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.22/the.bienal.de.so.paulo.unseenundone.19691981.
adviser for the FBSP in 1971.\textsuperscript{7} Therefore, the phrase “cultural void” can be understood as a critique of the effects of Brazilian dictatorship (1964-1985) in the country’s cultural sphere. However, the use of this term erases important debates about the show’s mission and reorganization that were actively taking place in the 1970s and that enabled the creation of the I Latin American Art Biennial in 1978.

Throughout the 1970s, the structure and goals of the São Paulo biennial were at the center of debate. Welcoming institutional critique, the FBSP sponsored and organized the 1971 Round Table of Art Critics, gathering international art professionals including Flusser, Jorge Romero Brest, Umbro Apollonio, Jacques Lassaigne (who had participated in the 1969 boycott against the institution), and Dietrich Mahlow, to discuss the biennial format.\textsuperscript{8}


\textsuperscript{8} Ciccillo Matarazzo wrote about the event to which he invited several critics, including Flusser and Jorge Glusberg, to try to rethink the biennial as a format: “We wish, finally, to express our gratitude for the help of all those who have come to the São Paulo Biennial and our Round Table of Art Critics. And we are certain that with the assistance of those present, new frontiers can be opened not only to our but to all biennials so they can continue to pave the road for new understandings of art.” At the beginning of the text, published in the 1971 catalogue, he stressed the fact that the show was trying to improve and keep pace with the times: “After twenty years of activity, we wish to proclaim our intention to undertake an ample and profound reformulation, considerably more ample and profound than has been undertaken since our first biennial in 1951.” The hyperbolic remark refers not only to the fact that the biennial is a lively event that has been continuously remodeling itself since its opening, but also to the point that the post-boycott edition is even more welcoming of changes. Indeed, Ciccillo Matarazzo made sure to clarify that the institution should not be conflated with the authoritarian government, despite the fact that it relied heavily on public funds: “As defined in our statuses, we are essentially a cultural organization without any political, ideological or religious influences. (...) We wish to emphasize that in the São Paulo Biennial, creative arts has always enjoyed liberty, free of restriction or censure. On no occasion have these been imposed on our activities and exhibitions with any manner of restraint or limitation [sic].” Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, “Presentation
Furthermore, in the 1970s, the institution implemented important structural changes the most important element being the implementation of the *Conselho de Arte e Cultura* (Counsel of Art and Culture, CAC, 1976), which replaced the figures of the artistic director and technical advisers. The results of this change were visible in the 1977 and 1979 shows, organized according to thematic categories that replaced the national school division that followed the Venetian foundational model. Operating as a curatorial group, the CAC was composed of a conglomerate of art professionals who were working *locally*. This geographical factor was crucial in giving the show a Latin American emphasis—not only did the CAC create the only Latin American event ever promoted by the FBSP, but the main prize was also awarded, for the first time, to a Latin American artist during the 14th São Paulo Biennial in 1977.

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9 The CAC substituted the *Assessoria de Artes Visuais* (Counsel of Visual Arts) that was implemented in 1963, composed solely of art critics. Formed by a heterogeneous group of seven art professionals in the 1977 show, the CAC enlarged to a total of nine people in 1979. Among the CAC’s members were artists Olney Krüse and Maria Bonomi, and art critics Olívio Tavares de Araújo and Radha Abramo. In 1981, the collective model of the CAC was substituted for the figure of the chief-curato, as will be explained in chapter 3.  
10 For example, the 1977 show had three major categories: 1) contemporary art production—the only section with awards; 2) anthological exhibitions—a monographic show dedicated to an established artist; and 3) great confrontations—a space in which to display two or more productions in dialogue. The first item was divided into seven themes: “urban archeology,” “nature recuperation,” “catastrophic art,” “video art,” “space poetry,” “the wall for a display for artworks,” and “non codified art.” In the regulations, written by the CAC, it read “...a space for each country is no longer available, replaced (from now on) by groups organized according to theme, anthological and confrontation; each country may participate with a maximum of three propositions, within the same theme or in different themes ...” Cf. “Regulations for the XIV Bienal de São Paulo, in *XIV Bienal de São Paulo* (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 1977), 10. This complex scheme was designed to direct the show towards new media and unconventional art media. A similar division, according to themes and not to national categories, was also meant to organize the I Latin American Biennial in São Paulo. Ultimately, however, the show was displayed according to nationality, since the majority of the participating countries did not assign themes to their artists during the inscription—an issue that will be examined in the third section of this chapter.
The São Paulo Biennial’s Boycott as the Catalyzer of a Regional Debate

In 1969 the São Paulo Biennial received international attention after the Secretariat of São Paulo sent a letter to the show’s organizers, prohibiting them from exhibiting artworks with any erotic or political content. The censorship was viewed as part of larger measures imposed upon Brazilian culture after the coup d’état of 1964. In particular, the repressive Institutional Act no. 5 (AI-5) issued in December 13, 1968 dissolved the National Congress, suppressed the right to Habeas Corpus for political prisoners, and legalized censorship, among other severe measures. The act operated as a watershed in Brazilian history and greatly impacted the country’s cultural sphere and the lives of art professionals. Immediately after the decree was issued, three exhibitions were censored: the II Bahia Biennial (II Bienal da Bahia), the III Salon of Ouro Preto (III Salão de Ouro Preto), and a show with artists selected to participate in the IV Youth Paris Bienal at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro (MAM/RJ). This latter episode culminated with the imprisonment of Niomar Muniz Sodré, president of the MAM/RJ. As a response, Mário Pedrosa, the then-president of the Brazilian Association of Art Critics (Associação Brasileira de Críticos de Arte, ABCA) and vice-president of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA), issued the document “Declaration of the Principles of the Brazilian Art Critics” (Declaração dos Princípios dos Críticos de Arte Brasileiros). The text, published in Brazil and disseminated abroad via ABCA, repudiated any interference and censorship in the arts and rapidly generated an international petition.
for Muniz Sodré’s immediate release. Circulating internationally, the document operated as a precursor to the biennial’s boycott the following year.11

Although technically a private institution not directly linked to Brazil’s authoritarian state, the FBSP was affected as censorship in Brazil became stricter, demonstrated by the letters sent to the biennial jury. In a direct response to this censorship, however, Brazilian art professionals organized the boycott of the 1969 Biennial and withdrew their participation. Hélio Oiticica, who was then living in London, wrote an open letter in French to be circulated among artists and critics explaining the tense political situation in Brazil and asking for the art community to join the embargo. Identifying himself as “the living witness against the São Paulo Biennial this year,” the artist clarified that the show was “completely dominated by the ridiculous rules imposed by the Brazilian fascist regime.” Oiticica further stated that to participate in the exhibition was to do a “disservice that cannot be repaired” as participation “reinforces the Brazilian fascist regime, which imposes censorship and oppression upon those who live there and who are condemned to silence today.” Oiticica concluded his letter with a powerful question: “So, why does France not refuse...”

to participate?” Although the artist targeted France as his main audience, his words had a much broader impact and helped the boycott to reach a larger audience.

On June 16, 1969 French critic Pierre Restany, who had been invited to organize a show for the 10th Biennial and withdrew in solidarity with Brazilian artists, incorporated Oiticica’s statement as part of the dossier titled “Non à la Biennale.” The document’s cover figured a black and white drawing of the map of Latin America covered with crosses, being compressed by a giant hand. The sleeve with a pattern of stripes and stars localize it as the long arm of U.S. imperialism (Figure. 1.1) In addition to Oiticica’s letter, the report included descriptions of the AI-5 decree, of the three closed exhibitions, and a partial list of the intellectuals who had their rights suspended, making clear that censorship of the 10th São Paulo Biennial was not an isolated occurrence. In a gathering in the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, 321 artists and intellectuals signed the dossier. Together with the museum directors Edy De Wilde (Stedelijk Museum) and Ponten Hultén (Moderna Museet), Restany used his contacts to circulate the dossier in both Europe and the U.S. The Smithsonian Institution, which was responsible for organizing U.S. official participation in international exhibitions at the time, chose Gyorgy Kepes, the director of M.I.T.’s Center for Advanced Visual Studies, to put together an exhibit showcasing the innovative use of lightening and technology by U.S. artists. Despite Kepes’ inclination to participate in the biennial as a way to create dialog with other

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12 Calirman published the complete dossier, which included Oiticica’s letter, as an appendix in her book. Cf. Calirman, Brazilian Art under Dictatorship, 155-158.
artists and intellectuals, the artists themselves decided to participate in the boycott.\textsuperscript{13} Kepes’ concern echoed the one sustained by the majority of South American intellectuals. On April 22, 1969, following a meeting in New York, artist Hans Haacke wrote a letter to Kepes explaining his reasons for not participating in the São Paulo Biennial. Not questioning the “humanism and integrity” behind Kepes’s desire to participate in the show, Haacke refused to officially represent the United States, whose government participated “in an immoral war against Vietnam and vigorously sustains fascist regimes in Brazil and other places in the world.” He continued: “At present, all exhibitions under the auspices of the U.S. government are made to promote the image and politics of this government.”\textsuperscript{14} Haacke’s response to Kepes’ request demonstrates that in the U.S., the boycott acquired local tones going beyond the will to express solidarity with Brazilian artists and intellectuals.

The 10\textsuperscript{th} São Paulo Biennial, known as the “boycott biennial,” was inaugurated with only a small fraction of the invited artists and countries: in addition to the withdrawal of individual artists, including David Siqueiros, official representations from several countries, including France, Holland, Sweden, Greece, Italy, Venezuela (which requested the removal of artworks one day before the inauguration), and the U.S. took

\textsuperscript{13} James Green gives a detailed account of the U.S. boycott of the São Paulo Biennial. See: James N. Green, We Cannot Remain Silent: Opposition to the Brazilian Dictatorship in the United States (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 117-124.

part in the embargo.\textsuperscript{15} In the Atlantic North, the protest focused on the denunciation of the repressive regime in Brazil, spotlighting the dire consequences for the cultural sphere of the country and for artists and intellectuals being arrested, tortured, and forced into exile—as the letter by Oiticica, himself exiled in 1969, exemplified. In Latin America, the discussion in the aftermath of the boycott created a lively debate questioning the authoritarian and colonial nature of the FBSP. In the Americas, the boycott opened a debate about the politics of the São Paulo Biennial and its significance for the region that compelled Latin American artists and intellectuals to position themselves in relation to the event and its consequences, as art critic Aracy Amaral noted.\textsuperscript{16} In Brazil, as well as in other Latin American countries, many critics and artists

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\textsuperscript{15} Aracy Amaral described the international response to the boycott in a 1970 text: “The Ministry of Foreign Relations [in Brazil] did not allow Jacques Lassaigne, President of the Paris Biennale, to be the French delegate since he had signed a petition against the imprisonment of Mrs. Niomar Muniz Sodré, president of the Museum of Modern Art in Rio. The incidents started to cross borders. In France, at a meeting at the Musée d’Art Moderne, 321 artists and intellectuals signed, on June 16, the manifest Non à La Biennale, based on eye witness accounts and documentation of Brazilian censorship. The boycott became international and the list of artists who are advocates of the movement was circulated anonymously in several countries via postal mail. De Wilde, director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, as well as all the artists he had selected for the Biennial, joined the movement; Ponten Hultén in Sweden, present in the Paris debate, withdrew Swedish participation; after Pol Bury and Pierre Restany withdrew their exhibition Art and Technology, the artists Takis, Le Parc, Martial Rayssse, de Rosny, Hans Haacke, Kowalski, Kosice, César, and Marta Minujin also withdrew. Several U.S. artists working with curator Gyorgy Kepes withdrew in solidarity with the Brazilian artists and in protest to the restrictions the U.S. delegation is submitted. However, sculptor Charles Frazier (who refused to take part in the boycott) wrote Professor Kepes, saying that if the artist delegation had not been suspended, ‘its voice would have been heard all over the world, repudiating the Brazilian government.’ Positions like this, however, weakened opposition to the Biennial.” Amaral added that countries like the former USSR, Yugoslavia, Venezuela, and Chile withdrew their participation, France sent only a tapestry exhibition, and isolated artists including Siqueiros, Lygia Clark, and Hélio Oiticica joined the embargo. Cf. Amaral, “Boycott à X Bienal: extensão e significado,” 401.

\textsuperscript{16} Amaral closed her 1970 article about the 10\textsuperscript{th} boycott with a quote from the poet Ferreira Gullar stating that despite the fact that artists are a non-united class, they had to manifest themselves due to the seriousness of the situation. See Amaral, “Boycott à X Bienal: extensão e significado,” 405. Surely, these manifestations were not in unanimity. For example, in 1969, Argentinean curator Silvia Ambrosini, who would co-organize the 1978 I Latin American Biennial in São Paulo, stated that it would be more productive to send artworks that could make a critical statement than simply withdrawing from the biennial. See Silvia
refused to take part in the show’s embargo as they thought it detrimental to a region already lacking in important art exhibitions. For example, Argentinean artist Victor Margariños sent a letter to the São Paulo Biennial confirming his participation in the show, stating that “we cannot forget the cultural dictatorships of New York and Paris.”

Expressing a similar view and declaring that the biennial should not be associated with the authoritarian government but to the efforts of its founder Francisco Matarazzo, the Argentinean critic and artist Jorge Glusberg declared that to take part in the embargo was a crime, “especially for Latin America, which can actively participate in the biennial due to its geographical location.” In the Americas, therefore, the boycott prompted reactions that highlighted the cultural politics in the area by calling attention to cultural imperialism and the lack of opportunities for artists living away from international art centers. This climate helps shed light on the decision of the physicist and art critic Mário Schenberg—a fierce antagonist of the authoritarian government who was arrested by the military seven days after the coup-d’état in 1964 due to his involvement with the communist party and was compulsorily let go from his academic position at the University of São Paulo in 1969—to participate in the 10th Biennial as part of its jury and to organize a special room with Brazilian artworks named Novos Valores (New Values).

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19 Schenberg’s name was cited in the dossier “Non à la Biennale” as one of the Brazilian intellectuals whose rights were suppressed after the AI-5.
Thus, although the 1969 boycott included an international grouping of countries involving U.S., Latin American, and European artists working together against totalitarian acts, it ultimately prompted a regional discussion about the role and responsibilities of Latin American artists and critics.

**Creating Latin Americanness from NY: The Contrabienal**

The success of the 1969 boycott inspired further criticism of the São Paulo Biennial and debate about the situation of the Latin American artist. The publication *Contrabienal* (Counterbiennial), also know as the “printed biennial,” can be viewed as the moment in which this criticism gained a regional inflection, focusing on the critique of the São Paulo Biennial’s internationalizing politics and its misrepresentation of Latin America.

The book was organized in New York in 1971 by Latin American artists and intellectuals affiliated with the *Museo Latinoamericano* (Latin American Museum) and its subsequent splinter group, the *Movimiento de independencia cultural latinoamericana* (Latin American Culture Independence Movement, MICLA). Formed as part of the protest against the political direction of the Center for Inter-American Relations (CIAR), the present-day

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20 The CIAR, presently the Americas Society, was established in 1965 as “the first premier national not-for-profit institution dedicated exclusively to educating the United States public about all facets of their Western Hemisphere neighbors” — namely, Latin America, the Caribbean and Canada. Arnold Belkin, Leonel Góngora and other artists first idealized the *Museo* at the end of 1970 in order to compose a collective letter for the director of the CIAR gallery, Hans van Weeren-Griek. The artists were unhappy with the CIAR’s politics and believed their pledge would be more effective if framed as an institutional letter rather than as an artists’ letter. Van Weeren-Griek, persuaded by this request, contacted the CIAR board to expose the demands, which included the incorporation of Chicano and Puerto Rican activities in its cultural programing. After realizing that the demands would not be met, Van Weeren-Griek resigned from his position. Although the action did not produce the expected result, it generated an unprecedented level of collective action in the Latin American community living abroad. Later that same year, the *Museo* split in two different groups: one faction aimed at promoting the artwork of its members that kept the original name, and another, more radical one, later named *Micla*, that believed that promoting anonymous and
Americas Society, both groups were composed primarily of South American artists living in New York. According to Uruguayan artist Luis Camnitzer, their main aim was, besides creating special services for Latin American artists, “to create a center for Latin American cultural dissemination on a non-official level; to report on cultural repression in Latin American countries; and to take action against institutions that misrepresent or ineptly represent Latin American culture.” Camnitzer and Argentine artist Liliana Porter, who were part of Micla, had together with Venezuelan artist José Guillermo Castillo and U.S. artist Sharon Arndt previously formed another politically oriented group, the New York Graphic Workshop. The Workshop promoted printmaking (as well as the multiple) as a strategy able to challenge the private collective actions directed at cultural issues was preferential over individual art. Both groups jointly organized the Contrabienal publication: they invited a number of Latin American artists to participate in the book, and the Museo made a general call for submissions of artworks or textual statements related to either the biennial or the repression in Brazil. They also organized a raffle to buy a small offset press to print the book. As the split between Museo and Micla was made official during preparations for the Contrabienal, each group published a separate introduction. The publication drained the funds of both groups, which, shortly after, both dissolved. See: Luis Camnitzer, “The Museo Latinoamericano and MICLA,” in A Principality of its Own: 40 Years of Visual Arts in the Americas Society, eds. José Luis Falconi and Gabriela Rangel. (New York: Americas Society, 2006), 216–29.

The foundational document of the Museo was signed in February 1971. The original group included Arnold Belkin, Leandro Katz, Rubens Gerchman, Leonel Góngora, Luis Molinari Flores, Alejandro Puente, and Rolando Peña. They were later joined by Luis Camnitzer, Eduardo Costa, Liliana Porter, Teodoro Maus, Carla Stellweg, and Luis Wells, among several others. A month later, Wells, Camnitzer, Stellweg, Porter, and Maus formed the Micla group.

appropriation of art and the art gallery system by fostering collective work. According to curator and art critic Carla Stellweg, who was also part of *Micla*, the New York Graphic Workshop served as a springboard for more socially oriented art making and therefore informed the 1971 experience.\(^{24}\) Developed in opposition to the CIAR and its representation of a stereotyped Latin America, the two groups—*Museo* and *Micla*—formed by artists from several nationalities, conceived of Latin America as a political, transnational, and critical region. From this perspective, Latin America became a territory whose (artistic) identity was postulated on shared political goals, which went beyond the art world. These goals were hard to fulfill, as Stellweg noted:

> a lot of artists were in no position to protest and confront the establishment, either because their immigration documents were insufficient or because of financial and personal pressures. Nevertheless, for over a year, the group called attention not only to Latin American artists but also to Latin America in general.\(^{25}\)

The 1971 publication *Contrabienal*, in accordance with this objective,\(^{26}\) openly defined itself as the expansion of the 1969 Biennial boycott, encouraging artists to boycott the 1971 biennial in São Paulo and to submit their artworks for print in the book instead. Thus, the artists planned that the *Contrabienal*—building on the experiences of

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\(^{24}\) Camnitzer related the closure of the Graphic Workshop to his and Porter’s participation in Micla. According to the artist, their participation created an awkward situation as Castillo was working for the Center of Inter-American Relations: “The conflict of interest ended the workshop. José Guillermo [Castillo] later returned to Caracas and became partner of the Conkright Gallery, which subsequently became the Adler Castillo Gallery. For a while, Liliana [Porter] and I were represented by the gallery…” Ibid., 60.


\(^{26}\) This discussion is particularly important as a genealogy of Frederico Morais’ critique of the FBSP published in 1979 in the book *Artes plásticas na América Latina: do transe ao transitório*, which will be discussed in this chapter. See the introduction written by the Micla for the Contrabienal publication: Micla, “Introduction,” in *Contrabienal*, eds. Luis Wells, Luis Camnitzer, Carla Stellweg, Liliana Porter, and Teodoro Maus, (New York, 1971). Accessed via ICAA-MFAH Documents Project, Document 766001. The imprisonment of Mário Pedrosa, Brazil’s most influential art critic, in 1971 also prompted new international reactions against the dictatorship.
the New York Graphic Workshop—would operate as a vehicle for the democratization of art rather than serving as merely a substitute exhibition. In keeping with the goal of fomenting critical regionalism, the publication’s primary aim was to incite cross-cultural and horizontal collaborations across Latin America, therefore challenging the FBSP’s emphasis on North Atlantic art movements. Indeed, in the letter inviting artists to take part in the publication, the Contrabienal organizers questioned the pertinence of the São Paulo Biennial, which was viewed as a colonial enterprise. Micla and Museo also rebuked any cultural act organized by dictatorial governments and urged artists to categorically refuse to participate in such events.\textsuperscript{27} For them, participating in the São Paulo Biennial was understood as a way to “validate Brazil’s military regime and give it cultural prestige.”\textsuperscript{28}

Ultimately, the goals of the Contrabienal were twofold: to defy the art world’s colonial apparatus of galleries, museums, and biennials by democratizing art, and to gather Latin American artists and intellectuals under a common regional fight against dictatorial regimes and the lingering effects of coloniality. These two aims were interrelated, since in this common regional fight, art was viewed as inseparable from politics and as needing to be dictated by ideology and ethics rather than the art market.

Argentinean painter Luis Felipe Noé’s contribution (Figure 1.2)—a signed drawing of an

\textsuperscript{27} This letter instigated a long debate with Jorge Glusberg, director of the Centro de Arte y Comunicación (Art and Communication Center, CAyC) in Buenos Aires, who was accused of serving as one of the official promoters of the FBSP event. See “Estimado compañero,” in Contrabienal, eds. Luis Wells, Luis Camnitzer, Carla Stellweg, Liliana Porter, and Teodoro Maus. (New York, 1971). Accessed via ICAA-MFAH Documents Project, Document 766014.

\textsuperscript{28} Camnitzer, “The Museo Latinoamericano and MICLA,” 222.
academic painting in a caricature fashion—embodied these two aims. In his drawing, the artist inserted a text in which he qualified the construction of a Latin American identity as the “only great art of Latin America.” Writing the word “revolution” in capital letters, he openly urged art to be perceived as “revolutionary acts.” As he wrote in the piece, the São Paulo Biennial should be transformed into “a popular assembly.”

Therefore, the crafting of a Latin American identity was itself a work of art.

In 1971, Noé, who was part of the Nueva Figuración movement, was back in Buenos Aires after a three-year period (1965-1968) in New York, where he had shared an apartment with Camnitzer. During his sojourn abroad, he wrote the essay “La responsabilidad del artista que se va de América Latina y la del que se queda” (“The responsibility of the artist who leaves Latin America and that of the one who stays”, 1966), in which he reflected on the issue of Latin American identity. The text strongly advocated the creation of an expanded idea of Latin America:

To create roots does not mean that Latin Americans should “stay” in their countries; it means much more. We must start to elaborate—within our means, within our continent—a cultural adventure. Our cultural adventure will have a large impact in that it will start to break down borders. It is much more pleasant to think that we are “making” Latin America than that we are simply affirming a localism.

This cultural adventure conceived of by Noé is a creation that does not need to be confined within the national borders that comprise the region, but can occupy the entire


31 Ibid.
Latin American continent. His 1967 text, therefore, anticipated the goals of Museo and Micla to create a communal Latin American identity from the faraway location of New York.

*Contrabienal* opened with two different introductions, one written by Museo and the other by Micla. The latter is worth quoting at length, as it clearly formulated a critical and political regional Latin American identity. Criticizing artists that had agreed to participate in the São Paulo show, the Micla collective wrote:

Moreover, for many who do not perceive of Latin America as one single country, Brazil and its terror are distant. As an artist who did not want to collaborate [in the Contrabienal] wrote: “the lack of telephones here in Mexico is more important than the torture that happens 10,000 kilometers away.” MICLA does not want this distance to disappear. The means that we advocate is nothing more than a way to find individuals and groups all over the continent who can unite in a common conscience, helping to inform and reveal our realities. Brazil is only one of the “vanguard” that can reach us all; the São Paulo Biennial, one day, can be the biennial of each one of us. That is why it is not in vain to exhaustively repeat the denunciation that “cultural activities” that simultaneously colonize our people, act as embellishments for bloody dictatorships that attempt to hide their daily crimes, indicating that “everything is fine.” Moreover, the COUNTERBIENNIAL wants to achieve something else. Until now, the biographies and chronicles register only the awardees and the participation in the type of activity, such as the São Paulo Biennial. This COUNTERBIENNIAL is inaugurating a new way of documenting the negatives of complicity, valorizing moral position above sale and collaborationism. The additions to this document, as far as MICLA is concerned, are neither open to aesthetic criticism or comparison. Its presence only indicates the election in a moral system, the intention to bury crime and corruption. Latin America has millions of artists. The fact that only a small fraction are present in this publication demonstrates the importance and the urgency of this effort. If all artists were present, this publication would not be necessary. The São Paulo Biennial and its related institutions would not exist.  


Imagining a new regional identity catalyzed by a common fight, the *Contrabienal* conceived of Latin America as a territory with different realities composing a single
unity, constituting “our” reality. Thus, the cohesive Latin American regional artistic identity constructed in the publication was imminently geopolitical—and partially interchangeable with a Third World one. In this scenario, the São Paulo Biennial was the ideal target of Museo and Micla due to its international art policy, which perpetuated an attitude inherited from colonial times in which North Atlantic artworks were preferred over those from Latin American. Adding to this colonial attitude was the recent interference of the totalitarian government. Before discussing the concept of vanguard art, it is important to examine how Micla delineated it. Brazil and the São Paulo Biennial are spotlighted as “one of the vanguards that can reach us all.” It is possible to suggest, therefore, that the concept of “vanguard” is associated with an urban and modern Latin America epitomized by the biennial. Moreover, this modern and vanguardist art is not an undesirable goal for Latin American artists as long as it is redefined as a regional project—becoming an exhibition “of each one of us.” This understanding of the notion of vanguard explains the negative repercussions of the I Latin American Biennial in 1978 among local artists, as the theme (“Myths and Magic”) promoted a rural and traditional vision of Latin America.

Fully inserted in the spirit of the time, the Contrabienal publication is simultaneously an artwork/exhibition in its own right, a political protest, and a form of institutional critique. The work, part of a popular format in the late 1960s and early 1970s, can be easily inserted in an international artistic genealogy that includes curator

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Seth Siegelaub’s series of 1968 publications/exhibits that democratized art as the celebrated \textit{Xerox Book}. This genealogy has helped to associate the \textit{Contrabienal} with conceptual art, further reinforcing the conflation of the political in Latin America with conceptualism, which will be examined in the next chapter.\footnote{As will be discussed in chapter 2, art critics conflated the political with CONCEPTUALISM in the 1990s, especially Mari Carmen Ramirez who identified it as Latin America’s most important artistic contribution due to its political potentiality. Morais also supported the premise of a socially engaged Latin American art in his curatorial project for the 1997 Mercosul Biennial.} It is important to note, however, that the publication involved artists working in diverse styles—including neo-figuration, pop, abstraction, and conceptualism. The restriction to the black and white format of the print—with the exception of the work by Luis Wells reproduced on the cover and significantly tinged in red—helped to create a false aesthetic unity among the artworks.\footnote{See Lukin, “Contrabienal,” 78.}

(Figure 1.3)

In the essay “Magnet New-York,” Stellweg notes that despite attempts to distribute the publication commercially, \textit{Contrabienal} was primarily circulated underground, distributed among the networks of the organizing groups. Therefore, the book had a strong impact among Latin American artists and intellectuals, especially in the Southern Cone area, the region where most of the organizers came from.\footnote{In the 1960s and 1970s, several Latin American artists were awarded fellowships by the Guggenheim Museum and lived in New York, including Oiticica, who stayed from 1972 to 1978. The experience of diaspora, especially of political exile, albeit not directly discussed in this dissertation, was an important factor in building a Latin American cultural identity.} \textit{Contrabienal}, a 114-page book with nearly 500 copies, published the work of 64 artists across Latin America, including Mathias Goeritz and Rufino Tamayo from Mexico,
Lorenzo Homar from Puerto Rico, Léon Ferrari and Julio Le Parc from Argentina, Clemente Padín and Antonio Frasconi from Uruguay, and Oswaldo Viteri from Ecuador. In order to avoid punishment from the military, Brazilian artists were not invited to participate in the publication—with the exception of Rubens Gerchman who was living in New York at the time and was part of the Museo.

In addition to a dossier containing information about governmental torture and murder in Brazil, Contrabienal included both collective letters of support to artists living under totalitarian regimes signed by 112 other art professionals and the polemical correspondence between U.S. artist Gordon Matta-Clark and Argentine artist and theoretician Jorge Glusberg. The Argentine, who was the director of the Centro de Arte y Comunicación (Art and Communication Center, CAyC), was organizing an international conceptual art show entitled Arte de Sistemas (Art Systems) for the 1971 São Paulo Biennial. The exhibition was in-line with CAyC’s aggressive internationalization policy of presenting local contemporary art as an integral and contemporaneous part of the international vanguard. Glusberg intended to gather artists across the Americas to take

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37 The group CAyC, also know as Grupo de los Trece (Group of the Thirteen), was formed in 1970 in Buenos Aires; the term arte de sistemas (systems art) would become the CAyC’s trademark the group’s end in 1994. The group’s main purpose was to support and foster experimentation and interdisciplinary research through eliciting the participation of artists, architects, musicians, mathematicians, semioticians, and other professionals. In 1978, Glusberg defined the term arte de sistemas as “the attempt to develop the necessary intersection between a group of select discourses and the concretization of a conceptual model apt to develop a reading of the ontological process of these discourses.” See: Jorge Glusberg, “Sobre la Vanguardia Argentina: En qué consiste el Arte de Sistemas,” La Opinión, Buenos Aires, (October 2, 1978): 15. See also the official speech given during the inauguration of the 1971 exhibition Arte de Sistemas. Guillermo Whitelow, “Discurso inaugural de la muestra Arte de Sistemas en el Museo de Arte Moderno,” Buenos Aires, (July 19, 1971), (MAMBA archive).

38 Arte de Sistemas, a show featuring more than 100 international artists, opened in the Museum of Modern Art in Buenos Aires in July 1971. Artists included Vito Acconci, Arakawa, John Baldessari, Robert Barry,
part in his *Arte de Sistemas*, which would be inaugurated at the biennial and then travel to Buenos Aires. On May 19, 1971, Matta-Clark wrote a letter-manifesto urging artists to continue boycotting the São Paulo Biennial, questioning the intentions of Glusberg’s show and proposing an alternative show in Chile, the homeland of his father, Roberto Matta. He started his plea stating that after 1964 the Military Junta “began to drag that Biennal and an increasing number of social freedoms down the road of dictatorial repression.” In such a repressive context, dialog was not possible, Matta-Clark explained:

> Given that all institutions and all individuals come under the dictatorship, it seems gratuitous nonsense to think that an “independent” exhibition could be organized there in September. Instead of supporting the cause of free exchange of public information, the works exhibited in São Paulo will shamefully boost the totalitarian government and its allies.\(^39\)

With this argument Matta-Clark nullified positions sustained by intellectuals such as Kepes and Glusberg who argued that it would be better to attend the biennial and try to converse with the Brazilians artists. For the young U.S. artist, the solution to creating a transcontinental dialog would be a show in Chile, which was, at the time, a free democracy under president Salvador Allende. Such a show would create “a strategic forum in which artists can once again show their works in a free interchange with the

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peoples of South America." In the letter, which Matta-Clark sent to the art magazine *Artforum*, the author also listed the artists who had refused to participate in the São Paulo show and asked artists interested in participating in a show in Chile to contact him. However, the Chilean show never took place.

Matta-Clark’s open letter resulted in the withdrawal of the *Arte de Sistemas* exhibit from the 1971 São Paulo Biennial, despite Glusberg’s written response maintaining his opinion that artists should take part in the event in order to “have a dialogue with artists repressed by the dictatorship.” In the end, Glusberg’s show happened only in Buenos Aires. The CAyC leader, therefore, reiterated the position sustained in 1969 when he defended Argentine participation in the boycotted show.

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40 Gordon Matta-Clark, together with artist Jeffrey Lew, traveled to Santiago, Chile, in September 1971 after opening their collective project “Food” in New York. At first, the travel was a search for Roberto Matta, as his son was concerned that he might be in danger. Matta, however, was in Paris. The director of the Museo de Bellas Artes, taking advantage of the fact that the building was closed for renovation, gave the U.S. artists space to make installations. The fact that his first travel to Santiago took place after he had written the letter demonstrates that Matta-Clark was not as connected to Chile as one might suppose. See Lew’s description of the travel in *Gordon Matta-Clark: A Retrospective*, (IVAM Centro Julio González, Valencia; Musée Cantini, Marseille, 1993), 370. Thomas Crown also describes the episode, highlighting the fact that it inserted Matta-Clark into a prestigious, transnational network. See: Thomas Crow, “Gordon Matta-Clark,” in *Gordon Matta-Clark*, ed. Corinne Diserens. (London; New York: Phaidon, 2003), 43-44.

41 The artists cited by Matta-Clark were Carl Andre, Robert Morris, Walter de Maria, Hans Haacke, Mel Bochner, Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier, Vito Acconci, Lee Jaffee, Christo, Terry Fox and Les Levine. Matta-Clark’s letter had wide repercussions in the art world. For example, European art dealer Ileana Sonnabend wrote to Matta-Clark, asking him for a copy of the letter, as one of the artists she represented, Pier Paolo Calzolari, had expressed second thoughts about participating after reading it.


43 According to Camnitzer, members of the Museo resented the fact that Glusberg, in a visit to NY, tried to persuade the Latin American community to participate in the show by implying that by exhibiting side-by-side with “big stars,” they would profit from their fame. Members of Museo and *Mida*, in addition to not wanting to participate in a show in Argentina, whose political situation was rapidly climaxing towards dictatorship, commented on the “inappropriateness of Glusberg’s arguments with regards to piggybacking.
Glusberg had an opportunity to share this experience with the São Paulo Biennial organizers. He made a contribution in the aforementioned Round Table of Art Critics promoted by the FBSP in the same year, highlighting that none of the emerging artists working with experimental art practices was represented in the biennial, and advising the organizers to focus on a younger generation of artists if they “wanted to survive as an institution.”

Glusberg’s dedication to the biennial paid off, since in 1977 CAyC’s collective installation Signos em Eco-Sistemas Artificiais (Signs in Artificial Eco-Systems) was awarded the Prêmio Itamaraty (Itamaraty Award).

Amaral, in her review of the 1971 biennial, denounced the fact that the FBSP later censored the transcription of the lectures of the Round Table of Art Critics that the institution had initially circulated. In the text, she highlighted Glusberg’s talk as the seminar’s most valuable contribution. Aracy Amaral, “XI Bienal: Primeira visita—‘protótipos’ e ‘múltiplos’,” in Arte e meio artístico, 412.

The award generated polemics among the participating artists. The biennial spotlighted the theme “Ecology and Art;” Brazil-based Polish-born artist Frans Kraijberg, one of the first artists in the country to direct his artwork towards ecological concerns, won a secondary prize for his sculpture made of wood and roots. Kraijberg, however, considering the monetary prize insignificant and incompatible with his artistic trajectory, refused the award and withdrew his work from the biennial. Moreover, Kraijberg accused CAyC of being composed of rich artists who counted on the support of a wealthy patron (Glusberg), who had financed their expensive environmental piece. According to Kraijberg, this financial advantage made it impossible for other artists to compete for the prize. Art historian Isobel Whitelegg wrote about the episode: “Press reports suggest that Kraijberg was not alone in his antipathy, anonymously citing commentators who had suggested that the prize was an official favour to Argentina (‘country of a friendly regime’) or
2. The Legitimization of an Idea: The 1975 Texas symposium and the construction of a regional identity for art in Latin America

Titled Speak out! Charla! Bate-Papo!: Contemporary Art and Literature in Latin America, the 1975 symposium hosted at the University of Texas in Austin was the pivotal academic event in the 1970s for the academic legitimation of Latin American art as a constructed regional identity. Argentinean critic Damián Bayón organized the three-day meeting that gathered intellectuals, artists, and art historians from across the Americas to debate the formulation of a common artistic identity for the continent. Although physically located in the Northern part of the Americas and including U.S. specialists, the event was geared toward a Latin American public, as Brazilian critic Aracy Amaral noted. More than representing an effort to construct an expanded and collaborative Latin American artistic identity as did the Contrabienal, the academic symposium aimed to clarify an old ontological problem: did Latin America, with its colonial heritage and precarious context, have an original aesthetic expression? The debate about originality revolved around the concept of “vanguard art” and whether the existence of an artistic avant-garde was possible or even desirable in an underdeveloped region. As analyzed below, the concern was not only whether a local conception of avant-garde existed, but also if it would be politically effective as an aesthetic program in times of decolonization and dictatorships. Discussion about the nature (and utility of) the political vanguard had asking ‘what would happen if they awarded it to Etsedron [a Brazilian group that participated in the show], for example, and showed the whole world a vision of Brazilian misery?’ See Whitelegg, “Brazil, Latin America: The World,” Third Text, vol. 26 no. 1 (2012): 137.

47 Aracy Amaral, “Simpósio de Austin” in Arte e meio artístico, 438.
been ongoing in Brazil since the coup-d’état in 1964 and the alleged failure of the Concretist vanguards to reinforce modernity and democracy in the country.

**Establishing Latin American Art as Theory**

To focus the discussion in Texas on the formation of an artistic regional identity, the presenters at Austin were given a set of questions beforehand: 1) “Does present-day Latin American art exist as a distinct expression? If it does, on what terms?”; 2) “Can an artist [display] independently of foreign interests?”; 3) “What operative models does the Latin American artist have at his disposal: international currents, indigenous movements or other resources?”; 4) “To what extent do Latin American artists respond to their immediate circumstances: community, aesthetic resources and others?”; 5) “Does the universal complaint about a lack of a truly professional art criticism in Latin American countries compel the artist to seek feedback elsewhere?” The response to these questions, as to the very idea of what constituted Latin America, was not unanimous or free of contradictions. Bayón, for instance, in an attempt to codify a common identity for Latin American visual arts and architecture, had just delineated a unified narrative for the arts of the region in his *Aventura Plástica de Hispanoamérica* (Plastic Adventure of Spanish America, 1974), which, nevertheless, excluded Brazil and parts of the Caribbean, South, and Central America, as evinced by the title.

The meeting in Austin helped to configure a regional network, gathering intellectuals who, despite living on the same continent, interacted little. Moreover, differently from Bayón’s book, the symposium inserted Brazil as part of the reflection
about Latin American identity, as Brazilians Aracy Amaral and Frederico Morais participated side-by-side with artists, museum professionals, and critics including Marta Traba (Argentinean-Colombian), Octavio Paz (Mexican), José Luis Cuevas (Mexican), Fernando de Szyszlo (Peruvian), Rufino Tamayo (Mexican), Rita Eder (Mexican), Dore Ashton (U.S.), Jacqueline Barnitz (U.S.), Barbara Duncan (U.S.), Leonel Gongora (Colombian), Alejandro Otero (Venezuelan), Carlos Cruz-Diez (Venezuelan), and Manuel Felguérez (Mexican), among others. Parallel to the discussions, Bayón organized together with Argentine art critic and painter Kazuya Sakai the show 12 artistas latinoamericanos de hoy (12 Latin American Artists of Today) with a catalogue featuring texts translated into English that had been previously published in the Mexican journal Plural, edited by Paz. The symposium set a common agenda for Latin American art critics and visual theorists across the Americas—voiced by Mexico-based Peruvian critic Juan Acha, who made a public plea for the creation of autochthonous theories in Latin America. In his words: “We are not searching for our identity, but we are searching for the self-awareness of our identity, that is, the search for concepts that will help us to understand our identity, which is not European of a Western type, i.e. unitary, but plural.” In such a context, the creation of new art historical theories was vital, as they would legitimize the identity of Latin American art as plural and still identifiable.

48 The artists were the Argentines Marcelo Bonevardi and Luis Tomasello; the Brazilian Sérgio Camargo; the Colombian Edgar Negret; the Mexicans (or Mexico-based) Manuel Felguérez, Gunther Gerzso, Brian Nissen, Vicente Rojo, Roger von Gutten, and Francisco Toledo; the Peruvian Fernando de Szyszlo; and the Venezuelan Carlos Cruz-Diez.

49 Damián Bayón (org.), El artista latinoamericano y su identidad (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1977), 43.
Building a Common Agenda for Visual Latinamericanism: Juan Acha’s presentation

Acha opened his talk by answering the symposium’s first question—“Does present-day Latin American art exist as a distinct expression?”—with a vehement affirmation. In his presentation, he denounced “[t]he lack of an independent, realistic, and developed visual thought that would nourish artworks and ideals with its reflection and develop a Latin American substrata for the esthetic uniqueness of our artists.” Thus, what he termed “visual thought” in Latin America should not only promote original works and ideas, but also “put an end to the mistaken concept of limiting art to artists, in order to go beyond the specific aspects of each work and approach art as a sociocultural phenomenon.”

Art, as a sociocultural phenomenon, should therefore transcend the art world and serve as the nexus from which to imagine a Latin America united by social and cultural realities. In other words, a socio-political notion of art could be the initial point from which to configure a regional identity. Following this rationale, Acha intended to establish a Latin American visual criticality able to sustain local production with more than the dictation of merely aesthetical paradigms—as made clear by the addition of the word “ideals” next to “artworks.” This local visual criticality, therefore, would be, as the very artworks it analyzed, non-derivative, critical, and unique to the region. As a result, the new visual Latin Americanism would simultaneously include

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analyses of the poetics, the politics, and the materiality of the regional artwork in order to foment a socially engaged, namely political, art. With this vision, art history was not separated from other fields, but was included in core disciplines like sociology, anthropology, and political science.

In Austin, Acha distinguished himself by supporting the uniqueness of Latin American art—a uniqueness that would be enhanced if notions of art and art production were no longer separated from the social. In his vision, the political becomes a marker of differentiation for Latin America. Acha’s 1975 plea for local theories, however, more than anticipating a trend in the region, can be understood as a summary of an already ongoing activity. For instance, in the beginning of that year, the FSBP, under the leadership of Oscar Landmann, the Russian-born, Brazil-based collector of Pre-Columbian art, had discussed the possibility of transforming the São Paulo Biennial into a regional show, an idea that would be realized three years later. Also by 1975, Argentinean-born Colombian art critic Marta Traba had already published Dos décadas vulnerables en las artes plásticas latinoamericanas, 1950 – 1970 (Two Vulnerable Decades in the Latin American Plastic Arts, 1950-1970, 1973)—possibly her most influential work.

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51 About criticism in Latin America, see Fabiana Serviddio, Arte y crítica en Latinoamérica durante los años setenta (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila Editores, 2012).

52 In 1975, Oscar Landmann intended to unite several biennials of Latin American art taking place on the continent into a single exhibition, including: the Coltejer Biennial in Medellín, Colombia; the Latin American Biennial in Córdoba, Argentina; and the Grabado Biennial in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The proposal was utopic since not only did it presuppose that these manifestations would concentrate their efforts in São Paulo but it also ignored the fact that each show had a different objective, e.g., the show in San Juan was dedicated to prints, the one in Cordoba to painting, and the Coltejer welcomed non-traditional media. Landmann was against avant-garde art and a fierce collector of Pre-Columbian artifacts. Although he was not the FBSB president in 1978, it is possible that his vision of Latin American art influenced the show. See the article “Landmann: concepção conservadora,” O Globo, November 17, 1975.
National Specificity, Anti-Imperialistic Politics, and the Dismissal of the Vanguard: Marta Traba’s presentation

In her 1973 book, Traba postulated a common (art) theory for the Latin American region, giving prominence to sociopolitical analyses of the local socio-historical context. Traba examined the consequences of U.S. imperialism in the area, writing about the impact of globalization in the regional art context and associating the effect with an economic philosophy highly informed by dependency theory. More importantly, Traba used this contextual analysis to expand upon her concept of arte de resistencia (art of resistance), employing a theoretical scheme that, while drawing extensively upon European theory (Herbert Marcuse, Theodor W. Adorno, Pierre Bordieu, Umberto Eco, and Claude Lévi-Strauss), primarily applied local epistemology to compose a unified scenario for Latin America. She deployed Brazilian sociologist Darcy Ribeiro’s typology of Latin America that classified its countries according to their openness to or rejection of external influences. Based on this distinction, Traba postulated an art theory that, while regional, kept fundamental national differences. To her, countries that resisted coloniality were simultaneously promoting an “art of resistance” in opposition to those that mimetically subscribed to international vanguard movements, losing their specificity. In Traba’s regional vision, Colombia emerged as the model for Latin America. Exemplary of an art of resistance, Traba spotlighted Colombia due to its

53 For example, Traba wrote: “The area occupied by the middle classes of an invaded culture (or ‘dominated’ as Darcy Ribeiro puts it) is fundamentally different from an independent culture. Not only is it a narrow formal field, conditioned by its relation to the imported model, but it is also a field that is inherently weak: sapped by the mistrust of the public, the insecurity and the complexes of the artist, and the lack of preparation of the critics.” Marta Traba, Dos décadas vulnerables en las artes plásticas latinoamericanas: 1950-1970 (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2005), 154-5.
emphasis on drawing, its constant reference to Amerindian myths, and the presence of “top-quality” artists like Obregón, Botero, and Beatriz González. More urban and industrialized countries, including Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela, figured in the opposite side of the spectrum, characterized by their dependence on foreign paradigms and their will to be part of the international “vanguard” decried by Traba.

In her 1975 talk, Traba reinforced the premises she had laid out in her book, keeping the strict dualistic separation in which a vanguard art (identified as “body-art,” “funk-art,” and “mec-art,” and associated with names like Yves Klein, Pietro Manzoni, and Rudolf Schwarzkogler) was heavily criticized as pathological. She continued with the medical metaphor, adding that on penetrating the territory, cultural colonization created its “own antibodies”—namely a Latin American art of resistance. This art of resistance existed only internally and was generally ignored by the cosmopolitan art world—a premise that led Traba to affirm that Latin American art did not exist as a distinct expression.

Nevertheless, the art of resistance “fulfill[ed] an epistemological function and a political service.” In this point, Traba’s project intersected with Acha’s, as it urged the creation of local epistemologies and distinguished Latin American art as inherently political. There are, however, fundamental differences between the two critics. First, Traba did not support the claim that Latin American art already existed as an original art form, but was rather an embryonic project yet to be fulfilled. Second, her vision of “political” is exclusively linked to her notion of resistance to imperialism and directly
associated with content (expressed via figuration) and media (expressed via low-tech, popular techniques like drawing). As a result, she advocated for a specific artistic style for Latin America, which resorted heavily to figuration and to more traditional media such as drawing, print, and painting. She concluded her talk by urging artists to meaningfully accentuate their marginality as a path to artistic salvation. Several Latin American artists and critics rebutted this view of a Latin American political art tied to the use of traditional media, as demonstrated by the event Stray Myths (analyzed at the end of the third section of this chapter). By the end of the 1990s, there would be no space for arte de resistencia in the new canonical construction of Latin American art.

With the advantage of hindsight, it is easy to point out problems in Traba’s categorization of Latin America. Two conspicuous issues were present in her talk in Austin. The first was her maintenance of paradigms created by European modernism—including originality, mimesis, and avant-garde. Framing her project with such concepts resulted in fundamental contradictions. For instance, in order to maintain Latin America’s authenticity and originality, Traba intended to create “a delayed and aspired national specificity” in the arts. However, she simultaneously identified her project as anti-imperialist, failing to see that such models—nation state, originality, authenticity, as well as hierarchical qualifiers such as “top-quality artists,” “advanced,” and “delayed”—are deeply imbedded in coloniality. The second problem in Traba’s theorization is the creation of a narrow definition of Latin American art, which needs to conform to a strict model in order to oppose an equally narrowly defined “planetary
art.” This planetary art is inscribed within an imperial project whose main agents are the U.S. and Europe. In this stark binarism, Latin American art cannot utilize a medium like video art, for example, without being accused of being derivative—another term tied to modernity and amply employed by Traba. In hoping to differentiate Latin America from the West, Traba did not consider that the image of a “closed” Latin America might have conformed to rather than challenged colonial stereotypes, helping to cement the image of the region as other in the North-Atlantic imaginary. A lingering problem, in the present conceptualization of a global art world, the incorporation of Latin America into the greater canon is now an on-going project in the main art institutions in the Atlantic North—exemplified by MoMA’s MAP-Project and Guggenheim’s USB. The main challenge seems to be exactly this: the incorporation of the Latin American corpus as an integral, but not subordinate, parcel of a common art history. (These projects are analyzed in the conclusion of this dissertation.)

**Brazil Entered Latin American Conversations: Aracy Amaral’s and Frederico Morais’s presentations**

Aracy Amaral and Frederico Morais were the only Brazilian art professionals to participate in the symposium in Austin. At the time, Aracy Amaral was known for her work on Brazilian modernism, especially on the painter Tarsila do Amaral, and Frederico Morais was known for his curatorial and critical work with the new

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54 The Brazilian poet and literary critic Affonso Romano de Sant’Anna, at the time a professor at PUC-Rio, Brazil, also participated in the symposium. He had previously been trained at UCLA and Iowa, and from 1976 to 1978 he would teach Brazilian Literature at the University of Texas, Austin. It is interesting to note that Sant’Anna and Morais are the only professionals that used the word “vanguard” in their brief biography published in the annals of the symposium.
generation based in Rio de Janeiro, especially at the MAM/RJ. The two presentations, although supporting different ideas, not only inserted Brazil in Latin America but—as examined in the second chapter of this dissertation—laid out core ideas that Morais would develop in 1997 for the construction of Latin American art for the 1st Mercosul Biennial. The two Brazilian critics, who were living in a country operating under a dictatorial government, would accentuate the political potential of Latin American art.

Aracy Amaral’s Tripartite Model
Although Aracy Amaral also defined Latin America as a “culturally invaded” continent in her talk, unlike Traba she summoned up a common history of colonial domination and violence as a regional unifier. She pinpointed the socio-political context as the common denominator for Latin America, a region united by shared problems, social contradictions, political instability, and economic dependence. As a result, Amaral inserted the region into an expanded map of Third World nations marked by poverty and attempts to decolonize. Thus, by not accentuating the openness for cultural imperialism (as Traba had done by employing Ribeiro’s typology), Amaral inserted Brazil, then under a military dictatorship, as an active player in a shared Latin Americanness. For her, cultural integration remained a highly desired but unfulfilled cultural project. Highlighting that “there [was] not a such a thing as a Latin American art as a whole, with a unique common artistic expression,” she nonetheless identified three principal trends that had shaped the visual arts in the region. In her words:

[T]wo tendencies were clearly defined [in the 1930s]—internationalism from Buenos Aires and indigenism from Mexico. From that period on, these two tendencies become
three—the figurative, the internationalistic, and the surrealist. The figurative was often connected with an environmental conscience or a “regional awareness,” as some who consider themselves more advanced used to point out in a despising way. Internationalism was represented by a European geometrical abstractionism or the North American school of the post-World War II period. Surrealism is undoubtedly the greatest common denominator in Latin American creative arts. In this last tendency is perhaps the summary of the Latin American spirit, opposing the Anglo-Saxon pragmatism, merging under a unique intuitive form the world outside reality, as well as its inner aspects, through a total human experience.\(^5\)

In Amaral’s tripartite scheme the figurative is associated with regionalism and the vernacular; internationalism with European concrete abstraction and U.S. pop; and the “surrealist” tendency with magical realism, seeing its heyday in 1975 in Latin American literature by writers such as Gabriel García Márquez. As examined in the next chapter, in the 1997 Mercosul Biennial, Frederico Morais adapted Amaral’s tripartite configuration by anchoring the art of the region in three main vectors: constructive, political, and fantastic. In 1975, as in 1997, this scheme of artistic “tendencies” enabled the Brazilian critics to construct a regional cultural blueprint that still preserved Latin America’s diversity and hybridism—and highlighted Brazil’s exception within it. More importantly, in these tripartite schemes, the political and historical contexts dictate the art of the region. Indeed, Amaral and Morais espoused a social history of art since underlying these three currents was Latin America’s convoluted historical and socio-political situation.\(^6\) Differing from Traba, who also advocated a socio-political art

\(^5\) I am using here the English version available via the ICAA-MFAH documentation project. A Spanish version was also published in Bayón’s documentation of the symposium, and a Portuguese version was recently published in Brazil in the already-cited anthology Arte e Meio Artístico. See Aracy Amaral, “[Does present day Latin American art...], lecture as part of the Symposium on Latin American Art & Literature, October 1975. Austin, Texas.” Accessed via ICAA-MFAH Documents Project, Document 776786.

\(^6\) In a 1997 text, Amaral reinforced this point by quoting the affirmation of writer Antonio Callado. The writer affirmed that he had always viewed Brazil as divorced from Latin America, but had changed his
history, the Brazilians did not reject either the urban component of the region or external influences as a threat to Latin America’s originality. Indeed, in Austin, Amaral made the hybridity of the Latin American context responsible for creating regional uniqueness: “But what is a peculiar Latin American aesthetic expression is the socio-awareness of our strong domestic contradictions.” Therefore, embracing contradictions inherited from a colonial past, mixing erudite and popular culture, urban and rural, as well as vanguard and kitsch, Latin American artistic distinctiveness would be associated with the region’s chaotic socio-political context.

The Art Critic as Vanguard Terrorist: Frederico Morais
During the symposium, in response to Traba’s essentialist view of Latin America, Brazilian critic Frederico Morais would further stress the urban political dimension of art in Latin America. He started his talk by introducing himself as a “vanguard terrorist”: an art professional that, by engaging with experimental art practices, had bridged the gap between artist and critic. Therefore, the notion of “vanguard,” which framed Morais’s actuation as an artist/critic in Brazil, was deeply political and differed from Traba’s negative view of the term as having a colonized, depoliticized, and derivative meaning. For Morais, vanguard meant the contemporaneous, experimental mind when he realized that 21 years of military dictatorship had ended the dream that Brazil could be different from its neighbors. In this essay, Amaral applied Traba’s division between urban open zones and rural areas closed to imperialism within the Brazilian territory. Aracy Amaral, “Brasil na América Latina: uma pluralidade de culturas,” in Arte na América Latina, (São Paulo: Cosac & Narfy Edições, 1997), 68.

art scene and had a positive, urban, and leftist inflection. The critic had shaped the concept of “vanguard” during his trajectory in Brazil. Indeed, the first exhibition he curated was titled *Vanguarda Brasileira* (Brazilian Vanguard, Belo Horizonte, 1966) and presented young artists from Rio de Janeiro working in a neo-figurative vein.\(^{58}\)

In Austin, Morais laid out three fundamental ideas that would guide his trajectory as an art critic: 1) art as a way to organize reality, 2) art as a way to shape the nation state, and 3) the idea of a constructive will as representative of Brazil/Latin America. He explained:

I understand art as a form that can organize reality and at the same time—it is not a contradiction—I understand that is not possible to think about the idea of the nation without simultaneously considering the idea of art. To me, the artist fulfills the role of the dream. It is the artist that allows nationalities to dream. (...) These ideas take me to a third point, which is the problematic of models. As I understand art as a construction of reality, I came to the idea that this is not only characteristic of my country, Brazil, but common to all Latin America. In the case of Brazil, the idea of a constructive art is closely associated with the debates around nationalism.\(^ {59}\)

Just as Argentine artist Luis Felipe Noé had defined the creation of a Latin American identity as a “cultural adventure” in 1967, Morais proposed the idea of nation

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\(^{58}\) Morais felt this show was the start of his trajectory on a national level, since afterwards, he moved to Rio de Janeiro and dedicated his career exclusively to the visual arts. *Opinião 65* (Opinion 65)—an iconic exhibition that took place the year before in the MAM/RJ, heavily shaped Morais’ exhibition. *Vanguarda Brasileira* displayed artworks by young artists working in Rio de Janeiro: Antonio Dias, Carlos Vergara, Rubens Gerchman, Maria do Carmo Secco, Ángelo Aquino, Dileny Campos, Pedro Escosteguy, and Hélio Oiticica. As Oiticica could not attend the show or send his pieces, he had his artwork *Bólides* recreated by Morais, Gerchman, and Dias, Morais recalling that they chose eggs and gravel. The eggs were also used in an impromptu event on opening night against the military dictatorship. By narrating the episode, I am calling attention to the fact that art forms such as these types of events and figurative painting were understood in this moment as political art—the same rationale exposed in Oiticica’s fundamental 1967 essay “Esquema Geral da Nova Objetividade” (General Scheme of the New Objectivity), which he published in the catalogue of the show *Nova Objetividade Brasileira* (New Brazilian Objectivity, MAM/RJ, 1967), which included almost the same artists as Morais’ work. Oiticica’s article is examined in section 2.8 of this chapter.

\(^{59}\) Frederico Morais, *Artista Latinoamericano y su identidad*, 85. During the symposium, Morais presented in Portuguese.
as inseparable from dream and art. Morais was familiar with Noé’s text and had cited it. Invention, for Latin American artists and intellectuals, became a crucial concept, as it enabled their creations to escape the model-copy binary and their accompanying accusations of derivative work—hence the emphasis put on the concept by groups including the Argentine Asociación Arte Concreto-Invención (Concrete-Invention Art Association) and Madí, as well as isolated artists like Oiticica and Camnitzer, who constructed his formulation of conceptualismo building on eighteenth-century pedagogue Simón Rodríguez’s motto “or we invent or we err.” For Morais, art’s capacity to invent reality operated as the cohesive factor for the construction of a Brazilian and a Latin American identity. Morais’ theory was anchored in the idea of nation state and is inseparable from politics. However, more than aiming to create a desired and delayed national project that would then generate an original art form with political potentiality, Morais understood the very idea of national construction as an artistic process and an invention in its own right. In this scenario, the artist (as well as the critic) is the central political agent capable of shaping reality. In assigning this political role to the intelligentsia, Morais is categorically answering a contemporaneous interrogation about the political task of the intellectual in an underdeveloped nation, which was exacerbated after the 1964 coup-d’état in Brazil—a violent context that soon would be a common denominator for Latin American countries.

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60 Morais quoted Noé in the essay “A crise da vanguarda no Brasil,” discussed below.
In post-1964 Brazil, this debate would surface on the aesthetic level as a double disappointment with the vanguard. The first disappointment was an acute consciousness of the failed promises of the 1950s Concretist movements and their modernizing discourse, of which the planned capital of Brasília built in 1960—at the time hosting the authoritarian government—was a bitter reminder. The second disappointment was the inevitable advancement of the cultural industry, which brought entertainment, consumerism, and advertisement into the historically leftist cultural sphere. The end of the 1960s, therefore, would be marked by revisions and an acute (self-)criticism of the figure of the artist/intellectual—both in the arts and in the social sciences.

Poet Ferreira Gullar is exemplary of this self-reflexive revision of the role of the intellectual and of political art after 1964. The poet had been the main spokesman of the Concretist vanguards in Rio de Janeiro, first loosely collaborating with the Group Frente (1952-1956) led by artist Ivan Serpa, and subsequently writing the main theoretical guides for the Neoconcrete movement, “Teoria do não-objeto” (Theory of the Non-Object, 1958) and the “Manifesto Neoconcreto” (Neoconcrete Manifesto, 1959). In these texts, the poet rejects figuration as well as the traditional form of the artwork, namely painting and sculpture, in order to advocate an artwork that, freed from the

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61 It is important to note that as early as 1965, three years before the AI-5, the police invaded Ferreira Gullar’s house in Rio de Janeiro, confiscating his books and writings. Gullar narrated the episode, explaining that the censors mistook Cubism with Cuba—the story became exemplary in Brazil of the stupidity of the military censorship. See the preface of the second edition of *Etapas da arte contemporânea: do cubismo à arte neoconcreta* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Revan, 1998), 7.
frame or the pedestal, would operate as a phenomenological door to the world: “the Neoconcrete artists prefer to plunge themselves into the world’s natural ambiguity to discover new meanings within it through direct experience.” 62 Therefore, like Concretism, Neoconcretism situated itself in a lineage of formal innovation that included pre-war European abstract art movements such as Piet Mondrian’s Neoplasticism.63 However, after Gullar’s experience with the Centros Populares de Cultura (Centers for Popular Culture, CPCs, 1961-64), a leftist organization which sought to bring culture to the people,64 he rejected these artistic premises (and especially abstraction) as incompatible with the political role for the intellectual in underdeveloped countries. In a predictable move, during and after his work at the CPCs, Gullar

62 Ferreira Gullar, “Arte neoconcreta,” 

63 For example, Gullar highlighted the European legacy in Concretism and Neoconcretism in a series of articles published in the cultural Sunday Supplement of the Jornal do Brasil, at the time the most important newspaper in the country. Introducing the series, he wrote: “Starting today, we will attempt a retrospective of the most important innovative movements since Cubism…in the field of visual arts. We do not intend…. an exhaustive survey, but a…modest introduction which will facilitate comprehension of what is being done today in the world, and in particular in Brazil. This endeavor can also be seen as a necessity dictated by the attitude that we assume in the face of Concrete art—and its roots—with the Manifesto Neoconcreto.” This translation by Irene V. Small is from her article on Gullar’s relationship with the avant-garde, specifically how he carefully constructed a revision of a particular avant-garde history in order to fit the Necoconcrete movement as the culmination of a process. See: Irene Small, “Exit and Impasse: Ferreira Gullar and the ‘New History’ of the Last Avant-Garde,” Third Text, vol. 26, no. 1 (2012): 91-101.

64 Mariola V. Alvarez described Gullar’s transition from Concrete poetry to the committed art of the CPC as follows: “The Neoconcrete group dissolved shortly after Buried Poem. Gullar’s move into art production left him uncertain about his future as a poet and the direction of his poetry with only single word compositions. He left Rio de Janeiro for Brasilia, the new capital of Brazil, to work as the director of the Fundação Cultural de Brasilia (Brasilia Cultural Foundation), and his departure added to the reasons for the separation of the group. By 1962, Gullar became involved with Centro Popular de Cultura (CPC or Center for Popular Culture), part of the National Union of Students (UNE), which aligned itself with ‘popular revolutionary art’ rather than European avant-garde practices. Gullar renounced his association with vanguard theory and its usefulness in favor of art and poetry directly engaged with the Brazilian people, articulated in his 1964 book, Culture in Question. The historical period had dramatically shifted from a democratic government intent on development to a military dictatorship ruling through oppression and the dismantling of civil liberties.” See Mariola V. Alvarez, “The Anti-Dictionary: Ferreira Gullar’s Non-Object Poems,” Nonsite, no. 9 (Spring 2013), n.p.
advocated for more traditional art forms coming from rural regions of Brazil, especially from the Northeast. This image of a more “authentic” Brazil associated with rural areas of the country—which would emerge from the polemics between Aracy Amaral and Juan Acha, both members of the group Etsedron (analyzed below)—would also, paradoxically, be espoused by the right-wing militaries in the 1970s, whose nationalist concerns led to a rejection of imperialism from both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. In the mid-1970s, the left and the right would be united on their views of what Brazilianity and Latin Americaness should look like.65 This coincidence helps to explain the cultural politics undertaken by the FBSP during these years, such as the regionalist focus of the National Biennials and, to a certain extent, the project for a Latin American Biennial to which Cuba was not invited.

In Cultura Posta em Questão (Culture in Question, 1965), written just before the military coup in 1964, Gullar addressed the responsibility of the intellectual, who should not merely theorize about culture, but should act unambiguously, directly impacting her/his social environment. He defined popular culture as a culture that aimed to illustrate and represent the socio-political interests of the Brazilian people. Using a Marxist lexicon, he affirmed: “Popular culture is, first and foremost, revolutionary consciousness.”66 In direct contrast, vanguard art was understood as elitist and divorced from the reality of the Brazilian people and, as a consequence, was not an apt tool to

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transform concrete practices. Consequently, in *Vanguarda e Subdesenvolvimento* (Vanguard and Underdevelopment, 1969), Gullar turned his interrogation to the notion of the “vanguard” as political. The poet questioned the conception of a European notion of vanguard and its effectiveness in the Third World, challenging the universality and relevance of an aesthetic avant-garde. Gullar strictly associated political art with national reality and the avant-garde art with cosmopolitanism. For him, there was no possibility of a Brazilian avant-garde that was not derivative, apolitical, tainted with imperialism, and aesthetically conformist.  

67 He explained his notion of art:

> an art that is geared toward national reality, rather than adhering to aesthetical conformism, is the right path to the enrichment of artistic experience and the creation of new forms and expressive means, as long as “national reality” is understood as a complex weaving of singular and particular realities … instead of as a political-sociological abstract scheme. In this sense, the national character of a work of art (literature, theater, cinema, etc) is less an objective to be reached than a condition for its emergence.  

68 The alignment between nationalism, leftist politics, economics, and art should be straightforward and resilient to external influences, including the one from the European avant-garde. In Gullar’s new position, there is no space for an anthropophagical hybrid synthesis of imported references in the making of a Brazilian national culture.

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67 Although Gullar, in the 1950s, was an enthusiast of a cosmopolitan vision of vanguard art, as his description of his visit to the first edition of the São Paulo biennial with Lygia Clark quoted in the last chapter of this dissertation demonstrates, after the 1960s, he turned against it in favor of a more popular art, a point of view he never relinquished. In his narrow view of political art, no possibility of a popular and local form of vanguard art exists. For example, in a new preface for a joint edition of *Cultura* and *Vanguarda*, Gullar wrote: “Vanguardism is dead. All that’s left is to bury it.” Ferreira Gullar, *Cultura Posta em Questão: Vanguarda e Subdesenvolvimento: Ensaios sobre arte* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympo, 2001), 10.

68 Ibid, 82.
Oiticica made a generous reading of Gullar’s post-1964 position in his 1967 essay “Esquema geral da nova objetividade” (General Scheme of the New Objectivity) in which the artist attempted to define and justify the emergence of a Brazilian vanguard art. Differently from the poet, Oiticica did not reject the idea of a local vanguard art as incompatible with politics. Indeed, the capacity of the local avant-garde to be political is brilliantly addressed in 1967 both by Oiticica, in the abovementioned text, and by the cinema-novo director Glauber Rocha in the bold film Terra em Transe (Entranced Earth, 1967). Oiticica and Rocha, who would resort to self-exile in 1968 and 1971, respectively, did not dismiss the vanguard after the coup, but ultimately asked: How can the political potential of the avant-garde in Brazil and Latin America be rekindled in these turbulent times?

**Experimental Exercise of Freedom: Hélio Oiticica’s answer to a political Brazilian avant-garde**

“General Scheme of the New Objectivity” figured as an introductory text in the catalogue of the exhibition Nova Objetividade Brasileira (New Brazilian Objectivity, MAM/RJ) that displayed works by artists working in neo-figurative style, such as Rubens Gerchman, Wesley Duke Lee, and Antonio Dias. Oiticica closed the essay with the motto “da adversidade vivemos” (in adversity we thrive), which may be the most celebrated sentence of the artist. The artist constructed the text as a manifesto, in which

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69 It is important to note that in the last part of his 1969 book, Gullar cited Oiticica’s *Parangolé* (a cape to be worn by the viewer, who would then participate in the artwork, giving the experience its full meaning) as an example of an artwork that returned to reality and the concrete facts of life. The text, however, was written after Oiticica’s 1967 essay, analyzed above.
he laid out the principles of vanguard art in the country. It is based on Oiticica’s construction of a Brazilian vanguard that is not dissociated from the country’s social problems that Morais built his theory for a unified Latin American art around constructive art, which he titled *Vontade Construtiva* (Constructive will)—a fundamental concept for the 1997 Mercosul Biennial.

At the beginning of the text, Oiticica outlined characteristics of the “typical state of the current Brazilian vanguard”:

1) a general constructive will; 2) a move towards the object as easel painting is negated and superceded; 3) the participation of the spectator (bodily, tactile, visual, semantic, etc); 4) an engagement and a position on political, social and ethical problems; 5) a tendency towards collective proposals and the consequent abolition of “isms,” which characterized the first half of the century, in today’s art (a tendency that can be included in the concept of “post-modern art” by Mário Pedrosa)...

Regarding the first characteristic, a general constructive will, Oiticica cited the modernist movement of 1922 and Oswald de Andrade’s coinage of anthropophagy as the best method of construction for the national. He then created a national artistic genealogy starting from 1922 and including Brazilian architecture and the Concrete and Neoconcrete movements. Opening Brazilian art movements to international exchanges, he wrote:

> Anthropophagy would be our defense against such exterior impositions [i.e. cultural imperialism], and our main creative weapon would be this constructive will, however, this did not hinder all sorts of cultural colonialism, which we want to completely eradicate today… Therefore and for this reason, we have the first urgency of the “new objectivity”: to look for our own, latent features, which are still developing; to objectify a general creative state, which we would call Brazilian vanguard…

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Oiticica thus laid out the agenda of the new objectivity: to establish a new creative state that, although open to external influences, would constitute an original Brazilian vanguard. He thus proposed reconciling what, for Gullar, constituted two mutually exclusive principles: the vanguard and local politics.

In the 1967 show, Oiticica presented one of his most celebrated artworks, the installation *Tropicália* (Figure 1.4) in which he famously employed materials as diverse as sand, plastic, television sets, cheap plywood, and live parrots. Materiality here operated metonymically and metaphorically as an index of precariousness and Brazilianity. Mixing “poor materials” and technological appliances, nature and culture, the artist exposed the transitory space that Brazil (and himself as a “Third World artist” living under a dictatorship) occupied. The artwork gave visual form to the historical belief that two Brazils coexisted—one urban, avant-garde, and modernized, and the other rural, kitschy, and primitive—without any attempts to resolve this contradiction into an artificial final synthesis. Ultimately, greatly inserted in its local context and culture, the precariousness that could be viewed and experienced walking through the environmental piece reminded the participants that art is indeed a social act. By enacting adversity—materializing the artist’s motto “on adversity we thrive”—the artwork had the political potential to create personal and social awareness. Furthermore, *Tropicália* created an ambiguous arena in which contradictions coexisted, as in the installation itself, vanguard art and local politics met.
**From Hunger to Dream: Glauber Rocha’s answer to a political Latin American avant-Garde**

In *Terra em Trânse*—filmed in a vanguardist style with abrupt cuts, close-ups, and using an oneiric elliptical narrative—Rocha performed an analysis of the Brazilian/Latin American (his fusion) intellectual through the narrator, Paulo Martins, a dying journalist, poet, and political consultant. Attacking with equal violence condescending populism and evasive revolutionary theory via the figures of the politician and the compromised intellectual, the film manages to be political precisely by working to undo any superficial idea of what political art should be. To the intelligentsia’s hunger for idealism, Rocha opposed the visceral hunger of the masses. In a dialogue between Martins and his girlfriend, Sarah, when confronted with his nonsensical exclamation “hunger for the absolute,” she repeats the word “hunger,” urging the poet back to the concrete reality of the fictitious city of Eldorado—an unidentified place that could be in Brazil as well as several other Latin American countries. Rocha’s confrontation of brutality of hunger with mystical romanticism evoked—in both form and content—the filmmaker’s two famous texts “Eztetyka da Fome” (“An Aesthetic of Hunger,” 1965), which served as a declaration of artistic principles for film production in the Third World, and its subsequent revision “Eztetyka do Sonho” (“An Aesthetic of Dream,” 1971). The titles are spelled according to Rocha’s personal ortography, which disregarded the Portuguese idiom and incorporated letters used to register indigenous languages, namely “w,” “y,” and “k.”
If in “Eztetyka da Fome” Rocha tried to rationally explain misery defined as “our main originality,”71 in “Eztetyka do Sonho” he rewrote his aesthetical principles to incorporate mysticism as the crucial component of Latin American revolutionary art. In the 1971 text, Rocha refused a rational approach to misery, stating that “no statistic can transmit the dimensions of poverty.” Rather than advocating a rational understanding of politics and of the revolution, Rocha preached that “revolutions happen in the happenstance of a historical practice that is the fortunate coming together of the irrational forces of the poor masses.” From Rocha’s viewpoint, therefore, “[m]ysticism, the vital point of poverty … is the only language that transcends oppression’s rational structure. Revolution is magic because it is the unforeseeable within dominating reason.” He concluded: “liberating irrationalism is the revolutionary’s strongest weapon.” In such a scenario, dreaming becomes essential: “Dreaming is the only right that cannot be denied. (...) Revolutionary art must be magic capable of bewitching man to such a degree that he can no longer stand to live in this absurd reality.”

Thus, from one text to the next, Rocha moved from a rational-political approach to misery to a view of it as a cathartic mystical-oneiric experience characteristic of film production in Brazil, Latin America, and the Third World—he did not differentiate among the three.72 Citing Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges and incorporating mysticism and dreams instead of intellectual rationalization, Rocha created a


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differentiated aesthetics for the political Latin American artist: “it is a spiritual illumination that helps to expand my Afro-Indian sensibility towards my race’s original myths. (…) The Afro-Indian gods denied the colonizing mysticism of Catholicism, which is the witchcraft of repression and the redemption of the rich.” Summoning an Afro-Indian sensibility, Rocha inserted the myth in the historical time of the Marxist revolution. To Rocha, political art in Latin America/Brazil/the Third World would thus be an irrational mythical force that assigned new creative possibilities outside the repressive frame of the West. These new creative possibilities could not be restricted by any particular content or form.

For the purpose of this chapter, the discussion of mysticism and Afro-Indian sensibilities in the formation of a political Latin American art is important for an examination of both the 1978 Latin American Biennial in São Paulo and Frederico Morais’s 1979 book *Artes Plásticas na América Latina: do transe ao transitório* (*Visual Arts in Latin America: From Trance to Transitoriness*). In the case of the 1978 Latin American Biennial, Rocha’s notion of a revolutionary magical art first demonstrates that magic and myth are not incompatible with politics and then shuns the argument that the theme “Myths and Magic” is responsible for an apolitical notion of Latin American art, a point that will be analyzed below. In the case of Morais’ text, Morais pays tribute to Rocha’s ideas and gives a genealogy other than magical realism to the framing of Latin American art: art as trance.
Frederico Morais’s Formulation of a Political (Brazilian) Latin American Art

Before his Austin presentation, Frederico Morais had also examined Brazil’s case using a self-reflexive approach. In the essay “A crise da vanguarda no Brasil” (The crisis of the vanguard in Brazil) published in the book A Crise da Hora Atual (The crisis of the present hour, 1975), he composed a critical panorama of the 1950s and 1960s associating Concretism and nationalism and questioning the role of the vanguard in Brazil. In the text, which reads as an expanded and more localized version of the Texas talk, the word crisis refers to two critical situations. On one hand, Morais uses the term crisis to refer to the breakdown of the modern Brazilian artistic project made clear by the failure of developmentalist socio-economic policies implemented in the 1950s to modernize Brazil and the subsequent military coup-d’état in 1964. On the other hand, Morais uses crisis to refer to the progressive dismantling of the local art world vis-à-vis the exile of critics and artists, the distrust in cultural institutions, and the rise of an internal art market. For the purpose of analyzing the creation of a regional artistic identity, it is crucial to note that while in the essay—as evinced by the title—Morais focused only on Brazil, he adapted the argument during the Texas symposium to encompass Latin America as a whole. The concept as a regional unifier would be further developed as a “constructive will” in the catalogue of the 1978 exhibition Arte Agora III. América Latina: Geometria Sensível (Art Now III. Latin America: Sensitive Geometry, MAM/RJ) and then presented in the curatorial project of the Mercosul Biennial, as will be analyzed in the next chapter. As mentioned above, Morais built on Oiticica’s 1967 essay and kept the artist’s option to
create a local and political vanguard art that *anthropophagically* devoured external influences.

For Morais, the crisis referred to a profound failure of both art and politics to transform the national reality, at the time under an oppressive regime. Nevertheless, if Morais proclaimed the end of the developmentalist dream in 1964, he redeemed the potential of art to change social reality:

> It cannot be inferred hastily that the end of the “developmentalist dream” is also the end of the “constructive dream,” because if parallelisms do exist, art always foregrounds reality. The certainty is that in the 1940s-1950s there was a coincidence of objectives between constructive ideologies in the cultural sphere, development in the economic sphere and continental alliances in the political sphere.\(^2\)

Hence, if in the 1940-1950s politics and art (developmentalist reforms and Concretism) operated in tandem in Brazil, by 1975 the two projects were clearly dissociated. However, by placing art as foregrounding reality and separating the end of the “desenvolvimentista dream” from the “constructive dream,” Morais empowered artists as able to change a national reality and intervene where economic measures had failed. Moreover, like Oiticica and Rocha, Morais did not divorce vanguard art from politics, or from any medium, be it abstraction or figuration.

### 3. From Magical Myths to Stray Myths: How to frame Latin American art?

In 1978, one year after the Argentinean group CAyC was awarded the first prize, the FBSP opened the 1st Latin American Art Biennial, replacing the National Biennials or

Pre-Biennials. The National Biennials, which had been conceptualized in 1967 but not implemented until 1970, took place in the alternate years of the international show with the intention of including more Brazilian artworks than could take part in the international show, which historically privileged artists living in the urban axis Rio-São Paulo. By further expanding the selection from a national to a continental show, the CAC continued the structural changes of the 1970s and responded to the on-going debates postulating the existence of a common identity for Latin American art and a corollary denunciation—namely, that the FBSP perpetuated cultural imperialism in the area.

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74 The National Biennials or Pre-Biennials had a total of four editions (1970, 1972, 1974 and 1976). Although they were instituted as a way to select Brazilian participants for the international show, the last edition worked as an independent exhibition. Cf. Renata Cristina de Oliveira Maia Zago, “As Bienais Nacionais de São Paulo: 1970 – 1976” (PhD diss., Unicamp, 2013). For the discussion of regionalism as a form of aesthetics in the third section of this chapter, it is important to realize that the National Biennials defended a cultural nationalism that operated on two levels: first, as a promotion of Brazilian art in a broad sense; second, as a promotion of internal regionalism, spotlighting rural areas far from the cities of Rio and São Paulo.

75 The 1974 exhibition, for example, operated as a panorama of national production—as an opportunity for Brazilians to “catch up” with what was happening across the country. In this way, it redirected the original (internationalist) intent of the São Paulo biennial. Artist and journalist Olney Krüse, representing the FBSP, travelled to 13 cities (Goiânia, Cuiabá, Manaus, Belém, São Luis, Teresina, Fortaleza, Natal, Recife, João Pessoa, Maceió, Aracaju, and Salvador) to invite artists and promote the national biennial. The show opened with 155 artists from 20 states, amassing a total of 496 exhibited works. The group Etsedron, based in Salvador, in the Northeast, was awarded first prize in 1974 with their environmental piece composed of local, natural materials—Aracy Amaral wrote an enthusiastic appraisal of the work, which mixed a contemporary art form (installation) with “rustic” materials. Her critique and the polemics it generated with Juan Acha will be discussed below.

76 The replacement of the National Biennials with a Latin American biennial was approved during a CAC meeting in 1976. The meeting report states: “This decision, unanimously taken, marked the first step for large-scale transformations in the structure of the São Paulo biennial, aiming to update and revitalize it.” Folder I Latin American Biennial. The Latin American Biennial was understood, then, as part of the show’s structural transformations in the 1970s.

77 The Latin American exhibition is thus understood in this dissertation as part of the development of an ongoing continental reflection. Traditionally, the I Latin American Art biennial has not been analyzed as a by-product of either the boycott or the institutional crisis of the 1970s. In the book celebrating 50 years of the biennial, the show is briefly commented on as having resulted from the 1970s Latin American boom in the literary and musical fields and from the prizes recently awarded for Latin American artists: “The various
This third section of this chapter examines the 1978 Biennial, including its accompanying events and the one-day manifestation *Mitos Vadios* (Stray Myths) in which avant-garde artists (the majority of whom had refused to take part in the 1978 event) organized independent performances, an act that was read as a protest against the biennial. Contrasting the two “myths”, the magical and the stray, reveals the main problem in the articulation of “Latin Americaness” in the 1978 Biennial, as well as the difficulty to reconcile regionalism with vanguardism, which resulted in the political failure of the I Latin American Biennial and its subsequent abolition in the 1980s. Opting for an anthropological and ethnographical reading of myths and magic to compose regional identities according to race, the organizers paradoxically ended up depoliticizing the show through their evocation of colonial images of Latin America. The event, however, worked as a productive counterexample for Morais when he composed his own Latin American Biennial in 1997.

Despite its outcome, the biennial was the culmination of a decade-long process towards gaining a regional perspective. The 1978 Latin American Biennial demonstrated that by the end of the 1970s, the articulation of a visual Latinamericanism had gained a legitimate institutional space inside the continent. Indeed, Brazilian art critic Aracy...
Amaral, in a summary of the artistic activity of the 1970s, explained that, despite its disastrous result, the 1978 event “ha[d] responded to an already existing climate in our continent.” According to Amaral, Brazilian art critics were taking an interest in Latin America for the first time, both travelling through (rather than just going to Europe and the U.S.) and writing about the region. Indeed, the biennial was conceived of as a way to consolidate this “existing climate,” as stated in the 1978 exhibition catalogue:

> With the creation of the Latin American biennials, the FBSP aims to provide Latin American artists and intellectuals with a meeting point and the possibility to—together—research, debate, and, if possible, establish what will be called Latin American Art. At the same time, artists, critics, and intellectuals from other continents will be attracted by this manifestation and will have the opportunity to actively engage with the cultural development of Latin America.

Despite maintaining an international scope characteristic of the FBSP, the 1978 show can be inserted in a genealogy that expanded upon exhibitions and artistic initiatives like the Contrabienal to comprise theoretical and critic articulations across the Americas and beyond in order to build a regional cultural identity: the 1970 UNESCO meeting in Quito, Peru; Marta Traba’s Two Vulnerable Decades publication in 1973 that was translated into Portuguese and published in Brazil in 1977; the Mexican trimestral magazine Artes Visuales (Visual Arts), published from 1973 until 1981, edited by the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City; the 1974 Venice Biennial dedicated to Chile in protest against the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet; the abovementioned 1975 symposium in Austin; and the 1977 Paris Biennial that had a special section on Latin

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78 Aracy Amaral, “Pensando esta década,” in Arte e meio artístico, 316.
American art curated under the supervision of Uruguayan critic Angel Kalenberg. In 1978, the year Brazilian art critic Roberto Pontual identified as the fundamental moment cementing interest in and research on Latin American art within the continent, there were the Jornadas Artísticas (Artistic Journeys) in Buenos Aires, Argentina; the Encuentro Iberoamericano de Pintura (Ibero-American Encounter of Painting) and the Muestra de la Fotografia Latinomericana Contemporanea (Exhibit of Latin American Contemporary Photography) in Mexico City, Mexico; the creation of the Centro de Documentación de Arte y Arquitectura para América Latina (Center for the Documentation of Art and Architecture for Latin America) at the CAyC, Buenos Aires, Argentina; the creation of the Unión de Museos de América Latina y el Caribe (Union of the Museums of Latin America and the Caribbean, UMLAC); and the already mentioned exhibition Arte Agora III. América Latina: Geometria Sensível at the MAM/RJ curated by Roberto Pontual, which ended in a tragic fire that destroyed an important number of works by Torres-García, and which will be examined in the next chapter. By the end of the decade, the focus of the debates about Latin American art went from the ontological questioning of the possibility of an independent art form on the continent to the creation of methodologies to obtain “Latin American art” that could be showcased in exhibitions.

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80 Roberto Pontual, “Mitos impostos, mitos depostos” (Imposed Myths, Ousted Myths), Jornal do Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, November 8, 1978. Pontual was also promoting his exhibition, Arte Agora III. América Latina: Geometria Sensível (MAM/RJ). Three months before the opening of the I Latin American biennial, Pontual wrote an article in which he of approaching the 1978 show glibly and not welcoming specialists. Roberto Pontual, “E assim caminha a bienal” (This is how the Biennial Walks), Jornal do Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, July 5, 1978. The FBS answered Pontual’s critique with an extensive and detailed letter, explaining the show’s proceedings and reminding the art critic that he was among the invited specialists for a consultive meeting, which gathered 55 specialists (out of 64 invitees) in São Paulo. Document dating from July 6, 1978. Folder I Latin American Biennial.
As analyzed below, the method envisaged by art critics and the FBSP’s CAC to divide the art of the continent according to “Myths of Origin” rehearsed on the I Latin American art Biennial in São Paulo was not supported by the local artists.

**Chronicle of a Death Foretold: The conceptualization of the 1978 I Latin American art Biennial**

To organize and develop the first Latin American Biennial, the CAC invited two foreign critics to act as consultants: Acha and the Argentine semiotician Silvia Ambrosini, who, as the national curator for Argentina in 1969, decided to take part in the show despite the boycott. By inviting external consultants, the FBSP was trying to dissociate itself from its previous reputation as a closed institution that ignored advice from art professionals, acting solely according to the will of its founder Matarazzo, who had died the previous year. After initial meetings that defined the overarching theme (“Myths and Magic”), the structure (including an exhibition entitled “Manifestation of Myths and Magic”, a documentation project, and a symposium), and the show’s regulations (division according to sub-themes rather than nations), the FBSP sent letters inviting over 60 art professionals, anthropologists, filmmakers, and writers living in Brazil to participate in a second round of meetings. The CAC hoped to gather a list of artists who would contribute to the show and of intellectuals who would potentially present at the

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81 Aracy Amaral, who was then director of the Pinacoteca de São Paulo, an important art institution in the city, participated in the first meeting to structure the show, together with the CAC, Acha, and Ambrosini in February 22, 1978. She was subsequently invited to join the CAC and to be involved in the formulation of the exhibition, but ended up not accepting the invitation since her request to name three other art professionals to join the CAC was not accepted. Document dating from July 6, 1978 in which the CAC responded to a critique by Roberto Pontual. Folder I Latin American Biennial.
biennial’s planned symposium. The future Mercosul curator, Frederico Morais, was included in the list but refused the invitation.

Pietro Maria Bardi, the iconic director of the Museum of Art of São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP), also refused to participate. His negative response to joining the biennial’s team exemplified the diffidence of the local artistic milieu toward the event’s success. Bardi’s response also clarified that the show was understood as part of the ongoing restructuring process that the FBSP was undergoing in the 1970s. About the Latin American show, he wrote:

... the exhibition will be inspiring and provoke a lot of interest as long as there is a sole talented “regisseur” with all the independence and authority that the enterprise requires to present the exhibition in a dynamic and harmonious ensemble. Without this guide, I am afraid that ... the show will end up presenting the customary fragmentary national division, each nation showing their myths and who-knows-what magic, each nation with their own direction. If there is no harmonious communication, the show will be monotonous and, what is worse, folkloric. [...] I would not even call it a Biennial (superseded format like the Salons), but I would give it a new name to clarify that it is a renovation of what came before.

The CAC ignored his recommendations to adopt a single curator or to rename the biennial, which would further emphasize the FBSP’s openness to renewal. However,

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82 The general meeting on April 8-9, 1978 had 3 main aims: 1) to select Brazilian artists who would participate in the show, which happened by direct invitation; 2) to select Latin American institutions that would be contacted to take part in the event, and 3) to name those who would participate in the symposium.

83 Although Morais received an invitation, he did not participate in the April meeting and did not take part in the symposium. From the 64 invitations, 55 critics attended. Although it was decided during the meeting that the biennial should be structured in three parts (manifestation, documentation, and symposium), the exhibition’s theme (“Myths and Magic”) had been previously determined, which was a point of complaint for many of the Brazilian critics. For instance, see, in addition to Pontual’s complaints mentioned above, Sheila Leirner, “‘Mitos e Magias’ ou a arte sob rotulação” in O Estado de São Paulo, March 3, 1978. Unlike Pontual, Leirner did participate in the meeting.

84 Letter from Piero Maria Bardi to the FBSP president Luiz Alves dating from April 4, 1978. Folder I Latin American Biennial.
Bardi’s warning to avoid any connections with “folklore,” a common fear among Brazilians, was spotlighted in the exhibition’s regulations and in the catalogue:

The CAC accepted for this I Latin American Biennial all styles and techniques, as long as the theme was considered fundamental for an encounter with our culture, and not as a mode to foment folklorisms (pseudo-folklore) through which our culture is normally seen as alien elements of alien cultures. While we were always seen as bearers of a “primitive” and picturesque culture, what we really had was a different worldview.85

Even though the admonition to avoid “pseudo-folklore” was explicit, the catalogue’s definition of fundamental concepts such as myth, magic, and even the term folklore itself, was vague or absent.86 In the instructions distributed for artists who wanted to participate in the biennial, the theme “Myths and Magic” was described as an investigative tool of the “existing cultural reality.”87 There was no mention in the catalogue of previous discussions about Latin American art in the continent or within the FBSP.88

In order to facilitate the construction of a shared regional identity, the CAC created an overarching theme for the exhibition (“Myths and Magic”) and ended the

86 The FBSP built on structural anthropology (Claude Lévi-Strauss, Darcy Ribeiro) and semiotics (Roland Barthes) to compose its theoretical markers. Although the concept of culture was not defined, it was stated that regional identity should be constructed collectively through the presence and help of the Latin American “Third World, so unequal in its forms of artistic manifestation and so equal in its socio-historical problems.” I Bienal Latino Americana, catalogue, (FBSP, 1978), 25.
88 In the 1970s, the São Paulo biennial increased the participation of both Latin American countries and other regions of Brazil. For instance, in 1975, in the 13th São Paulo biennial, 9 out of 10 special rooms were dedicated to Latin American artists: Ary Brizzi from Argentina, Mário Toral from Chile, Edgar Negret from Colombia, José Luiz Cuevas from Mexico, Fernando Szyszlo from Peru, Luis Hernandez Cruz from Puerto Rico, Augusto Torres from Uruguay, Alejandro Otero from Venezuela, and Jonas dos Santos from the Northeast of Brazil. Moreover, a parallel show on Indigenous art, Xingu Terra, resulted from the collaboration of anthropologist Orlando Villas-Boas and photographer Maurren Bisiliat, recreating an indigenous village with its artifacts. Note that the same “anthropological” and regionalist inclination would permeate the 1978 show.
historic division of art by country. Instead, the artworks would be divided according to five designations: Myths and Magic of Origin, Myths and Magic of Indigenous Origin, Myths and Magic of African Origin, Myths and Magic of Euro-Asiatic Origin, and Myths and Magic of Mestizo Origin. According to the CAC, these categories “followed an anthropological format in which the indigenous, the African, the Euro-Asiatic, and ‘Mestiçagem’ were considered as racial cultural manifestations that contributed to our Latin American formation.” Although myth as a structure in Western society had gained a new popularity with Barthes publication of Mythologies, which was translated into Portuguese and published in Brazil in 1972, *grosso modo*, myths are dubbed as archaic and are associated with “primitive” cultures or debased ideological cultural narratives even as they permeate cultural formations that shape modernity. Returning to a mythical and racialized interpretation of the foundation of Latin America, moreover, echoed old colonial views of the region imposed by foreign eyes. This problem did not go unnoticed by critics. In the words of Aracy Amaral, who took part in the meeting despite refusing to participate as a member of the CAC:

Unfortunately, the FBSP, from the start, ruined an initiative that appeared to be one of the most important since its foundation. It continued to act in the same improvised manner and lack of professionalism that has characterized its “performance” over the last years. So inept was the CAC in its understanding of Latin American art that even after the arrival of Juan Acha, who advised them in the conceptualization of the theme, they invited 60 (and later, four more) professionals from several fields to help the abovementioned council to execute a Latin American Biennial—a consequence of the total absence of self-criticism and at the same time an evidence of the incompetence of this council. (...) [For the CAC] The lack of nexus is not important, nor seems a didactical approach necessary. After all, the Latin American Biennial it is not for Latin Americans, but is about Latin America. And, maybe, actually, the event, as tradition dictates, it is not
for internal consumption, is not for better communication inside the continent, but is to be exported, i.e. to the eyes of Europeans and North-Americans who expect an event full of exoticism.⁹⁰

Integrating a didactical documentation project and a symposium in its structure, the I Latin American art Biennial, co-designed by Acha, was envisioned as a multiform event that incentivized the theorization of Latin American art.⁹¹ However, by framing Latin America as a mythical and magical continent, the show’s theme backfired on its intentions to analyze Latin America’s “existing cultural reality.” Therefore, the idea of the biennial as a South-South geopolitical platform from which to continue the earlier discussions of a political cultural identity and the search of autochthonous ways to theorize art stood in vivid contrast with the biennial’s conceptual frame, which fostered an image of a mythical, ethnical, and decontextualized place.

**The Problems of “Defining” an Aesthetics for the Region**

“Myths and Magic,” as a theme, suggested an idea of regional art linked to cultura popular (popular culture), which in Latin America signified the use of rustic, local, poor materials, and traditional art forms including woodcuts and prints. Different from the Northern Hemisphere, in which the phrase “pop culture” is associated with the cultural

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⁹¹ In an article written after the 1980 Consultative meeting in São Paulo, Acha reflected on the ideal format for Latin American biennials. After stating that institutions are apprehensive of the politicization and sociologization of Latin American criticism, the critic affirmed that Latin American biennials should be a space for theoretical investigation and should not award prizes for artists; in his words, they should be “biennials for art critics.” He reiterated the structure of a biennial including exhibition and symposium as the way to terminate a colonialist mentality and cultural dependency. Although the main figure for Acha is the critic, he wrote in this article that artists were also theoreticians, hence his support of Conceptual Art, or non-objectual art, in the 1980s, which will be analyzed in the next chapter. See Juan Acha, “Las bienales en América Latina de hoy,” *Re-vista del arte y la arquitectura en América Latina de hoy* (Medellín, Colombia), vol. 2, no. 6 (1981): 16.
industry, in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s it was used in reference to rural forms of cultural expression, normally linked to folklore. As the discussion of Ferreira Gullar’s writings after 1964 demonstrate, local popular art—framed against an imported vanguard—was advocated as conveying a more authentic vision of both Brazil and Latin America. A 1975 debate in the pages of the Mexican magazine *Artes Visuales* involving Acha and the Brazilian art critic Aracy Amaral—pivotal figures in the attempt to transform the international biennial into a regional one—illustrated well the divide of opinions concerning regionalism and authenticity.

The polemical debate was about a Brazilian artwork exhibited in the 1974 São Paulo National Biennial and exemplified the period’s discussion on Latin American aesthetics and authenticity. The installation *Selvicoplastia Projeto Ambiental Etsedron II*, (Figure 1.5) completed by the group Etsedron (the Portuguese word “Northeast” written backwards) employed local materials (such as mud, animal skulls, and vine) to create an environmental piece “animated” with music. The group, formed in 1969 and dissolved

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92 See Néstor García Canclini, *Transforming Modernity: Popular Culture in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993). In this book, Canclini expands the traditional vision of popular culture in Mexico beyond “the closed and stable character of an archaic universe.” About the transformations of popular culture with the migration of the rural population, see especially pages 152-170.

93 *Artes Visuales* (Mexico, D. F.), no. 10 (April-June 1976). Other critics joined the conversation about Etsedron in this magazine, including Uruguayan critic Maria Luisa Torrens, who called attention to the fact that behind the “rustic” work was a sophisticated team. Coincidently, Amaral and Acha also published related essays about the 1980 Consultative Meeting for Latin American Art Critics and the end of the Latin American biennial in São Paulo in the same number of another Latin American magazine. Cf. *Revista del arte y la arquitectura en América Latina de hoy* (Medellin, Colombia), vol. 2, no. 6 (1981). In the Spanish translation, the group’s name is written with an acute accent on the letter ‘ó’.

94 The artwork received the main award in the National Biennial of 1974 and was then shown in the 1975 international biennial. The same group also took part in the 1977 International São Paulo Biennial and in the 1978 I Latin American Biennial.
by 1979, was led by the artist Edson Benício da Luz and included 23 professionals including artists, archeologists, musicians, and sociologists from the cities of Salvador and Belém, in the Northeast and North of the country. In a process similar to ethnographic fieldwork, the group composed their artworks collectively while living in rural communities in the arid hinterland. Amaral associated the group with a genuine “poor aesthetics.” For the art critic, writing from urban São Paulo, the Brazilian Northeast was a region that maintained its untainted cultural traditions due to its “lack of economic oxygen.” Conspicuously inspired by Marta Traba’s notion of arte de resistencia, she wrote:

To avoid prejudice in judging a work like “Etsedrón,” a testimony of a mulatto or sertanejo art that suddenly appears in a Biennial modeled on—that of Venice, it might prove useful to adopt (as the Peruvian critic Juan Acha suggests) a Latin American, rather than a European-North American, critical viewpoint. Is it possible—and what is even more important—have we sufficient cultural autonomy for there to be a plastic expression, a Brazilian plastic language, in place of the one we have copied from western culture? It may be too soon. But perhaps “Etsedrón” represents a first howl (for there is a great deal of violence in the work) of assent. It is not a work designed to “bring order out of chaos,” as the São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro Brazilian urban architects of the fifties (the “concrete men”) proposed to do. It is, above all, the “matter” of the earth, used by craftsmen who worked as a team, in a common social effort.

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* According to the 1974 catalogue, the group was composed of: Edison Benicio da Luz (author of the project), Palmiro Nascimento Cruz (visual arts), Joel Estacio Barbosa (visual arts), Antonio Carlos Negreiro (visual arts), Durval Benicio da Luz (medical sciences—ecology), Matilde Augusta de Matos (art critic), Osmar Pinheiro Jr. (visual arts and architecture), Mercedes Kauark Krunchenwsky (visual arts and documentation), Ronaldo Golcman (visual arts), Altamirando Luz (juridical sciences), Lydia Milton (visual arts), José Maria Maia (medical sciences—ecology), Luiz Augusto Milanese (documentation), Luiz Galdino (archeology), Fernando Pereira da Silva (cinema), Samuel Kerr (music), Isabel Pinheiro (visual arts), Hamilton Luz (photography), Djalma da Silva (music), Marilia Porpino Maia (medical sciences), Antonio Bacchi Geruz (cinema), and José Olavo (photography). See Bienal Nacional-74, catalogue (São Paulo, FBSP, 1974), 67.

* Ibid., 53.
Describing the artwork as “mulatto” (a racial category) and creating a dichotomy between a rural/chaotic (Etsedron) and an urban/ordered (Concretism) art scene in Brazil, Amaral denounced the “westernizing” taste of the São Paulo Biennial. She suggested Etsedron as a guide for local art—which first was identified as Brazilian and later expanded to the rest of the Latin American region. Regionalism therefore signified, simultaneously, an authentic Brazilian and Latin American aesthetics.

Despite Amaral’s endorsement of Acha’s suggestion for a Latin American viewpoint to the biennial, the Peruvian critic rebutted her naïve conflation of Latin Americaness with what he named a primitivizing aesthetics. Acha argued that “hostile rusticity as an artistic rupture and as a reality of our Third World” could not “either affirm or deny the esthetic quality or Latin American exemplarity of Etsedrón.” He located the artwork in a distinct segment of Brazilian art. He wrote:

... Etsedrón is a direct descendent of such vernacular trends in Brazilian art as “Anthropophagy” and “Tropicalism”, just as it is in large part a result of the concern for the social causes and effects of art that is characteristic of Brazilian critics. [...] Etsedrón constitutes but a minimal part of the socio-cultural phenomenon of art, and we would be mistaken if we were to expect a single work to provide solutions for the whole range of Brazilian art. It would be still worse to try to take it as a basis for inferring at entire Latin American esthetics, even an esthetics motivated more by sentiments than by ideas [...] The essence of this work lies in the fact that it goes farther than choosing between familiar realities (in this case, the Afro-Brazilian) and simply expressing resistance to imperialism; here, the resistance itself is a new version of colonialism, because the effort

97 Amaral’s comments echoed the on-going debate in the 1970s in which abstract art was perceived as sophisticated, avant-garde, and imported, in opposition to a more “primitive” media, like drawing, seen as genuinely local—an argument advocated by critics such as Marta Traba.


99 Ibid.
is aimed directly at resisting outside pressures by arousing a neurotic reaction to them...\(^{100}\)

Acha placed Etsedron group as a direct descent of Brazil’s Anthropophagic and Tropicalist movements, which were described as producing “vernacular” rather than “hybrid” cultural products.\(^{101}\) Moreover, Acha sapped any political potency from the artwork, suggesting that its enthusiastic reception resulted from the Brazilian intellectuals’ infatuation with social causes—exposing Amaral’s praise as paternalist and as an evidence of internal colonialism in Brazil.\(^ {102}\) Thus, instead of seeing the artwork as portraying Latin Americanness or even supporting his own pledge for Latin American artworks to be socially engaged, Acha defined it as a “primitivist synthesis of erudite art” — a successful style that “ha[d] given good results in our part of America and ha[d] been accepted everywhere.”\(^ {103}\) Therefore, the artwork done by Etsedron was understood as an exotic merging of Western form (environmental art) with local elements (“poor” materials), and represented one (i.e. Brazil’s) out of many visions of Latin America’s multiple realities. His regional conception encompassed several nationalities and was

\(^{100}\) Ibid.

\(^{101}\) It is important to note that these concepts changed meaning in the 1990s, being used to express a sophisticated “hybrid” cultural product—as analyzed in the discussion about anthropophagy in the third chapter of this dissertation.

\(^ {102}\) Maria Luisa Torrens repeated the accusation that the artwork was “guided” by Brazilian intellectuals in a different article in the same magazine, continuing the conversation with Amaral. By assigning individual names to the “team” responsible for Etsedron—which included artists, sociologists, and archeologists—Torrens compares the group to the aforementioned CAyC and the E.A.T. (Experiments in Art and Technology) founded by Robert Rauschenberg in NY, questioning the “rusticity” praised by Amaral. She also noted that both she and Amaral were present at Rauschenberg’s lecture in São Paulo about the E.A.T. group. Cf. Maria Luisa Torrens, “Etsedrán or the lack of libidinous Interest in Reality,” *Artes Visuales* (Mexico, D. F.), no. 10 (April-June 1976): 55.

\(^{103}\) Acha,”’Estedrón,” 54.
thus different from Amaral, for whom Latin America was freely interchangeable with “Brazilianity.”

For Acha, Latin America should have redefined its aesthetics according to its own features—a redefinition that could be momentarily “obtained by combining ruptures with western art,” as an “artistic separatism of an autochthonous autarchic [sic] type” was not yet possible. This cultural independence would be reached by developing autochthonous art theories, which placed the art critic as the main character in the construction of regional identity, as he had previously advocated for in the 1975 symposium in Texas. Despite Acha’s rebuke of primitive elements to compose a regional aesthetics and his concern with the creation of a local epistemology, the artworks selected to integrate the I Latin American Biennial ended up reinforcing a cultural politics that supported a regionalist, exotic aesthetics, similar to the one Acha condemned in the pages of the Mexican magazine.

The discussion of the role of aesthetic principles in defining “regionalism” is important not as an examination of taste, but as an index of the period’s implicit cultural politics, a politics advocated for by the left intellectuals and the right-wing militaries in search of an authentic “national” form. Criticizing this search for a regional aesthetics,

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104 Ibid.

105 In an interview conducted by journalist and critic Jacob Klintowitz, Acha reiterated that the role of the art critic was to theorize, and added that contrary to the rest of Latin America, in which the critic was normally a literary person, Brazilian critics were more concerned with having ideas than writing well. This difference would explain the quality of artists in Brazil and the professionalism of its criticism. As he had already clarified in Texas, the art critic was, for Acha, a fundamental guide in the practical construction of art. In this same interview he affirmed that the aim of the biennial was to search for a regional identity in both praxis and in theory. “Mitos e Magia: o desafio da bienal,” Jornal da Tarde, March 2, 1978.
artist Carlos Zílio, in a 1974 article published in the artists’ led magazine *Malasartes*, made a double denunciation. He criticized the art world’s attraction both towards internationalism and towards nationalism/Latinamericanism. It is possible to suggest, using Zílio’s definition of the term, that the first interest, inherited from colonial times, historically directed the international edition of the São Paulo Biennial. The second, nationalism/Latinamericanism, which opted for a folkloric and anecdotal vision of the local reality, prevailed in the Latin American version of the event. In particular, Zílio denounced the recent populist interest in the creation of overly simplified categories for popular art aiming at the local art market. He wrote:

> Currently, new expressions of nationalism have been created, such as indigenous art, outsider art, black art, and South Americanism. They appear isolated or combined, which is not strange, as they are all an exotic attempt to create a Brazilian expression. They search to find in the indigenous art, in urban popular neighborhoods, in black religious rituals, influences that enable the construction of an autochthonous art. They are middle-class intellectuals who approach the “typical” through transitory excursions, and do not go beyond the appropriation of the picturesque that characterizes the relationship that the Europeans had with their colonies.¹⁰⁶

It was this folkloristic vision that Brazilian artists understood as prevailing in the categories defined for the submission of the artworks according to ethnicity and race, rather than a reinforcement of the popular myth of racial democracy in Brazil, which had been conceptualized by Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre in the 1930s and successfully expanded to other areas of Latin America. As result, several Brazilian artists refused the invitation to participate in the show, including Hélio Oiticica and Rubens Gerchman, who opted instead to take part in the *Mitos Vadios* event. Moreover, the

specialized press heavily criticized the biennial, discrediting the event as well as its legacy, as attested by the result of the 1980 consultative of Latin American critics, which will be examined in the last section of this chapter.

**The National Counterattacks: The selection of the artworks**

As the co-organizer of the show Silvia Ambrosini explained, myths and magic purposely did not focus on “artistic categories or movements,” allowing the theme to actuate in “several levels and in depth.”

The broad thematic spectrum revealed the fluid boundaries of art history in Latin America and highlighted the importance of other fields, including literature, sociology and anthropology, for the region. Nevertheless, categorizing the artwork according to the subthemes of Indigenous, African, Euro-Asian, and mestizo myths of origin was confusing, and the majority of the 14 countries participating in the biennial ended up sending the pieces according to the already established national criteria.

As stated in the catalogue:

The CAC, when proposing the regulations of the I Biennial, intended to arrange a display according to themes. In this way, not only would we avoid the geopolitical concept of the division according to country, but we would also have a better vision of an indigenous, African, Euro-Asian and “mestizo” Latin America. Unfortunately, participating countries replied to the CAC’s proposal by recommending the use of geo-political division. In completing the application forms, the participating countries, totaling 14 in this first edition, responded, in their majority, according to geographical area. Thus, the country X responded that its area was Y, when it should have given the area of each participating artist separately. If we lost our conceptual framework, we received an answer on which

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108 The 14 countries that joined the 1978 show were Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay.
we must ponder carefully. Why did this happen? Does Latin America really propose to be one, or does it still prefer to break up in nations—from a cultural point of view?\textsuperscript{109}

Despite the theoretical interrogation, in praxis the biennial ended up reinforcing official boundaries instead of shared myths of origin. The artworks were displayed following the old format of national representations. Moreover, countries that historically had had a consistent presence in the international biennial (namely, Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico) were given better display spaces.\textsuperscript{110} These countries also stated their artistic leadership by sending more artworks—Brazil had the largest number of artists, followed by Mexico and Argentina. Marta Traba, who participated in the biennial’s symposium, accused the FBSP of being “racist” since it had favored Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico to the detriment of other countries more representative of the theme, like Bolivia. To her, the national framing of the show mirrored the same power relations that exemplify the relationship of the North Atlantic with Latin America. In other words, the regional focus of the show was not enough to alter the old structures of the biennial format or to propose a differentiated art panorama—as Bardi had warned in his letter.

\textsuperscript{109} I Bienal Latino Americana, catalogue, (FBSP, 1978), 25. Another possible explanation for the national division was that the 1978 invitation followed the traditional format of the international show and was sent by the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Relations: the Ministry sent letters to Latin American countries that had embassies in Brazil. Moreover, some of the invitations were sent as early as 1977, even before the show had regulations or a theme. The Latin American countries struggled to send their entries without the support of their consulates that, in most cases, did not have sufficient resources to send one new commission each year and thus favored the international São Paulo biennial. As a result of poor organization and financial difficulties, many artworks arrived late, jeopardizing the show’s overall layout.

\textsuperscript{110} Rita Eder, in a review of Mexico’s participation, wrote: “The lack of organization was noticeable, with different spaces given to each participating country (for instance, Brazil had a dominant space on the first floor, while a small country like Bolivia was half-hidden in a remote corner of the building). Should this be seen—as Marta Traba suggested, as a symptom of internal colonialism?” Eder, “Mexico in the First Latin American Biennial,” \textit{Artes Visuales}, no. 21, (1979): 19.
Frederico Morais also denounced the unequal treatment that the FBSP gave to the show’s participants in his negative review, which appeared as an appendix in his 1979 book, *Artes Plásticas na América Latina: do transe ao transitório* (Visual Arts in Latin America: From Trance to Transitoriness, 1979). The publication was the first in Brazil to present itself as the theorization of a transcultural narrative of art for Latin America. In it, Morais urged Brazil to enter into dialogue with its neighboring countries and presented a passionate defense of cultural collaborations among Latin American countries in order to resist the cultural impositions of hegemonic powers.\textsuperscript{111} The article resulted from Morais’s extensive travels in the continent when accompanying his wife, artist Wilma Martins, and was undeniably influenced by the Austin experience, which was cited in the book.\textsuperscript{112} In the text, Morais denounced the FBSP for perpetuating a colonial mentality by closely mirroring the U.S. and Europe, while ignoring artistic developments in Latin America.\textsuperscript{113} However, he mentioned the CAyC main award of 1977 and the 1978 Latin American Biennial as a sign that Brazil’s isolationist attitude in

\textsuperscript{111} Morais’ first book, *Arte e Indústria* (1962), makes patent the critic’s Marxist view of art history as well as his interest in sociology, especially in the studies of Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros (Superior Institute of Brazilian Studies, ISEB, 1955-1964). Marked by left-wing politics and influenced by the politics of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the ISEB discussed the concepts of nation and development, ideology that would mark Morais’ conception of constructive art as utopic and optimistic in the future of the nation. Morais’ construction of a united Latin American art theory based in constructive art will be examined in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{112} Wilma Martins won an award for international travel in 1975 but refused the traditional route through Paris or New York, deciding, instead, to travel through Latin America. Morais’ interview with author, December 2011.

\textsuperscript{113} The book tried to fill this gap. Thus, besides an extensive review of the São Paulo biennial, it contained a literature review of Latin American art in addition to art criticism written during Morais’ trips to Latin American countries.
relation to its neighboring countries was starting to change. The review of the show in the appendix, however, dampened this enthusiasm.

In the review, Morais began by commenting on the negative criticism of the Brazilian press, which started long before the inauguration of the biennial on November 3, 1978, accusing the exhibition of ethnocentrism. He opened the article with the categorical affirmation that “all the negative predictions concerning what would happen came true.” He continued:

The ridiculous representation of some of the countries, the absence of several others with cultural weight like Venezuela and, above all, of representative names of the continental art that could have been perfectly inserted in the theme, like Torres-Garcia, Xul Solar, Armando Reverón, Roberto Matta, Fernando Syszlo, Fernando Botero, Rodolfo Abularch, the Mexican muralists, and Francisco Toledo, among many others, nullified the significance of this biennial.

Morais subsequently listed the few highlights of the show. In pace with his defense of vanguard art, he mentioned artists from Argentina and Mexico, the latter described as

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114 Even before the inauguration of the show in November, the Brazilian press started to voice the skepticism of the intelligentsia in relation to the event. When the guidelines for the biennial were issued in March, Jacob Klintowitz wrote: "What is Latin American art? The guidelines do not give us an answer. What is myth? The guidelines do not give us an answer. (…) if we can understand myths as everything, including urban mythology, french fries (Barthes), the amplitude is so vast that it dilutes the idea. (…) Magic is also not defined. (…) We have, thus, an equation of three terms and three unknowns: Latin American art? Myths? Magic? It will be hard to solve this issue.” Klintowitz, “Bienal, uma equação só de incognitas,” Jornal da Tarde, March 18, 1978.

115 Morais, Artes Plásticas na América Latina, 63-64. Morais was not the only one who noted the lack of “big names” in the review of the show. Art critic Mário Barata explained the absence of stars such as Tamayo as resulting from the 1969 boycott. However, the fact that the Mexican artist was present at the 1977 international show demonstrates that the lack of recognized artists was probably due to bad organization, lack of funds, and lack of prestige of the new show, rather than a remaining repercussion of the boycott. Barata made a vigorous defense of the biennial’s display of an “aesthetic of imperfection.” According to him, the 1978 show promoted outsider artists, whom Barata referred to as the “Brazilian people.” Even while noting that Elsedron was an “erudite group,” he defined it as a current representative of “the most vigorous path for Brazilian creation at the end of the decade because of its authenticity and sense of rupture, stemming for the greater part from the local facts of a reality.” See Mário Barata, “La Bienal Latinoamericana de São Paulo: De lo imaginario incontrolable a la estética de la imperfección,” Artes Visuales, no. 21, (1979): 10.
the only country that presented the theme “Myths and Magic” in an organic and
didactic manner. Morais then organized his criticism according to national
representations, strongly favoring urban countries with a vanguardist tradition, while
heavily criticizing the Brazilian participation, which was termed kitsch, descriptive, and
tfolkloric:

In the majority of the cases, the artists simply created an environment, as in the religious
room with wax ex-votos and photographs, chatbooks (literatura de cordel), sacred spaces
for Candomblé (terreiros), or reproductions of indigenous inscriptions, present
photographic documentation of shamans (santeiros) and religious images.

The incorporation of popular culture and outsider artists in the show rekindled fears of
easy regionalism, as Zilio had warned in the pages of Malasartes mentioned above, and
was scorned by Brazilian critics. If the biennial intended to challenge the canonical
occidental divide between art and crafts, the show’s structure organized between
“Manifestation of Myths and Magic” and a documentation section with a didactical
approach to art via the lenses of anthropology and sociology did not help.

In the documentation section were included—in addition to the cordel literature
and religious images and objects decried by Morais—the work of Swiss-born Brazilian
photographer Claudia Andujar with the Yanomami Indians living in the state of

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116 In Mexican critic Rita Eder’s review of Mexico’s participation, she noted that it was the only country that issued a catalogue and separated the artworks by themes: death, black presence in Mexico, the political myth (Zapata), and color. The selection of artists was eclectic and included Felipe Ehrenberg and Alberto Gironella. See Rita Eder, “Mexico in the First Latin American Biennial,” Artes Visuales, no. 21, (1979): 19-20.

117 Morais, Artes Plásticas na América Latina, 65. Cordel literature are popular and inexpensively printed booklets or pamphlets containing folk novels, poems, and songs, and are produced and sold in fairs and by vendors in the Northeast of Brazil. Terreiros, literally “yards,” are meeting places for Afro-Brazilian cults. Santeiros refers to the artisans that make religious imagery.
Roraima (Figure 1.6). The work, offering access to the shamanic visions that compose the Yanomami cosmology, was made between 1974 and 1977, before the group had contact with Western images or with Western drawing materials and techniques. The anthropological importance of the pieces, together with their placement in the documentation section, impeded the assessment of the images as an art form in their own right, outside Western categories. The show thus lost the opportunity to create a conception of Latin American art that would welcome indigenous works as art instead of viewing them as documents. Such a vision would have allowed for the construction of new parameters for art outside Western traditions—be it fine arts or anthropology.

Although the I Latin American Biennial did not award prizes, the examination of the two groups awarded main prizes in previous biennials, Etsendon (1974) and CAyC (1977), reveals different images of Latin Americanness—images that conveyed two distinct ideologies regarding the regional. Similar to the artwork appraised by Amaral in 1975, the Brazilian collective presented an environmental piece made with natural materials felled from the Northeast of Brazil. *O homem e o meio* (The men and the environment) used vine, sisal, banana leaves, and straw (Figure 1.7). The group had collected all the raw materials directly from the forest, working them with the help of local inhabitants. The artistic process, as well as the absence of industrialized materials,

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118 Brazilian artists were aware of the problems that the documentation section would bring to the reception of their works. For instance, artist Rubens Valentim, who was invited to participate in the documentation section, refused to participate in the show. Antonio Henrique Amaral, who was invited to the section “manifestations of myths and magic,” refused to associate his artworks with any of the racialized categories and exhibited separately.
reflected a socio-political choice: the will to create a vivid conversation between the group formed by academics and the local population. Through this interaction an exchange of information began about the forest, its products, and the importance of its preservation, altering the behavior of both groups. The decision to display the piece outside the biennial’s pavilion also exposed a political aim: to bring the general public closer to art, even people who normally did not visit exhibitions. As Etsedron’s leader, Edson Benício Luz, clarified in an interview, “the masses existed outside institutions.”

By breaking the bureaucracy of closed spaces, Etsedron was helping develop a new vision of art. Hoping to create public awareness for the cultural roots of the country, the group placed scarecrows that symbolized the oppressed and alienated Brazilian people. (Figure 1.8)

Choosing to display the collective work *Los Mitos del Oro* (Myths of Gold) inside the modernist pavilion, the group CAyC presented individual productions united by a common theme. The artworks evoked the myth of gold, more specifically, the defeat of the Inca civilization by Francisco Pizarro, the Spanish officer who, with thirteen men—later known as the *los trece de la fama* (the famous thirteen)—savage Peru. In the biennial, the thirteen artists that comprised CAyC, which was also known as *el grupo de los trece* (the group of thirteen), embodied the myth of a South American Eldorado. All the artworks exhibited were composed of golden materials, lending coherence to the

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120 Ibid.
display. Following CAyC’s promotion of an Argentinean conceptual art, an area of 720 square meters was carefully arranged in order to form a vast visual archive containing material native to the Americas (Figure 1.9). For instance, Vicente Marotta presented six silkscreens of dissected corncobs carefully resting on white pedestals; in front, six baskets were linearly arranged containing actual corncobs (Figures 1.10 and 1.11). Fusing a native plant, corn, with so-called “imported” visual aesthetics (installation/conceptual art) Marotta promoted the CAyC agenda of anchoring the contemporary production in the specificities of the region to create an international contemporaneous Argentine art. Víctor Grippo, an artist trained in chemistry, presented the work La papa dora la papa, la conciencia ilumina la conciencia (The Potato Browns the Potato, Consciousness Enlightens Consciousness) (Figure 1.12). Grippo’s work traditionally employed the potato as a sort of leitmotif to materialize a source of both nourishment and electrical energy. In the 1978 piece, the artist placed two modest-sized pedestals side-by-side, linked by electrical wires and covered with a acrylic shell. One transparent container sat on the top of each pedestal, one filled with water and crossed by cooper tubes with a potato submerged and electrical wires attached. The container on the other pedestal contained several potatoes, also with wires attached, and a DC meter that revealed the energy produced by the American vegetable. As the title

121 The CAyC artists who exhibited at the I Latin American biennial were Alfredo Portillos, Clorindo Testa, Jacques Bedel, Jorge Glusberg, Jorge González Mir, Leopoldo Maler, Luis Benedit, Luiz Pazos, Vicente Marotta, and Víctor Grippo.

122 The group’s aim was stated in Glusberg’s publication Retórica del arte latinoamericano, published in the same year.
indicated, art, science and metaphysics were associated. The artist became an alchemist trying to transform stone—or, rather, the true Latin American root, the potato—into gold. It is clear that the mythical figure under critical examination was the artist himself, and the myth invoked was the art world. Ratifying this interpretation, Glusberg declared about CAyC’s collective proposal:

We talk about “myths of gold,” including under this category not only aural material, but also everything that gives fame and glory to its owner. This is how the problem of the relationship between the myth of gold and human production presents itself. And among human creations, the one that defines unanimously the source of all human creativity is art. (…) Gold and art constitute the two utmost manifestations of our social organization. However, they are not antithetical, but complementary: they are both the product of human labor, the originators of social assets.123

Therefore, the myth critically exposed by CAyC was not the myth of the conquest of the American continent, but, rather, the myth of the artist in search of fame working from the South of the American continent—a vision that embodies an elitist concept of art production. Presenting the works by the two collective groups, Etsedron and CAyC, side-by-side reveals the divide of the intelligentsia between regionalism and vanguard. Mexican-based philosopher Eli Bartra raised this point in her presentation during the biennial’s symposium.124 In “Retorno de un mito: El arte popular” (The Return of a Myth: Popular Art) Bartra started by acknowledging the emergence of a Latin American theory that strongly reflected the socio-political struggles in the continent, struggles that that had not been voiced since the Cuban Revolution in 1959. For her, this same Latin Americanism had become a branch of the historical-philosophical field and was

characterized by a search for the “true” identity of Latin American art. This ontological search was divided into two currents: the defenders of an autochthonous popular art, and the defenders of the vanguard. By inventing a reality, colonized intellectuals had fallen prey to two mistakes: the first was the conviction that one unified Latin America existed, and the second the belief that by the force of sheer desire, reality would match this invented image. As a solution for the deadlock, Bartra argued that the Latin American consciousness—whether expressed through the art of the indigenous chinantecos or of the Kinetic Venezuelan—was equally authentic, independent of the desires of the intelligentsia. Following this rationale, Etsedron and CAYC were both considered representative of the art of the region.

*The 1978 Symposium: The excellence of Latin Americanness, in theory*

The I Latin American Biennial symposium, which happened concomitantly to the opening of the show, gathered 34 theoreticians from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Peru, the U.S., and Venezuela in order to debate three main issues: 1) myths and magic in Latin American art, 2) problems in Latin American art, and 3) proposals for the II Latin American Biennial in 1980. By the end of the decade, therefore, Latin American art had been accepted as an integral field of study.

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125 The presentations were transcribed and are compiled in a two-volume brochure at the FBSP. The presenters were Adalice de Araújo, Alba Maria Zaluar, Bengt Oldenburg, Carlos Espartaco, Carlos Silva, Clyde Morgan Darcy Ribeiro, Donald Goodall, Eduardo de Oliveira e Oliveira, Eli Bartra, Ernesto Sabato, Fernando Mourão, Galaor Carbonel, Guillermo, Whitelow, Israel Pedrosa, Jacob Klintowitz, Jorge Alberto Manrique, Jorge Glusberg, Jorge Romero Brest, Juan Acha, Leila Coelho Frota, Maria Heloisa Fenelon Costa, Mário Pedrosa, Marianne de Tolentino, Marta Traba, Mirko Lauer, Néstor García Canclini, Oreste Bruneto and Carman L., Oscar Olea, Raúl Lody, Rita Éder, Romanita Martins, and Silvia Ambrosini. See: Simpósio da I Bienal Latino-Americana de São Paulo: catalogue, vol. I and II (São Paulo: FBSP), 1978, n.p.
with an assured institutional space. Nonetheless, some of the speakers avoided a Latin American emphasis in their presentations. For example, Argentine critic and iconic director of the Torcuato di Tella institute, Jorge Romero Brest, affirmed his internationalist policy in the talk “A arte, a obra de arte, as artes” (Art, the work of art, the arts), in which he built on Heidegger to analyze the relationship between the artwork and the subject-object. The majority of the presentations, however, continued to expand upon early discussions about Latin America. Anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro presented his reflection about a shared continental identity for Latin America, developed in his book \textit{As Américas e a Civilização} (The Americas and Civilization, 1970). The art critics Mário Pedrosa and Marta Traba reinvigorated the discussion about vanguard art that had animated the 1975 symposium. Pedrosa presented “Variações sem tema ou a arte da retaguarda” (Variations without a theme or the art of the rearguard), as a suggestion for the direction of future Latin American biennials. After a brief introduction in which he listed misery, \textit{mestizaje}, and submission as the fundamental unifiers of the region, he developed what he titled “the art of the rearguard.” After asking “is there such an art [rearguard], embodying only one situation in the world?,” he traced the history of modern art/avant-garde art, associating it with imperialism, listing Africa, Asia and Latin America as sources of inspiration for modern artists at the beginning of the 20th century. After briefly examining pop art as linked to counterculture, Pedrosa described the main advantage of the contemporary biennials
with his celebrated sentenced “the experimental exercise of freedom.” He closed with a lengthy quote from his 1970 essay about a crisis in the structure of biennials in which he rebutted the art market and its necessity to label art movements. It is possible to read Pedrosa’s presentation as a veiled criticism of the biennial and its desire to institutionalize Latin American art. By tracing a common art history in which Europe, the U.S. and the Third World are interrelated, even if with different powers, and by literally pinpointing a label-less experimentation as the best art produced at the time, Pedrosa advocated for a global experimental art. This art should not be organized in a theme or classified as vanguard or rearguard—as his presentation title suggested.

Marta Traba again used her typology of open and closed areas, based on Ribeiro, to take a comparative approach in her analysis of Colombia and Venezuela. Her presentation was a close version of the article “Venezuela: Como se forma uma plástica hegemônica” (Venezuela: how a hegemonic aesthetic is formed) published in Portuguese in the catalogue of the show Arte Agora III. América Latina: Geometria Sensível. Continuing to expand upon the view she had laid out in Austin, she affirmed that

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127 In a interview conducted by Ferreira Gullar and Lourenço Dantas Mora, originally published in the Estado de S. Paulo in December 1978, a few months after the symposium, Pedrosa clarified his definition of rearguard and globalism. He said: “In the past, artists used to do new things. There was a permanent deepening of artistic concerns. Today it has stopped. And at the same time, what do we have? There is a huge movement that sweeps everything towards the sea of capitalism. The rearguard is the defense against this movement. (...) [The rearguard resists] not in the name of art’s values, but rather of the values of mankind.” About globalism, Pedrosa stated in the same interview that he believed in an expanded humanism, in mankind. Mário Pedrosa, “Sou cético diante da crítica, da arte, do mundo,” republished in Encontros: Mário Pedrosa, ed. César Oiticica Filho. (Rio de Janeiro: Açougue editorial, 2014), 150.
concrete and kinetic art in Venezuela, sponsored by initiatives of Cuban art critic and
writer José Goméz-Sicre, was alienated and served the interests of a small elite.\textsuperscript{128} Colombia was again cited as an artistic environment that was tied to the country’s
reality, even if far from ideal. In her view, the concrete vanguards were exemplary of an
imperialist and unoriginal art form, consumed by a capitalist elite and with no political
potential for Latin America. Therefore, neither of the presentations dealing with the
concept of vanguard art proposed a local and political form, as Morais had done in
Austin in 1975.

Morais, who although not presenting, attended the symposium, emphasized the
gap between the symposium and the art show:

The biennial’s theme, rich at a theoretical level, as demonstrated by the many
presentations in the symposium, is all-encompassing, but was poorly represented in the
artistic production. Frequently, especially in the Brazilian presentation, it drifted towards
folklore, to the kitsch, to the documentary, or to the mere accumulation of materials, in
the place of reflection or critical analysis. (…) There was nothing uniting the symposium
and the exhibition. The symposium demonstrated that we have advanced greatly at a
theoretical level; maybe we still have to find our own methodology as we handle
theoretical tools that are not ours.\textsuperscript{129}

Morais ended the passage listing a new generation of theoretician-critics, including
Néstor García Canclini, Mirko Lauer, Jorge Alberto Manrique, and Rita Eder, who
“renovate the methods of appreciating the artwork with brilliance and audacity.” In his
criticism, Morais does not speculate as to the reasons for the gap between theory and

\textsuperscript{128} José Goméz-Sicre was the main agent for the publicity of Latin American art in the U.S. through the
Visual Arts Unit of the Pan-American Union, which later became the Organization of American States. For
more regarding the PAU, see Claire Fox, \textit{Making Art Panamerican: Cultural Policy and the Cold War}
(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

\textsuperscript{129} Morais, \textit{Artes Plásticas na América Latina}, 65.
praxis. A possible cause for the problem might be the fact that the main events of the 1970s for the configuration of Latin American art were organized by and for art critics. Even if the 1975 symposium had a parallel exhibition or if the CAC was partially formed by artists, the search for a Latin American identity was posed as a theoretical and ontological problem that urged an intellectual solution—as Acha’s 1975 plea made clear. Nevertheless, another event parallel to the 1978 show gave the artistic community a chance to speak out.

**Mitos Vadios: The Myth of Avant-Garde Magic**

*Mitos Vadios* (Stray Myths) (Figures 1.13 and 1.14), a one-day event organized by the performance artist Ivald Granato, happened on November 5, 1978, the Sunday after the symposium and the I Latin American Biennial opening, in a parking lot on a chic commercial street in the heart of São Paulo. Lasting from 10am to 8pm, it involved 24 artists, including avant-garde artists like Artur Barrio, Marta Minujín, and recently repatriated Hélio Oiticica, as well as a multitude of late-joiners. No institutional affiliation or regulation determined participation in *Mitos Vadios*, and no connections were needed between the presentations. However, there was a climate of strong institutional critique against the FBSP and the state of Brazilian criticism. As an example of this critique, Granato showed up dressed as Ciccillo Matarazzo, the founder of the biennial who had died the year before, and Julio Plaza distributed pamphlets against art. Differently from the rural and outsider art focus given to the biennial, all the artists involved in this presentation lived and worked in the cities of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo,
and Buenos Aires. Most knew each other and worked in a style that could be easily described today as Conceptual Art. Ultimately, Mitos Vadios concretized the aim of the Contrabienal, as it highlighted the existence of an urban continental network of vanguard artists.

Aside from the photographic register of Oiticica’s performance Delirium Ambulatorium (Figure 1.15), there is no systematic documentation of the interventions by the other artists involved. The scarce visual documentation juxtaposed with the abundant photographs of Oiticica wearing goggles, a speedo, a pink blouse, a long-haired wig, and make-up has helped to give mythical inflections to the event, which lingers in the recent history of visual arts in Brazil, overshadowing the memory of the 1978 Biennial itself.

In the Hélio Oiticica archives can be found a four-page typed score for his performance dated October 24. On the first page, the artist makes a diagram stating that he would “ambulatoriar,” i.e. walk “without linearity, inventing things to do along the way.” On the day of the performance, the artist paraded down the street, making obscene movements with his tongue and shaking his genitals with his hands. He then sat on a wall continuing to move his tongue while the public criticized the Brazilian art market and the art system. In the score, Oiticica also listed a series of props including a

130 The participating artists included Alfredo Portillo, Ana Maria Maiolino, Antônio Dias, Antônio Manuel, Artur Barrio, Claudio Tozzi, Francisco Ibarra, Gabriel Borba, Gemilson, Gretta, Hélio Oiticica, Ibanez E Ma, Ivald Granato, José Roberto Aguilar, Julio Plaza, Lygia Pape, Marta Minujín, Mauricio Fridman, Olney Kruse, Regina Vater, Rubens Gerchman, Rui Pereira, Sérgio Régis, and Ubirajara Ribeiro. Paradoxically, Portillo, Minujín, and Ribeiro also participated in the 1978 biennial.
cape to be coiled around the bodies in the audience, and several “fragment-tokens” collected from iconic places in the city of Rio de Janeiro, such as earth from the Mangueira shantytown and water from Ipanema beach. He continued by loosely explaining the three main points that he would address in the performance:

- STRAY MYTHS: are myths that still need to be done: Mythify/demythify
- They are not the academicized myths that people are talking about mixing up with magic and other crazy stuff
- STRAY MYTHS ARE EMPTY MYTHS: they evoke the plentiful emptiness claimed by Lygia Clark in other times and circumstances: they are made and unmade as the walking in the streets of the nocturnal delirium ambulatorium: as picking up fragments-tokens in stray walks: when he proposed STRAY MYTHS to everybody, IVALD GRANATO opened in each of us a kind of poetics of the urban.

On the last page of the document, he listed personalities from Rio that he had personally invited to join in with a brief description of what they intended to do during the event in São Paulo. The last person included on the list, Esther Emílio Carlos, was described as an “art critic that adheres to MYTHS against the LATINAMERICAN BIENNIAL and will make declarations about it.” Oiticica’s own criticism of the 1978 show can be inferred by his suggestion of the myth as an open work, as an empty signifier able to be occupied by the participant rather than pre-filled with anthropological assumptions of a magical rural art, and of the urban space as a poetically errant place in its own right.

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131 The complete list included artists Luciano Figueiredo and Maurício Cirne, actress Norma Bengell, musician Macalé, “underground muse” Maria Gladys, filmmakers Neville d’Almeida and Júlio Bressane, Andreas Valentin, Waly Salomão, social scientist Nanci Brigagão, and the abovementioned Esther Emílio Carlos.

132 The last comment demonstrates that despite Granato’s declaration that the one-day performance was intended not as a criticism of the 1978 biennial, but as a manifestation to debate art outside any institutional frame including the art market, it was read as such by some of the participants. See the interview of Granato conducted by Gabriela Lodo, cited in her masters thesis. Gabriela Cristina Lodo, “A I Bienal Latino-Americana de São Paulo” (Master’s thesis, Campinas, Unicamp, 2014): 123.
Nevertheless, behind Oiticica’s defense of an urban, open, vanguard art there was also the desire to dissociate his work and artistic tradition from the rest of the region, reinforcing an alliance with art centers such as New York and Paris. This position is made manifest in an interview with artist Lygia Pape, who also took part in Mitos Vadios:

I never liked to separate Latin American art as an isolated thing, for several reasons. One of the reasons is that I do not want to be included in it. Another, is because I think is provincialism (...) In New York, I was already against it, because I thought it was a fabricated minority, this Latin American art, artists kept separate in a manufactured minority in a country that is already full of minorities. So it is a very reactionary thing in my view (...) I think Brazil has more to do with New York than other Latin American countries. Or with some European traditions. (...) I don’t know what people want to define when they say Latin American art. It is a very problematic thing. What would be the art made here? Generally the given examples [of Latin American art] are imported things—or we can use this expression—or second-hand things. I’m also hearing that in this biennal the proposed theme is “myth and magic,” but these are philosophical concepts. Myths and magic are not a Latin American privilege. Quite the contrary.133

Oiticica’s distrust of the label “Latin American art” demonstrates his disinterest in joining the Latin American artistic community while living abroad. It also betrayed two old national beliefs: 1) the cultural and socio-political divide between Brazil and the rest of the continent, 2) the conflation of Latin American art with second-hand folklore.134

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133 Pape’s question to Oiticica demonstrates that most of the Brazilian artists viewed the term “Latin American art” with suspicion: “Hélio, you just came back, when, suddenly we started to hear everywhere about Latin American art, we started a Latin American biennial, etc. To you, who lived abroad, in New York, what is your opinion about this issue? What is your concept of Latin American art, which was conceived of for the first time by Mário Pedrosa, if I am not mistaken?” Lygia Pape, “Fala, Hélio,” Revista de Cultura Vozes, Rio de Janeiro, vol. 72, no. 5 (1978): 363-370.

134 This position should also be considered when reading Oiticica’s famous statement in the catalogue of the groundbreaking show Information (MoMA, 1970): ‘i am not here representing brazil, or representing anything else... [sic]. ” The sentence was written in the heyday of Brazilian dictatorship, but was copiously cited by chief-curatorial Paulo Herkenhoff when defending a national/Latin American perspective in the 1998 São Paulo biennial, as analyzed in the third chapter of this dissertation.
In the “Manifesto Mitos Vadios,” Barrio, Cavalcanti, and Guimarães continued their criticism of the conception of a unified Latin America by revealing it as a desire of art critics in Brazil and abroad. Reinforcing Zílio’s position stated in Malasartes, the authors engaged in institutional critique, separating Brazilian criticism in three distinct categories: 1) one that intended to rekindle Brazilian art by creating artificial events (biennials, salons, etc.) using easy formulas and working as a kind of reversed anthropology; 2) one that only accepts one model for art; 3) a minority that realized that in Brazil there is a great deal to be done in the artistic field and therefore there is a vital need for experimentation and freedom of creation. The authors then criticized Latin American criticism, attacking Marta Traba and her notion of arte de resistencia as reactionary, academic and against any artistic experimentation. For them, instead of being anti-imperialist and political, Traba would preach a new artistic colonialism:

The refusal to accept new media as a participant in our Latin American urban reality, where there is an advanced use of technology, side-by-side with a primitive state, facilitates a Manichean definition of roles—Europe and the U.S. can do “vanguard,” and the other countries can continue doing painting. In reality, our myths and magic are both in the streets and in the forest, in a natural state, being, therefore, inseparable from the all-embracing Brazilian reality. The attempt to reduce this reality to an exhibition that followed conventional models fell into a ‘tourist’s shop’ style with a mere sampling of exotic objects, without a real deepening of Latin American radicalisms...

The “Manifesto Mitos Vadios” was, therefore, a defense of experimental art as political and part of Latin America. The last sentence in the text, “Mitos Vadios operates as the institutionalization of a vanguard,” demonstrated the existence of a movement to institutionalize the Latin American/Brazilian vanguard that would be conflated with

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conceptualism in the 1990s, as will be analyzed in the next chapter. Therefore, despite Marta Traba’s influence from the mid-1960s until her death in 1983, it was the understanding of the political promoted by vanguardist artists and critics that prevailed. In the contemporaneous canon of Latin American art, the political became conflated with avant-garde art conceived of as guerrilla warfare, rather than with the vision of a closed Latin America impervious to U.S. imperialism. In the 1990s, Traba’s arte de resistencia underwent severe criticism, being paradoxically associated with ethnographical readings inherited from colonial times—as exemplified by the seminal publication Beyond the Fantastic (1996) organized by Cuban curator Gerardo Mosquera.

4. The End of a Decade: The 1980 consultative meeting of art critics of Latin America

In 1980, when the second Latin American Biennial proved unfeasible due to time and monetary constraints, Aracy Amaral, who had been invited to be the curator of the show, organized the Reunião de Consulta aos Críticos de Arte da América Latina (Consultative Meeting of Art Critics of Latin America) under the auspices of the FBSP. The three-day meeting aimed to continue conversations about the structure of the biennial as well as to decide the future directions of Latin American participation in São Paulo. Additionally, this meeting reactivated the proposal to replace the international

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136 In the schedule handed to the participants, the aim of the 1980 meeting was described as such: “To carry out, as an executive seminar, a meeting that aims to produce recommendations about the most desirable form of Latin American participation in the international events of São Paulo. This initiative aims to address issues which arose during meetings with critics from several countries in the continent and, as such, we aim to participate more actively and collaboratively in the Latin American art system.” In the same document it was stated that “artists will be welcomed as observers and will have the right to give their opinions during
show with a continental one, an idea first discussed briefly in 1975. In a result that Amaral described as the “betrayal of an idea,” Latin American critics decided to discontinue the Latin American Biennial. Of the 39 critics present, only nine voted in favor of the proposal that there should be only a Latin American Biennial; the majority decision (twenty-three in favor) was for an International show that would have a Latin American emphasis. From Brazil, only Amaral and Frederico Morais defended the Latin American event. Significantly, artists who were invited to participate in the meeting as “observers” did not have the right to vote. Amaral had written a strong rebuttal to the performance Stray Myths, which she viewed as an irrational gesture of reactionary individualism that dismissed an important (even if unsuccessful) event. Amaral did not understand the performance as a protest against the dismissal of urban vanguard art in the Latin American Biennial. Rather, in the tense moment of the abertura (the slow transition from dictatorship to democracy in Brazil), she understood it as a selfish refusal to participate in the larger debate. I suggest, therefore, that as the organizer of the meeting promoted by the FBSP, she was following this same rationale when she decided to exclude artists from the discussion.

the meetings.” It is possible to suggest that, as in most of the events of the decade, the 1980 meeting was organized by and intended for art critics. Document belonging to the Wanda Svevo Archive, Folder Aracy Amaral (IBLA).

137 The promised emphasis on Latin American art did take place, although the 1981 and 1983 shows were divided into three nuclei: Nucleus I: language analogy; Nucleus II: works that had historical importance to the biennial; and Nucleus III: Latin American artworks. The FBSP’s first official curator, Walter Zanini, who was present in the 1980 meeting, organized the shows.

The FBSP invited art critics, art historians, and museum professionals from all over the Americas, including Cuba, with whom Brazil did not maintain diplomatic relationships, to participate in a meeting that took place in São Paulo. Building on the structure of the 1975 symposium in Austin, Amaral distributed a series of questions to be debated during the encounter. As stated in the schedule handed to participants, each critic would bring her or his individual answers and present them on the first day of the meeting. On the second day, the participants would be divided in groups (each group with a total of 2 Brazilians) and debate on specific themes. On the last day, a commission formed by one of the Brazilian members in each group would compose the final text that would serve as the guideline for Latin American participation in the São Paulo Biennial.

In 1980, as Brazil was progressing towards the “abertura,” the opening of the military regime, the gathering was conceived of as a democratic debate between the countries since “it was no longer conceivable that the theme or guideline of the Latin American

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139 According to Amaral, the invitations followed a formula: there should be two representative critics from each South American country and from Mexico, and one, if possible, from Central America and the Caribbean countries. Besides the individual critics, Amaral also invited Latin American critics who were in São Paulo for a meeting of the Union of the Museums of Latin America and the Caribbean (UMLAC). In her essay about the meeting, Amaral blamed these critics for the result of the meeting due to their international bias. Amaral, “Críticos da América Latina votam contra uma bienal LatinoAmericana” (Latin American Critics vote against a Latin American biennial), ibid, 421-2. The article was originally published in Spanish: “Críticos de América Latina votan contra una bienal de Arte Latinoamericano,” Revista del arte y la arquitectura en América Latina de hoy (Medellín, Colombia), vol. 2, no. 6 (1981): 36–41. Juan Acha had a similar view. Contrasting the radical presentations of the 1978 symposium with the conservative view expressed in 1980, he wrote: “In the accompanying symposium [Acha is referring to the 1978 Symposium of the Latin American biennial], radical Latin American positions were presented that might have influenced the FBSP’s decision to invite a majority of conservative, Yankee, and eurocentric critics, who want to turn their backs on our reality and collective interests…there is a fear of the politicization and sociologization of artistic issues, and the majority of Brazilian critics are against these proposals on behalf of a xenophobic and nationalist self-sufficiency or due to an infantile and sterile anti-bienialism.” Acha, “Las bienales en América Latina de hoy,” 16.
biennials would be imposed by Brazil on their brother countries." The commentary, however, is misleading, as for the 1978 Biennial, the CAC had invited Acha and Ambrosini as consultants. Moreover, the affirmation of Brazil’s democratic approach was jeopardized by the fact that Brazilian participation not only outweighed that of the other countries, but also had a more constant presence in the final wording of the document. Amaral’s statement could therefore be explained as an attempt to blame the Brazilian council, the CAC, for the failure of the initiative due to the choice of the theme (“Myths and Magic”) and to try to associate herself with democracy and a broader Latin American focus. Nevertheless, the 1980 meeting was opened by FBSP president Luiz Villares’ brief explanation of the theme for the 1981 Biennial, “Visões para o futuro—uma viagem pelas utopias” (Vision for the future—a trip through the utopias),

140 See the final report on the 1980 meeting dating from October 24, 1980. Document belonging to the Wanda Svevo Archive, Folder “Reunião dos Críticos.” The same document lists the art professionals invited to the meeting: Argentina: Damián Bayón, Horacio Safons, Jorge Glusberg, Marta Traba and Rafael Squirru; Bolivia: Nohra Beltran and Gonzalo Rodrigues; Chile: Milan Ivelic and Nena Ossa; Colombia: Eduardo Serrano, German Rubiano Caballero, Gloria Zea de Uribe e Sebastian Romero; Cuba: Adelaida de Juan; El Salvador: Zoiro Salazar; Ecuador: Manuel Esteban Majia; Guatemala: Roberto Cabrera; British Guiana: Lwnnette Dolphin; Honduras: Pompello del Valle; Mexico: Ida Rodrigues Prampolini and Jorge Alberto Manrique; Paraguay: Ticio Escobar; Peru: Alfonso Castrillón and Mirko Lauer; Porto Rico: Ernesto Ruiz de la Mata; Dominican Republic: Marianne de Tolentino and Silvano Lora; Uruguay: Angel Kalemberg and Maria Luiza Torrens; Venezuela: Juan Calzadilla, Manuel Espinoza and Sofia Imber. From Brazil: Aline Figueiredo, Marcio Sampaio, Ennio Marques Ferreira, Ferreira Gullar, Frederico Morais, Wilson Coutinho, Alberto Beuttenmüller, Fernando Cerqueira Lemos, Ivo Zanini, Jacob Klintowitz, Sheila Leirner, Casemiro Xavier de Mendonça, Esther Emilio Carlos, Fabio Magalhães, Wolfgang Pfeiffer, Mauricio Segall Luiz Antonio Serafico, and Pietro Maria Bardi. It is important to note that despite the report’s claims for democratic participation, the majority of the invitees were from Brazil. Cuban Adelaida de Juan had her visa denied and could not participate. Ferreira Gullar, Jacob Klintowitz, and Sheila Leirner, despite being invited, did not take part in the meeting.
demonstrating that the FBSP was still solely responsible for the theoretical direction of the show.141

The questions distributed to the participants aimed to generate a pragmatic discussion on the biennial rather than questioning the existence of a Latin American art, as in the previous decade:

1) What seems more significant to the arts and art system in Latin America: the mutual knowledge of Latin American artists and art systems or the international promotion of what is done inside our continent? 2) What should a Latin American art biennial present: new artistic tendencies, 20th century art, or art from the Pre-Columbian, Colonial, and Republican periods? Could we present the three periods simultaneously? Should we alternate between them? Should we mainly present interdisciplinary retrospectives focusing on didactics? Or, finally, should we only present contemporary art and new tendencies? 3) Would it be possible for all Latin American countries to participate in São Paulo biennially if the Latin American biennial is separated from the international one? What about the implementation of international quadrennials (1981, 1985, 1989) intercalated with Latin American quadrennials (1983, 1987, 1991)? 4) What is your opinion on an international biennial with special emphasis on Latin America? Appendix 1) Do you think your country would participate if the Latin American Biennials would happen every two years in São Paulo?

Following this line of questioning, the topics of the group discussion on the second day of the encounter were: 1) What should be the aim of the biennial? 2) How should the FBSP present the artistic manifestations of Latin America? 3) How should we propose a Latin American Biennial to the FBSP? 4) How frequent should the biennials be?, and 5)

141 Ultimately, the 1981 São Paulo Biennial, curated by Walter Zanini, who was present at the 1980 meeting, was not organized under this theme. By the end of the 1980 meeting, the participating critics voted against having a theme for the biennials. The 1981 FBSP catalogue stated: “During this consultation phase, the Meeting for Consultation of the Critics of Latin America was held in October 1980 in place of the II Latin American Biennale, when continental participation in the São Paulo Biennale was discussed. Although this was only a consultive meeting, since all final decisions are made by the São Paulo Biennale Foundation, many of the viewpoints presented by the 40 critics participating in this meeting were drawn upon in the preparation of the regulations for the XVI Biennale. With this same spirit in mind, the idea of using a unifying theme was abandoned…” See: XVI Bienal de São Paulo (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 1981), 18.
What is the function of the biennials? Therefore, although Amaral stated in an article published in 1981 that the aim of the meeting was to decide conjointly if the show should or should not be suspended, the questions demonstrate that the termination of the Latin American Biennial was not at stake—even if the fourth question opened a precedent for it. As published in the annals of the meeting, Uruguayan critic Angel Kalenberg proposed voting on the last day of meeting. After a decade of rehearsals to frame a Latin American art that would be a political force, the effort reached a dead end. The voting halted plans for a systematic policy for Latin American art in the international biennial until 1998, when chief-curato Paulo Herkenhoff openly decided to present international art with a national viewpoint, a decision that will be examined in the last chapter of this dissertation. Nevertheless, the meeting was fundamental in helping Frederico Morais compose the direction of the First Mercosur Biennial.

Indeed, in his presentation, Morais delineated concerns that guided the 1997 show. The curator started by attacking the view of promoting Latin American art internationally instead of inside Latin America as the perpetuation of a colonized

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142 The first group was formed by Damián Bayón, Eduardo Serrano, Nena Ossa, Luiz Miguel La Corte, Miguel Angel Fernandez, Marcio Sampaio, and Horacio Safons; the second by Angel Kalenberg, German Caballero, Gonzalo Rodriguez, Ruiz de la Matta, Aracy Amaral, and Walter Zanini; the third by Frederico Morais, Marianne de Tolentino, Ticio Escobar, Aline Figueiredo, Manuel Mejia, Alberto Beuttenmüller, and Wilson Coutinho; the fourth by J. Alberto Manrique, Maria Luisa Torrens, Nohra Beltrán, Roberto Cabrera, Wolfgang Pfeiffer, Fernando C. Lemos, and Sonia Guarita; the last by Jorge Glusberg, Milan Ivelic, Esther Emilio Carlos, Mauricio Segall, Ana Maria Beluzzo, Gloria Zea, Adriano de Aquino, and Paulo Sérgio Duarte. Glusberg suggested the theme for the fifth group on the first day of the meeting, which was not initially predicted.

143 Amaral also stated that independent of its final result, the meeting was doomed from the start since the FBSP was not supportive of the proposed structural changes. Amaral mentioned that in the opening, the FBSP president Luiz Villares stated that it may not be possible to implement the majority of the propositions, including the 4-year interval between the exhibitions. See: Amaral, “Críticos da América Latina votam contra uma bienal Latino Americana,” 420-1.
attitude. He suggested that the emphasis of a Latin American event should be neither the presentation of a “vanguard or rearguard”, directly quoting Mário Pedrosa’s presentation at the 1978 symposium, but rather, in the formation of an art history from a Latin American perspective: “it matters the way you frame art, you can make a modern or vanguardist reading of the baroque or the colonial…” He continued: “What matters today is to analyze…the main lines that compress or dilate our culture, making it go back or forth, towards the trance or the transitory.” Thus, Morais affirmed his own vision of Latin America, delineated in his 1979 book *Artes Plásticas na América Latina*. The publication, profoundly shaped by Morais’ earlier involvement with left-wing politics and sociology, urged Brazil to have a dialogue with its neighboring countries, presenting a passionate defense of cultural collaborations among Latin American countries in order to resist the cultural impositions of hegemonic powers. In the book, Morais also denounced the São Paulo Biennial as a perpetuator of the colonial mentality that follows closely what is happening in the U.S. and Europe, but ignores artistic developments in Latin America. Therefore, it is not surprising that the critic would see the 1980 meeting as an opportunity to correct this inclination and transform the show into a regional event. He then refined the position that he had introduced in Austin, when defending a political art, which is now exemplified by conceptualism (“repression in several countries in Latin America, especially in the Southern cone, determined new mechanisms of creation and circulation of artworks, causing… cyphered and hermetic language as an alternative to say what cannot be stated in a direct form”) and fantastic
art (“In this perspective, fantastic art, among us is ... an entrance into our social and political reality”). Here, as it would be in 1997, Morais’ main concern is with the history of art: “When a worldview that is not ours is imposed upon us, when we are prevented from elaborating our own history of art, the colonizer harms art history itself.” He concluded his presentation by stating:

To us Brazilians, independently of the solution to be found [in the meeting], what is most important is to take a position in relation to the continent. Because the danger of a lack of a well-defined continental position by Brazil, is that we take Latin American art as a fashion, the Latin Americanism.¹⁴⁴

Even after Brazil’s active participation in Austin as well as the I Latin American Biennial hosted in São Paulo and its accompanying events, it seemed that Brazil’s continental position was to opt for isolation. However, as we shall see in what follows, bienials held in 1997 and 1998 reviewed this position.

¹⁴⁴ See Frederico Morais’ response. Document belonging to the Wanda Svevo Archive, Folder “Reunião de Críticos.”
Chapter 2: Framing a New Canon for Latin American Art: The I Mercosul Biennial

Introduction

This chapter examines the curatorial project of the I Bienal de Artes Visuais do Mercosul (Porto Alegre, 1997), also known as the Mercosul Biennial, revealing how avant-garde art was incorporated into the canon of Latin American art.¹ By adapting theories and debates developed in the 1970s, Brazilian curator Frederico Morais presented a unified interpretation of Latin American art based on political and abstract art. By doing so, Morais continued his trajectory as a “vanguard terrorist,” as demonstrated in the previous chapter through his rejection of the thematic construction of “Myths and Magic” displayed in the 1978 Biennial. Capitalizing on the Mercosul Treaty and building on regional geopolitical constructions set in motion in the 1970s, Morais linked the curatorial proposal to the socio-economic and political context of the region, in particular that of the Southern cone.

Contributing to the formation of a Southern genealogy of biennials, the first part of this chapter analyzes the formation of regional biennial, including the I Latin American Biennial in São Paulo, as important antecedents for the Mercosul Biennial. The second part examines Morais’ curatorial project displayed at the Mercosul Biennial, ¹

¹ The Mercosul Biennial inaugurated in 1997 with Morais exhibition is currently at its 10th edition. In this chapter I will analyze only Morais’ curatorial proposal and not the institutional history of the event, as it has changed substantially to incorporate a more international view. In this chapter I am interested, instead, in seeing how the project for Latin American art delineated in the 1970s was adapted by exhibitions in the 1990s-2000s. There is a book that analyzes the history of the Biennial, for information, see Gaudêncio Fidelis, Uma história concisa da Bienal do Mercosul (Fundação Bienal do Mercosul, 2006).
which promoted Latin American art as autonomous and avant-garde. The third part of the chapter analyzes the rise of conceptualism and abstract geometry as the new canon of Latin American art led by Puerto Rican curator Mari Carmen Ramírez, who took part in the symposium promoted by the Mercosul Biennial. During the same period, she was collaborating with the show *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950-1980* (Queens Museum of Art, 1999) and would later affirm her own influential view of Latin American art in the co-curated *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America* (Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, MFAH, 2004). This exhibition cemented the new canon of Latin America art beyond the “fantastic,” mainly presenting abstract geometry coming from urban areas of Latin America (i.e. Buenos Aires, Montevideo, São Paulo, and Caracas) and affirming conceptualism as the most important contribution of regional art to a global historiography of art—impacting collections all over the world. Ultimately, this chapter studies the curatorial project of the 1997 Mercosul Biennial as an index of the transformations in the conception of a regional identity—from autochthonous to avant-garde and integrated—from the 1970s to the 1990s.

1. *In Search of a Southern History: Peripheral biennials and the articulation of a critical regionalism*

The 1997 Mercosul Biennial can be viewed as a key installment of a Southern genealogy of exhibitions that attempted to formulate a visual and theoretical narrative of regional artistic formations. Scholars Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, in the article “Biennials of the South on the Edges of the Global,” have traced Southern regional
histories in order to propose a new genealogy for biennials separate from Northern histories.\footnote{This mapping, therefore, takes into account the category of “third world,” a fundamental concept for Latin America in the 1960s-1970s, as discussed in the introduction of this dissertation. See Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, “Biennials of the South on the Edges of the Global,” in \textit{Third Text}, v. 27, no. 4 (2013): 442-455. The authors were also involved in the project “Mapping South: Journeys in South-South Cultural Relations.” Available at: www.southproject.net.} The authors map peripheral biennials developed from the mid-1950s to the 1980s that are marked by “a self-conscious, critical regionalism as the means for realigning cultural networks across geopolitical divides.”\footnote{Gardner and Green, “Biennials of the South on the Edges of the Global,” 444.} Instead of accepting the Venice Biennial or Kassel’s documenta as points of origin, they propose 1955 as a benchmark. The year marks both the inauguration of the first regionally oriented biennial, the \textit{Biennale de la Méditerranée} (Alexandria, Egypt), and the date of the Bandung Conference in which African and Asian post-colonial countries disseminated the appellation “Third World” as a geopolitical denomination. The term was proposed as an alternative to the non-aligned bloc, which did not fit into the Cold War polarization between East and West. By listing the two events together (biennial and conference), Gardner and Green emphasized the geo-political component of their periodization, naming the period as including a second wave of biennials.\footnote{The three waves of biennials, according to Gardner, include a first wave of internationalizing shows modeled after the Venice Biennial, a second wave of critical regional biennials (analyzed here), and a third wave, inseparable from neoliberal ideology, of shows promoting cities like the Istanbul Biennial, which boomed in the 1990s. According to their periodization, the 1997 Mercosul Biennial would be inserted in this third wave. Author in conversation with Gardner, March 2014.} In this second wave, the “South” emerges as an extended political network, one that can suggest different ways of delineating a cultural history. To this point, the missions of these Southern biennials coincide in purpose with the politics of Third World states, as both aspire to create local
organizations. These new aims would defy, or at least represent an alternative to, hegemonic configurations typified by dichotomies of East and West and their resulting hierarchies of power. In citing their genealogy here, I am interested in situating the Mercosul Biennial as part of a longer history of regional biennial configurations. By doing so, I am not subscribing to what Gardner and Green called a Northern biennial history—a narrative that understands the Havana Biennial (1984) as the turning point of regional projects, erasing earlier initiatives, including the 1978 show.

**Latin America’s contribution to peripheral biennials**

In Latin America, Gardner and Green’s periodization favors projects that “sought to redirect the axis of cultural and economic influence away from the North (whether that be the United States or Iberia) so as to concentrate on exchange with neighbors in the

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5 The authors associate this horizontal regional exchange with “informal modes of discourse and discussion.” They highlight the paradox that less traditional South-South networks took place within the biennial structure: “The horizontality of localized exchange – by which we mean the face-to-face discussions, informal philosophizing, song and so forth – was thus inseparable from the horizontality of regional exchange, the one pivotal to the possibility of the other. That the biennial should be the medium of choice for this informal, critical regionalism may strike us as odd today, given the current ubiquity and uncanny similarity of these mega-exhibitions worldwide. Yet biennials also opened up opportunities for the South that were arguably not afforded by other cultural forms. This produced a paradox, however, for the format of the biennial had a significant colonial heritage, as we noted earlier, one that could potentially hinder or undermine such attempts to use biennials as a way to give form to cultural independence. What the wide-ranging turn to biennials suggests, though, is that the South’s attempts at regionalism were not a radical withdrawal from all forms or histories of colonialism; this was not a struggle for absolute autonomy from either the recent past or other regions and cultures (or what Walter Mignolo, among others, has championed as a process of radical ‘delinking’ from coloniality). [...] These biennials thus epitomized how the deep histories of colonialism could not be disavowed in the South’s new spirit of regionalism; rather, they were central to connecting the cultures of the South through ‘the link of our tragedies’, to reiterate Beatriz Bustos Oyanedel’s words, and more importantly, to finding ways to overcome them.” The fact that colonialism represented another common history associating the people of the South is an important argument for this chapter. See Gardner and Green, “Biennials of the South on the Edges of the Global,” 453-4.
Caribbean and other parts of South and Central America.” Therefore, in defining their second wave of biennials, they do not necessarily intend to promote the internationalization of local art scenes, but, rather, the international promotion of regionalisms. International art politics traditionally framed the politics as well as the analysis of institutional practices in Latin America during the second half of the 20th century, as exemplified by Andrea Giunta’s seminal book *Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics*. Despite the internationalizing focus, Latin America did have a long political history defending the autonomy of regional articulations.

International relations scholar Amitav Acharya explained:

Latin American countries, the first [Third World area] to obtain independence from colonial rule, have been “international rule innovators.” A key source of regional norms, Bolivarianism, was explicitly geared toward regional autonomy; it “derived from the external threat posed by Europe’s powers to the nascent South American states.” Although Bolivar’s dream of a Latin American political union never materialized, Latin American regional interactions became the springboard of “ideas that rejected imperialism, ... defended sovereignty, self-determination, and nonintervention, and

6 Ibid., 448. The authors concentrate on the Biennale Grafike (Ljubljana, 1955), Bienal de Coltejer (Medellin, 1968), and Sidney Biennial (1973). The authors' examples in Latin America may not be the most significant to make their point of a regional transcultural network and of its anti-colonialist ambitions. The Coltejer Biennial, which had four editions (1968, 1970, 1972, and 1981), did actually accept Spanish and North-American artworks and had internationalizing ambitions. The biennial sought to promote art as a universal value, and not as a regional project. The authors' focus on the Coltejer Biennial is probably due to the fact that the show included less traditional media, contrary to a strong tendency in Latin America to focus on painting and graphic arts. The authors wrote: “A similar regional focus also developed in the first Bienal del Latinoamericano in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 1970 (albeit with a strict focus on graphic arts rather than the expansive range of practices shown in Medellin), as well as the Bienal Americana de Artes Gráficas in Cali, Colombia, in 1971, and the Bienal Internacional de Arte in Valparaíso, Chile, in 1973.” Ibid., 448-9. I would argue that the emphasis of Latin American biennials on graphic arts, in particular drawings, printmaking, and engravings, operated as a reinforcement of Latin American identity in the 1960s-1970s, as critics such as Marta Traba promoted these traditional media as being the quintessential regional style, a point examined in the previous chapter. For example, the Biennial de San Juan del Grabado Latinoamericano, one of the most important events held in the Caribbean region, operated as a platform for an exchange of ideas and contact among different artists in the region; printmaking was selected because it was a form of expression that was widely practiced by Puerto Rican artists. On the Coltejer Biennial, see Rodrigo Uribe Echevarria, “Esta bienal que por tercera vez inauguramos es la realización colombiana...,” in *Tercera Bienal de Arte Coltejer Medellin* (Medellin: Colina, 1973), 7–8. Accessed via ICAA Documents Project, Document 1098143.

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encouraged Latin American coordination and cooperation.” (...) Another subsidiary norm of Latin America was “absolute nonintervention in the hemispheric community,” both as an abstract principle and as a means to challenge US hegemony in the region (embodied in the Monroe Doctrine). Developed under the banner of pan-Americanism, this norm responded to the perceived hypocrisy of a superpower in dealing with its southern neighbors.\(^7\)

Attempts to create regional biennials in Latin America mirrored this political history and aimed to encourage Latin American coordination and cooperation in the cultural sphere.\(^8\) However, although emphasizing critical regionalism, Gardner and Green do not include the I Latin American Biennial in their discussion.\(^9\) This absence can be explained by the fact that the São Paulo Biennial Foundation hosted the event, an institution that, despite its location in the Southern hemisphere, had the Venice Biennial as its model. Nevertheless, the 1978 exhibition is an important predecessor for regional Latin American articulations, representing an early attempt to create a transcultural and transversal narrative for the visual arts of the region of Brazil. Although unsuccessful,\

\(^7\) Amitav Acharya, “Norm Subsidiarity and Regional Orders: Sovereignty, Regionalism, and Rule-Making in the Third World,” *International Studies Quarterly*, no. 55 (2011): 113. This tradition of creating regional articulations as a way to challenge hegemonic presence and external interference in domestic affairs helps to explain the anti-imperialist tone that the Mercosul treaty quickly acquired in the 1990s. The author’s surprising promotion of Bolivarism can be read as a defense of Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez’s politics.\

\(^8\) The *Bienal Americana de Arte* (Córdoba, Argentina, 1962, 1962, 1966) was sponsored by Kaiser industries, who had organized the Salón IKA (IKA Salon) the three preceding years. Established as a competitive international show, its original plan predicted three editions: in 1962, the countries of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay participated and the show was restricted to painting; in 1964, the biennials would expand to encompass all South American nations and all art forms; and in 1966, all countries in the American continent would be included. Therefore, although it started as a regional project, it had Pan-American intentions from the start. See “Bienal Americana de Arte,” [1961]. Archivo IKA, Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Córdoba, Argentina. Accessed via ICAA Documents Project, Document 777759. Conversely, the I *Bienal de Arte Latino-Americana*, analyzed in the previous chapter, aimed to be an exclusively regional project without pan-continental intentions.\

\(^9\) In my conversation with Gardner in February 2014, he expressed unfamiliarity with the 1978 Biennial. Contributing to its invisibility in a regional history is the fact that the show had only one edition and was organized by the FBSP, whose internationalizing agenda is well known.
the show can be viewed as a laboratory for the creation of a Latin American artistic identity.

By associating the two biennials, the 1978 and 1997 exhibitions, I claim that the intellectual origin of the Mercosul Biennial dates from the 1970s. This genealogy reveals two things. First, that the Mercosul Biennial cannot be fully understood if examined as an isolated event or as merely stemming from the so-called biennial boom of the same period, within which projects like the Havana Biennial (Cuba, 1984) or the Johannesburg Biennial (South Africa, 1995) are usually located. Second, that the canonical construction set forth by Morais in the Mercosul Biennial was not a new construction. Rather, by 1997 the vision of Latin American art as associated with abstract geometry and the political had already been in the making for sixty years. Therefore, analyzing the intense debates and attempts to restructure the São Paulo Biennial in the 1970s uncovers that it is precisely due to the institution’s inclination towards internalization that the biennial was at the crux of regional debates. These debates, however, have not been acknowledged either by “Northern” biennial histories or by Gardner and Green’s Southern genealogy—as the absence of the 1978 Latin American Biennial among the authors’ list of regional Southern biennials demonstrates.¹⁰

¹⁰ This effort is also ignored in the institutional book promoted by the FBSP to celebrate its 50-year anniversary, written by art historian and curator Aguinaldo Farias. Not only does the author not mention crucial events such as the Round Table of Art Critics, but he also links the 1969 boycott and the subsequent institutional critique to both the world crisis epitomized by the 1968 student revolutions and to the Brazilian military dictatorship, dislocating the discussion to factors external to the institutional remodeling of the São Paulo Biennial. See: 50 anos da bienal de São Paulo, ed. Aguinaldo Farias. (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 2001), 180-185. Available at: http://issuu.com/bienal/docs/bienal.
2. Mercosul: Promoting the “South”

In 1991, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay signed the Asunción Treaty, establishing a free trade zone among the countries known as Mercado Comum do Sul or Mercosul. Responding both to neoliberalism and globalization, the Mercosul agreement was meant to foster regional integration and development, similar to other regional arrangements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). However, the creation of a Southern market quickly gained anti-imperialist tones, understood as being a reaction against the historical U.S. hegemony in the area.

Situated equidistantly from the capitals of Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay, the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre viewed the treaty as an opportunity to break dominance of the São Paulo-Rio de Janeiro axis in the cultural scene. Porto Alegre remained largely marginal in the national arts panorama, although it had already hosted two international encounters of Latin American art and was the hometown of nationally famous artists, including the painter Iberê Camargo. Idealized by the state’s left-wing government and supported by local tycoons, the Mercosul Biennial was designed to

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11 The NAFTA treaty, creating a common North-American market among Canada, Mexico, and the U.S., is generally understood as a U.S. foreign policy tool to continue to support neoliberal regimes in Mexico rather than a transversal arrangement to reinforce regional integration on equal terms. Despite being different in its regional intentions from Mercosul, NAFTA also used culture to promote and strengthen economic agreement. Of note is the show Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries (Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, 1991), which was described by Néstor García Canclini as an event manipulated by the Salinas neoliberal administration as part of political cultural diplomacy. To that end, it promoted a misleading historical continuity in Mexican art for 30 centuries in order to create a panamerican artistic genealogy away from Europe. Art historian Claire F. Fox also wrote of the impact of NAFTA on culture. For its consequences on border art, see Claire F. Fox, The Fence and the River: Culture and Politics at the U.S.-Mexico Border (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

12 Porto Alegre hosted the regional symposium “Encontros de arte latino americano” (Latin American art encounters) in July 1989 and August 1980. The third and last edition of this event was presented in August 1997 as a foreword to the Mercosul Biennial, which took place between October 2 and November 30, 1997.
reflect the aims of the Mercosul treaty in the cultural sphere, namely foster regional integration and autonomy.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, the Mercosul Biennial aimed to promote the city of Porto Alegre as a new cultural capital, giving domestic and international preeminence to its art scene. Artworks should, then, perform an active role in both internal and external socio-politics.\textsuperscript{14}

Luis Camnitzer, in his review of the exhibition, noticed the paradoxical mixture of neoliberalism and left-wing politics present in the Mercosul Biennial.

The Mercosur Biennial is a product of the strange combination of contradictory factors which, due to a special situation here, seem to be functioning to the benefit of art. Porto Alegre is the only city ruled by the [leftist] Workers Party (now in its third term). It is the capital of Rio Grande, an affluent state, governed by another much more conservative party which maintains tense relations with the city’s administration. (...) The geographical position of Porto Alegre, which is relatively close to Uruguay and Argentina, coupled with a possible desire to compete with São Paulo and Curitiba (both host cities of the other Brazilian biennials), probably helped establish a precarious truce. The business initiative which, in fact, launched the project also influenced the spirit of collaboration. The meta-commercial objective (it was not art which was on sale here but all the rest produced by the countries from which the art comes) meant that the neoliberalist policy could tolerate leftist positions. (...) There was thus a mixture of politicized erudition and academic rigor within a government political agenda which sought to establish pacts with a profit-oriented business enterprise.\textsuperscript{15}

Despite the neoliberal frame, the agenda of the Mercosul—to foster regional integration and assert autonomy—resonated with the aims of the construction of a Latin American

\textsuperscript{13} The Brazilian Roaunet Law, issued in 1991, enabled this ambitious biennial. As part of the neoliberal privatization project, the law encourages cultural investments that can be used by firms and citizens to help finance cultural projects. In return, the firms can deduct a large percentage of the investment off their income tax.

\textsuperscript{14} Several scholars, including Eva Cockcroft and Serge Guilbault, have considered the role of artworks in promoting politics and ideology transculturally. For a synthetic view, see Judith Huggins Balfe, “Artworks as Symbols in International Politics,” International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society, v. 1, no. 2 (Winter, 1987): 195-217.

\textsuperscript{15} In the regional context, the Mercosul Biennial (as well as the Treaty itself) can be viewed as a regionalist form of capitalism implemented as a defense against globalization. See Luis Camnitzer, “Letter from Porto Alegre,” Art Nexus, no. 27 (1998). Available at: http://www.universes-in-universe.de/artnexus/no27/camd_en.htm.
identity in the 1970s. To this end, the Mercosul Biennial was the perfect platform from which to showcase a revised version of the Latin American cultural identity developed in the early period.

**The Framing of the Curatorial Project for the 1st Mercosul Biennial**

After a long debate, the executive directors of the biennial\(^{16}\) decided to invite Aracy Amaral and Frederico Morais to present curatorial proposals for the first exhibition.\(^{17}\) The choice was not surprising. Amaral and Morais had a long trajectory in promoting a regional art identity, as seen in the previous chapter. Amaral was the organizer of the unsuccessful 1980 Consultative Meeting of Art Critics of Latin America that ended the project of a regional biennial in São Paulo. Morais had proposed a unified identity for the continent by articulating the several constructive movements in the region in the 1978 article “Constructive Vocation (but the chaos remains)” and had published, a year

\(^{16}\)The first executive directors of the Mercosul Biennial were entrepreneur and collector Justo Werlang (president) and Heitor Kramer, José Paulo Soares Martins, Lúcia, Tedesco Silber, Mário Englert, Paulo Brasil do Amaral, Paulo Sérgio Pinto, Rudi Kother, Vera Regina Pellin D’Ávila, and Wrana Panizzi. The state culture secretary Maria Benites also participated in the meetings and played a crucial role in inviting the two curators.

\(^{17}\)At first the executive directors of the Mercosul Biennial wanted to hire a local curator to delineate the curatorial program for the 1997 exhibition. When this alternative was deemed unfeasible, a triumvirate, containing one curator from Porto Alegre, one from São Paulo, and one from Rio de Janeiro, was proposed. After a meeting in which the names of Tício Escobar, Décio Pignatari, Angel Kalenberg, Paulo Herkenhoff, and Frederico Morais were contemplated, a sole invitation to Aracy Amaral was officially made in April 1996. After her first draft was heavily criticized, the direction asked Amaral to deliver a revised proposal and also invited Frederico Morais to submit one. Amaral and Morais also received a document to serve as a guide, stating that the show should give a preponderant place to local art in the show (i.e., art from Rio Grande do Sul, the state where Porto Alegre is located). In the minutes of the directors’ meetings in April 1996, it is clearly stated that Amaral’s proposal would receive preference vis-à-vis her experience with the São Paulo Biennial. Despite this and the fact that Amaral’s proposal conformed to the directors’ demands and Morais’ did not, Morais was officially invited in August 1996. All the minutes of the 1996 meetings are stored at the Archive of the Mercosul Visual Arts Biennial Foundation/Documentation and Research Nucleus (FBAVM/NDP).
later, a book that theorized Latin American art. Moreover, they had both participated in the 1975 symposium in Texas and were the only Brazilian art critics to vote in favor of the transformation of the international São Paulo Biennial into a regional project in 1980.

Aracy Amaral sent a proposal that built on the São Paulo Biennial format: a Historical Nucleus (featuring art from the 19th century onwards), a Contemporary Nucleus (with the participation of Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay), and two Special Rooms. The Mercosul direction rejected her curatorial proposal because it was deemed unoriginal and too similar to the São Paulo Biennial.

Morais’ Curatorial Proposal for the Mercosul Biennial

Morais’ proposal was selected in August 1996. In it, he identified the mission of the Mercosul Biennial as follows: “to initiate the urgent task of rewriting the history of art from a Latin American standpoint or, at least, a standpoint which is not exclusively Euro-North American.” For Morais, this necessity spurred from the fact that “since the


19 As part of the Historical Nucleus, Amaral included the following nine shows: Zoólitos: American Sculptures from the Mercosul; Roberto Matta: a Trajectory in Painting; Candido López, Painter; The Beginning of Landscape in Mercosul; The Popular in the 19th Century Paraguayan Imaginary; Barradas: The Vanguard from Uruguay; The Gaucho via Painting; Printmaking Clubs; and Enio Iommi: a Creative Trajectory. The Special rooms comprised artists from the South of Brazil and Constructive Art in Private Collections. Aracy Amaral, “Curatorial Proposal,” dating from July 15, 1996. Document belonging to the Archive of the Mercosul Visual Arts Biennial Foundation/Documentation and Research Nucleus (FBAVM/NDP).

20 Paradoxically, Amaral, who was the favorite candidate due to her experience in the São Paulo Biennial, was rejected precisely due to the fact that her proposal was considered too similar to the previous biennial. A paradoxical relationship with the São Paulo Biennial, which is viewed simultaneously as a rival and as an aspiration and parameter will be a constant of this first Mercosul Biennial.

21 Frederico Morais, “Curatorial Proposal,” manuscript dated August 20, 1996, n.p. Document belonging to the Archive of the Mercosul Visual Arts Biennial Foundation/Documentation and Research Nucleus (FBAVM/NDP). A slightly different version of this statement was published in the catalogue and signed as
times of its European colonization, Latin America has been excluded from universal art
history.” Citing the debates he participated in from the 1970s, he continued, “this
absence has been imposed by the metropolis, belonging to a process that Marta Traba
has defined as the ‘systematic declassification of the province.’” Following Juan Acha’s
proposed model for Latin American biennials, Morais envisioned a publication and a
symposium together with the exhibition. Morais presented the project as the “biggest
anthological exhibition of Latin American art,” an opportunity to “affirm the originality
of the regional art and the capacity of invention of the Latin American artist, and of the
Brazilian artist, in particular.”

To trace the history of art from a regional point of view, Morais’ proposal
delineated three main “vectors” or “axes” that defined Latin American art in the
twentieth century: political, constructive, and fantastic. By creating a tripartite narrative
for the art of Latin America dictated by recurrent “trends,” it is possible to suggest that
Morais was building on the construction presented by Aracy Amaral during the 1975
symposium in Texas. As seen in the previous chapter, Amaral divided 20th century Latin
American art into a tripartite scheme: figurative (linked to regionalism), international

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(associated with the avant-garde), and surrealist (tied to the fantastic). Morais updated this format, anchoring his vectors in the socio-political and cultural reality of the region than in stylistic choices. Still, similar to Amaral’s scheme presented in Austin, the “vectorial” curatorial display enabled Morais to delineate a clear regional identity for Latin America.

The creation of this vectorial model allowed Morais to avoid the conventions of the traditional biennial display, in which art is conventionally presented according to nationality. Morais’ vectorial structure created a cohesive, easily identifiable regional narrative for Latin American art that was also dynamic. As an on-going project, the first curatorial configuration escaped totalizing conceptions since it presupposed the inclusion of new vectors. Reinforcing the critic’s belief that “everything in Latin

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25 The creation of tripartite theories analyzing Latin American art was a trend in this period in which a main concern was to define Latin American art. For instance, for the 1977 Latin American Section at the Paris Biennial, invited curator Angel Kalemberg (who also worked at the Mercosul Biennial) divided the art of the region according to “modes.” The exhibition included a group of 23 contemporaneous artists and collectives. The artworks were divided into three categories: the subordinated mode, the cosmopolitan mode, and the independent mode. To Kalemberg, the subordinate mode presented a “submissive relationship to the metropolis” that resulted in “a colonial or regionalist art model.” The cosmopolitan mode was a new version of colonialism and was practiced primarily by artists in exile. Finally, the independent mode included the most radical artworks and was, paradoxically, also expressed in magical or popular painting. Therefore, to Kalemberg, radicalism was not linked to the avant-garde, but to the idea of Latin America as being independent from the “metropolis.” See Camila Bechelamy and Camila Maroja, “From the South and Back Again: Constructing Latin American Art at the 10e Biennale de Paris – Section Amérique Latine (1977) and at the I Bienal de arte Latino Americana de São Paulo (1978)” (paper presented at the conference South-South Axes of Global Art, Paris, France, June 17–19, 2015).

26 As will be explained in the next chapter, the São Paulo Biennial eliminated its “National Representations” sector only in 2006, during the 27th Biennial curated by Lisette Lagnado. However, some attempts to update the format had been made prior to 20006, including Walter Zanini’s 1980 biennial that relegated the national division to the catalogue and Paulo Herkenhoff’s in 1998 that openly criticized the arrangement.

27 The Mercosul Biennial president, the collector Justo Werlang, invited Frederico Morais to curate the 2nd Mercosul Biennial, predicted to open in 1999. One of the main concerns of the directorship was to ensure the continuity of the event. Morais’ curatorial proposal for the second biennial focused on a renewed vision of the fantastic vector, which would not include surrealism, but would focus instead on outsider artists and
America tends towards hybridization,” Morais’ vectors were not envisioned as able to “overlap and merge into new formations.”28 Transnational and transcultural, the three vectors were understood as recurrent tendencies in the region, present in several artistic movements and inseparable from the economic and socio-political context of the region. To make explicit the political stakes of theorizing the region’s art as autochthonous, in the catalogue introduction Morais juxtaposed Joaquín Torres-García’s famous 1936 drawing América Invertida, which flips South and North, with Henry Kissinger’s 1969 declaration that “nothing important can come from the South. History has never been produced in the South.”29 For Morais, Torres-García’s symbolic gesture nullified the later statement—proving that art is political and can radically transform the way we perceive reality.

**Morais’ Three Vectors**

In his initial curatorial proposal, Morais began his narrative of the development of political art with Mexican muralism, followed by its strong resurgence in the Southern Cone during the dictatorships of the 1960s and 1970s, a moment when artists abandoned the figurative and embraced other visual languages, many of which were later associated with conceptual art. In Morais’ scheme, the constructive vector in Latin

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29 Ibid. According to Morais, Kissinger made the declaration during a continental meeting of chancellors in Viña de Mar, Chile.
America began with the 1934 return of the Uruguayan artist Joaquín Torres-García to Montevideo after forty-three years abroad. Moreover, as he had done in Austin more than 20 years earlier, Morais connected the constructive vanguards with modernization projects in the region. Morais’ final vector was fantastic art, affirming Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier’s concept of the real maravilloso (marvelous real) and the position that, in Latin America, “the uncanny is part of daily life.”

Morais subsequently decided to limit the biennial to the first two vectors (political and constructive). Restricted by the ability to select artworks from only the countries that were predicted to join the Mercosul agreement (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay), he justified this choice by stating in the proposal that fantastic realism had been particularly strong in Mexico, Colombia, and the Andean region. As non-Mercosul members, these areas were forcibly absent from the show. This strategic decision challenged traditional exhibition and collecting practices in Latin American art, including those of New York’s Museum of Modern Art, which had

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30 Morais, “Curatorial Proposal.” In the prologue of the novel El reino de este mundo (1949), Carpentier promoted his concept of the real maravilloso, which created the possibility of combining magic and reality in a synthesis offered by Cuban’s unique version of Spanish American literature and life. In this context, the marvelous real signified the rejection of European ideas of aesthetics and the search for a genuinely American expression.

31 An earlier draft of the Mercosul Biennial proposal, suggested to Morais by the Mercosul Biennial Foundation in 1996, predicted the inclusion of not only the original countries that signed the Asunción Treaty that formed the Mercosul, but also Chile and Bolivia, which joined the trade region via the Área de Livre Comércio Sul-americana (ALCSA) in 1996. Morais’ decision to invite Venezuela (famous for its kinetic art) but ignore Bolivia (an Andean country) suggests that the curator was interested in giving priority to the first two vectors, political and constructive.
launched its own engagement with the region in 1931 with a solo show of Diego Rivera and continued to favor the work of Mexican artists for decades.\textsuperscript{32}

Furthermore, by eliminating these countries from his curatorial model, Morais differentiated his project from Marta Traba’s political construction that focused on the art of the Andean region, examined in the previous chapter.\textsuperscript{33} As a result, although clearly anti-imperialist, the chosen vectors departed from Traba’s \textit{arte de resistencia}. In the final curatorial introduction printed at the catalogue, Morais—significantly—removed the reference to Traba’s name. The political and constructive vector promoted, instead, the idea of Latin American art as autonomous and, yet, sophisticated and cosmopolitan.

By omitting the fantastic (and Traba’s reference) from the Mercosul Biennial, Morais avoided a vision of Latin American art as mythical and magical. Strengthening the curatorial scheme centered on a modern and sophisticated Latin American art, Morais proposed the participation of Venezuela—famous for its kinetic art—as an “invited country.” In a review of the initial curatorial proposal, Morais added a new third vector titled “cartographic.” This vector was previously suggested as an


\textsuperscript{33} As stated in the previous chapter, the 1973 publication \textit{Dos décadas vulnerables en las artes plásticas latinoamericanas, 1950-1970}, summarized Traba’s views at the time.
independent show “mapping” the artistic production of the continent.\textsuperscript{34} The final curatorial scheme thus comprised three conceptual axes that translated part of the socio-history of Latin American art: “political – art and its context,” “constructive – art and its structures,” and “cartographic – territory and history.”

Keeping with his presentation at the 1980 Consultative Meeting analyzed in the previous chapter, Morais clarified that it was possible to make, for instance, a political reading of the constructive vector or a formal reading of the political vector, and that many artists would be included in more than one vector. Epitomizing the hybrid nature of his model was Torres-García’s work, understood as the conjunction of all three vectors. Selecting key artworks according to vector enabled the curator to disregard linear models and strict stylistic denominations. Brazilians artists and critics viewed the labeling of art movements with a double suspicion, considering the need to adopt “isms” both as a sign of cultural dependency on external paradigms and as a market-driven phenomenon of creating recognizable products for consumption.\textsuperscript{35}

\textbf{The Presented Vectors}

To materialize his regional curatorial plan, Morais invited six curators, each from a different country participating in the biennial, to select artists for the vectors under his supervision. The six were: Argentine Irma Arestizabal, director of the Museo de la Casa

\textsuperscript{34} The cartographic vector was envisaged as a small parallel show in the first curatorial proposal of August 20, 1996.

\textsuperscript{35} See, for instance, Mário Pedrosa, “Discurso aos Tupiniquins ou nambás,” \textit{Continente Sul Sur}, no. 6 (November 1997), 423-430.
Rosada; Bolivian Pedro Querejazu, director of the Fundación BHN; Chilean Justo Pastor Mellado, art critic; Paraguayan Tício Escobar, Secretary of Culture in Asunción; Uruguayan Angel Kalemberg, director of the Museo Nacional de Artes Visuales de Montevideo; and Venezuelan Roberto Guevara, director of the National Culture Counsel (CONAC). Morais would be responsible for selecting the Brazilian participants and for supervising the artists that would figure in the three vectors composing the backbone of the biennial. Despite the official statement that the participating artists were invited directly by the national curators and therefore not officially representing their countries, Morais blatantly privileged art professionals who were working in national organizations. This scheme allowed the incipient Mercosul Biennial to profit from their official networks and, at the same time, avoid the display of traditional national representations—an unwanted arrangement in a regional exhibition.

The biennial was divided into four parts: 1) Exhibitions, divided into the three main vectors (Constructive, Political, and Cartographic) and two small shows, one showing contemporary artists and the other Latin American artworks from Brazilian collections; 2) “Interventions in the City,” a section that invited important artists to make permanent interventions in the city of Porto Alegre to create an archive of public art; 3) two international seminars, including “Latin-American Utopias” and “Latin America as seen from Europe and the U.S.”; and 4) the publication of a catalogue and a special seminar “Latin American Utopias,” participants included Blanca Brites, Angel Kalemberg, Javier Alcalá, Gérard Teulière, Marcelo Pacheco, Pedro Querejazu, Justo Pastor Mellado, Valeria Paz, Bélgica Rodríguez, Tício Escobar, Fernando Farina, Juan Pita, Gaspar Galaz, Gabriel Peluffo, Roberto Guevara, Márcio Doctors, Nelly Perazzo, Margarita Sanchez, Frederico Morais, Andrea Giunta, Shifra Goldman, and
edition of the magazine *Continente Sul Sur* containing theoretical essays grounding the three vectors. In addition, the biennial paid tribute to Argentine artist Xul Solar and Brazilian art critic Mário Pedrosa—critical figures for the Latin American art scene. Unlike the São Paulo Biennial, isolated in a pavilion signed by Brazilian iconographic modernist architect Oscar Niemeyer, the Mercosul Biennial occupied the whole urban area of Porto Alegre. Therefore, the biennial aligned itself with international exhibitions like Kassel’s documenta to fulfill the goal of promoting the city of Porto Alegre as a new art hub.

**Constructive as Regional Connector**

In contrast to almost all previous surveys of the region, the Mercosul Biennial greatly privileged abstract and political art. The constructive vector took up Morais’ idea of Latin America’s “constructive vocation” and continued to promote a modern and avant-garde view of the region. Throughout the constructive vector, Morais linked the art that

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37 The 1997 Mercosul Biennial was the fifth exhibition in South America to be conceived of as a regional survey of Latin American art, and the only one in this genealogy to emphasize both constructive and political art. The first was the *I Bienal de arte latino-americana* (São Paulo, 1978), organized by the São Paulo Biennial Foundation under the theme “Myths and Magic.” In the same year, Roberto Pontual’s *Geometria Sensível* appeared at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro organized around the idea of constructive art as characteristic of the region. Coordinated by Juan Acha, the 1981 “Primer Coloquio Latinoamericano de Arte No-Objetual y Arte Urbano,” which focused on performance and other ephemeral art forms, took place in Colombia as an introductory event to the revived IV Medellin Biennial and emphasized political art. In late 1992, Gerardo Mosquera co-organized *Ante América* with Rachel Weiss and Carolina Ponce de León at the Luis Ángel Arango Library and the Banco de la República in Bogotá, Colombia, as part of the celebrations for the Five Hundredth Anniversary of the “discovery.”
flourished from the 1940s through the 1960s to modernization efforts across the region.\textsuperscript{38}

He thus adapted the premise delineated in his earlier catalogue essay “Vocação Construtiva (mas o caos permanence)” (“Constructive Vocation [but the chaos remains]”).\textsuperscript{39}

In that text—which was heavily quoted in the 1997 Mercosul catalogue and republished in the magazine Contínente Sul Sur—he theorized an integrated regional identity under a common “constructive vocation.” He cast Latin America’s concretist movements as part of a larger impulse that included references to foreign artists like Vladimir Tatlin and Piet Mondrian. In doing so, he was building on a genealogy created by (neo)concrete artists themselves, exemplified in Lygia Clark’s text “Letter to Mondrian” (1959).\textsuperscript{40} He wrote:

I believe it is possible to characterize our constructive will as something deeper and prior to the existence of constructivism in some European countries. The fact that we [Latin Americans] did not have our own codified space where we could move and act (or, rather, we did not have a defined culture, as the Europeans), led us to assimilate, even before France did, the purism of Ozenda and Le Corbusier, Bauhaus didactics, constructivism and Russian suprematism, and Max Bill’s concretism. In a society like ours, in which everything needs to be accomplished, art integrates the effort to define a

\textsuperscript{38} This view was also promoted in Morais’ first book based on the critic’s Marxist view of art history as well as his interest in sociology, especially in the studies of the Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros (ISEB, 1955-1964). Marked by left-wing politics and influenced by CEPAL, the ISEB promoted the nationalist and developmentalist ideas that would mark Morais’ utopian and optimistic conception of constructive art. See Frederico Morais, Arte e indústria (Belo Horizonte: Impr. Belo Horizonte, 1962). In a show like the Mercosul Biennial, intended to promote the regional integration, autonomy, and development sought by the treaty, this theory was particularly welcomed.

\textsuperscript{39} The text was first published in Roberto Pontual, ed., América Latina: geometria sensível, Museu de Arte Moderna (Rio de Janeiro: Edições Jornal do Brasil, 1978).

\textsuperscript{40} Clark wrote “Letter to Mondrian” as a diary entry in May 1959. At the time, she had decided to leave the Concrete movement to pursue her personal convictions. She addressed Mondrian as her master and example. See, Lygia Clark, “Carta a Mondrian” [1959]. Lygia Clark (Barcelona/Marselha/Porto/ Bruxelas/Rio de Janeiro, Fundación Tàpies/Galeries Contemporaines des Musées de Marseille/ Fundação de Serralves/Société des Expositions du Palais des Beaux-Arts/Paço Imperial, 1999), 114-116.
national and/or continental project, art organizes the reality, art transforms and constructs a new society.\textsuperscript{41}

In his construction of an original constructivism in Latin America, Morais pinpointed the essential role of art as an auxiliary tool in the formation of a national and regional project in socio-economically dependent societies. To that end, he paradoxically pictured the region as an inchoate mass that needed to be organized according to the Western tradition of the nation state in order to develop. This developmentist view and its accompanying focus on geometric abstraction was part of Morais’ strategy to further dissociate himself from Marta Traba’s theory of an enclosed Latin America and of the 1978 Latin American Biennial. He wrote in the 1978 essay:

If in the theoretical plan, Marta Traba insists on “the predominant mythical tone of Latin American society,” the São Paulo Biennial… spurs this view. The next exhibition of the São Paulo Biennial, the first entirely dedicated to the analysis of art in our continent, will have as theme “Myths and Magic.” Because of all this, [Juan] Acha understands that “geometrism is, in Latin America, a healthy corrector of an individualist and emotional tradition of art and culture.”\textsuperscript{42}

Morais did not specify that although the 1978 theme was obviously inspired by Traba’s vision for Latin American, it was proposed in a biennial which was co-curated by Acha—demonstrating that this notion of a mythical Latin America had wide appeal in the 1970s, being staged in exhibitions both inside and outside the region.

In order to promote an original art for the region, Morais skillfully inverted the predominant “original-derivative” discourse by postulating the existence of a “constructive will” among artists in the Americas prior to its appearance in Europe—a


\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 30.
move that, while maintaining the presence of a vivid transatlantic exchange, guaranteed
the originality of a Latin American cultural identity. In doing so, he was building on
(and reinforcing) art history’s traditional conception as a succession of artistic
movements reacting to each other. In such a model, precedence is conflated with
originality and quality, the defining traits of the Eurocentric concept of artistic avant-
garde. Simultaneity, or even antecedence, was a key element in Brazilian artists’ attempt
to revise the dominant narrative, as it remedied the old colonial belief that Brazilian
cultural products were either “misplaced” or mere imitations of U.S.-Western European
originals.

Nonetheless, by claiming a Brazilian artistic genealogy and inverting the logic of
Eurocentric historiographical constructs, Morais challenged the notions of cultural
dependency and colonial difference in the writing of art history and the theorization of
artistic practices. He explained, “If we accept the existence of this Latin American
constructive will, we can extrapolate about a possible influence of our art on European
and North-American art.” He offered as examples French kinetic art “dominated by
Latin Americans” and the “minimalist anticipations” of artists like Mexican-based
Mathias Goeritz, Colombian Eduardo Ramírez Villamizar, and Brazilian Almicar de
Castro, among others.

43 This inversion and the claim that Latin America’s antecedence demonstrated the artistic autonomy of the region was also mobilized in Ramírez’s essays and displayed in her 2004 show at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, significantly titled Inverted Utopias, analyzed in this chapter.
44 Ibid. 26.
To the Mercosul curator, the fundamental regional connector was Torres-García. Torres-García was active across the region, from his school *Asociación de Arte Construtivo*, founded in Montevideo in 1934 with the hope of disseminating concrete art, to *Universalismo constructivo: Contribución a la unificación del arte y la cultura de América* (Constructive Universalism: Contribution for the Unification of Art and Culture of America, 1944), which collected his writings and proved highly influential across the Southern Cone. Visually legitimizing Morais’ theory of a cohesive identity under a constructive will, the Mercosul Biennial presented the constructive vector in a museum-like environment—an enclosed space that differed from the other two vectors (i.e. political and cartographic), dispersed throughout the 24,000 square meters that composed the multiple exhibition spaces. The correspondence among the several regional movements, theorized in the catalogue, took visual form in the continuous display of artworks by *Taller Torres-García, Concreto-Invención*, concretismo, Madí, neoconcretismo, *Los Dissidentes*, and GRAV, among others (Figure 2.1).

In the magazine *Continente Sul Sur*, Morais included Rhod Rothfuss’ article “El marco: un problema de la plástica actual” (“The Frame: A Problem in Contemporary Visual Art”), which spurred artists to incorporate the irregular frame into their compositions. The text was originally published in the celebrated *Arturo* magazine. Launched in 1944 in Buenos Aires, the publication advocated for a conceptualization of the artist as an engaged intellectual, concerned with all areas of human creativity.

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Featuring a drawing of Argentine artist Tomás Maldonado on the cover (Figure 2.2), the single-issue magazine put forth ideas that would agitate the local artistic scene throughout the next decade, namely the promotion of abstract art and of invention in contrast to a mimetic approach to art. Therefore, *Arturo* created a regional network that included collaborators such as Torres-García, the Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro, the Portuguese artist then living in Brazil Maria Vieira da Silva, Brazilian poet Murilo Mendes, and Slovenian-born Argentine artist Gyula Kosice, who would found the Madí movement with Rothfuss two years later.

Supporting his curatorial framework, Morais published the magazine *Continente Sul Sur* as part of the Mercosul Biennial. The essays in the magazine were also divided according to three vectors, integrating and helping to theorize the curatorial framework. In *Continente Sul Sur*, Morais included the two foundational texts of neoconcretism: "*Manifesto Neoconcreto*" ("Neoconcrete Manifesto," 1959) and "*Teoria do não-objeto*" ("Theory of the Non-Object," 1959), both written by Brazilian poet Ferreira Gullar. The two texts, influenced by Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, were the inaugural theoretical pieces of the famous neoconcrete movement. Even more important than the principles delineated in the manifesto itself was the concept of the non-object. The non-object was born out of the demise of the picture frame and the pedestal, which liberated the work of art from any physical enclosure. To neoconcretists, it signified the end of representation in art and the direct appearance of the object in the world, without any
mediation—including that of verbal language.46 To Gullar, while common objects were “hybrids, being composed of name and thing like two layers superimposed,” the non-object was “transparent to perception” and “pure signification.”47 In other words, Gullar argued, whereas objects were representational and divisible between signifier and signified, non-objects were pure presentation and thus integral; thus, the non-object was neither an anti-object nor a representation of an object. Crucial for the development of the non-object was the explosion of the frame, which the neoconcretists excluded from their artwork.

By juxtaposing the seminal theories of Madi and neoconcretism, the Mercosul Biennial highlighted the importance of the rupture with the traditional Renaissance frame. To both groups, the object is progressively negated in favor of a more communal experience. Further creating an association between the two groups, Morais included in the exhibition Kosice’s articulated wooden sculpture Röyi (1944) (Figure 2.3) in the exhibition and three of Lygia Clark’s Bichos (Critters, 1960) (Figure 2.4). In these artworks, both artists created hinged structures to be manipulated by the exhibition viewer, who defined the final layout. As such, the artworks had no reverse, no other side. Featuring an invented name, Röyi was Kosice’s first dynamic artwork—an aspect that would be further developed in his later Madi creations. Titled Bichos because of

46 I am using quotes from the essay “Dialogue on the Non-Object,” a text dating from the same year as the “Theory of the Non-Object,” which was written by Gullar in order to explain his theory didactically. Gullar, “A Dialogue on the Non-Object,” in Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 145.
47 Ibid.
their fundamentally organic character, the sculptures represented the last stage of Clark’s geometric research that, since the 1950s, had evolved with a systematic deconstruction of traditional painting in its key elements: line, plane, and surface. Therefore the Madi and Neoconcrete artworks displayed at the Mercosul Biennial supported Morais’ theories of the existence of a vivid correspondence between different countries of Latin America. Furthermore, they exemplified how this art was original and differentiated by being both socio-political and avant-garde.

**Political Latin America as Avant-Garde**

Morais conceived of the political vector as a response to difficult economic and political realities, among them the imposition of dozens of brutal dictatorships across Latin America. Morais was long an advocate of this view, which he famously promoted in the two-part collective exhibition known as *Do corpo à terra* (*From Body to Earth*, Belo Horizonte, 1970). The exhibition was presented under extraordinary conditions, considering the political repression and turmoil of the period. Moreover, the event was entirely sponsored by Hidrominas, a local touristic agency, whose president issued an

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48 The show gathered the most respected artists working in conceptual art in Brazil at the time, including Cildo Meireles and Hélio Oiticica. The exhibition also presented works by Alfredo José Fontes, Artur Barrio, Carlos Vergara, Cildo Meireles, Décio Noviello, Dileny Campos, Dilton Araújo, Eduardo Ângelo, Franz Weissmann, Frederico Morais (who also exhibited as an artist), George Helt, Ione Saldanha, José Ronaldo Lima, Lee Jaff (who executed an idea by Hélio Oiticica), Lotus Lobo, Luciano Gusmão, Maria de Lourdes, Terezinha Soares, Thereza Simões, and Umberto Costa Barros. For the first time in Brazil, the organizers paid for the artists’ travel expenses, as well as the production of the site-specific artworks, but no catalogue was produced. Ironically, as Morais notes, the event was organized as part of a celebration for Tiradentes, a national hero associated with freedom because he took part in a rebellion that tried, unsuccessfully, to promote Brazil’s independence from Portugal in 1789.
official letter authorizing the artists to exhibit inside the city park. This invitation and authorization was understood as a form of carte blanche permission for the presentation of transgressive works of art. In addition to the city park, the event also took place in the official governor’s palace. Although the exhibition did not have a catalogue, Morais conceptualized the exhibition in the 1969 essay “Contra a arte afluente: o corpo é o ‘motor’ da obra.” (Against Affluent Art: The Body is the “motor” of the artwork) In it, Morais promoted a view of art as a living process, as action. More importantly, he launched the concept of “art-guerrilla,” promoting the view of experimental artwork as an ambush and associating the artist with the guerrilla soldier. Morais published this essay in the publication accompanying the Mercosul Biennial, the magazine Continente Sul Sur, and included the pamphlet he distributed in the opening of Do corpo à terra, “Do corpo à terra: somos os bárbaros de uma nova raça” (From Body to Earth: We Are the

49 Besides being sponsored by Hidrominas, the show was promoted by politicians directly linked to the military government who endorsed the selection of Morais as the event’s organizer and as a participating artist. During our conversation, Morais explained that the State of Minas Gerais (MG), where he came from, had a very peculiar relationship with the military: The MG government believed that the Brazilian coup-d’état had been conceived there, and consequently felt superior to the rest of the country. Therefore, the MG refused to provide explanations of events that happened locally to the centralized government in Brasília.

50 According to Morais, the two exhibition spaces comprised two simultaneous and integrated events: the show Objeto e participação (Object and participation), inaugurated inside the Palácio das Artes on April 17, 1970, and the manifestation Do corpo à terra (From Body to Earth), which took place in the Municipal Park of Belo Horizonte from April 17 – 21. The events in the park, which occurred in different times and places, were left on-site until their destruction. Both the indoor and the outdoor shows were sponsored by Hidrominas and shared the theme of “object,” understood as an aesthetic category. The term was already a popular concept in Brazil, as acknowledged by Ferreira Gullar’s “Teoria do não objeto.” Morais, who made the suggestion to include the park in the event and chose the event’s theme, had been actively trying to integrate spaces outside institutions in his curatorial practice. Starting in 1968, he would develop a series of events in the gardens of the MAM/RJ, the most famous being the celebrated Domingos de Criação (Creation Sundays, 1971) in which the public was invited to create artworks collectively.

Barbarians of a New Race). He closed the text stating: “Vanguard is permanent transformation. It is precariousness as a norm, guerrilla warfare as a life process.” Morais is claiming for Brazilian art a revolutionary status and tradition that countries like Brazil (differently from Cuba and Nicaragua) cannot easily plea.

Embodying this view in the 1970 exhibition were artist Artur Barrio’s “T.E.” (Trouxas ensangüentadas or Bloody Bundles) (Figure 2.5). The bundles were “objects” consisting of blood, cow meat, paper, and rope tied together with cloth. Barrio placed these objectionable things in public places as site-specific works and did performances related to them. In Do corpo à terra, Barrio chose the outer space, the city park, to exhibit the final part of his artwork. The artist presented a multi-part “situation.” He first prepared fourteen Bloody Bundles with the aid of a local butcher. Then he disposed of them on the banks of a small river inside the city park. He named the performance Situação T/T,.1 (Situation T/T,.1). Barrio’s action caused local consternation and attracted some five thousand spectators, police, and firefighters (Figure 2.6). This disruption of the public order was caused because Barrio’s action re-inscribed the military disposal of political prisoners’ corpses. In the brutal phase of the military regime in Brazil, which lasted from 1969 until 1974, political prisoners who died under torture where thrown into remote bodies of water—normally the ocean, lakes, or rivers. Therefore, if the body was eventually found, the death could be “easily” explained as drowning or suicide. This tactic was well known all over Latin American countries undergoing military dictatorships.
Barrio showed photographs of his *Bloody Bundles* in the milestone exhibition for conceptual art, *Information* (Museum of Modern Art in New York, 1970), which occurred two months after the show *Do corpo à terra*. Although he sent extensive photographic material to the curator Kynaston McShine, Barrio decided to print four photos of the last phase of *Situation T/T,.1* in the pages of the *Information* catalogue. The catalogue was envisioned as an artwork itself, and artists had complete control over the material they chose to publish, which could be different from that shown in the exhibition itself. Thus, one can assume that Barrio liberally opted to circulate pictures of his bundles beside the river, including one in which both civilians and the police are nervously observing the objects—an image that exposes the socio-context of the artwork, as ignoring the political situation and the ethics of *Situação T/T,.1* reduces the radicalism of the artwork. With his *Bloody Bundles*, Barrio is not only challenging the conventional boundaries of art, he is also bringing into question the ways in which we acknowledge, experience, and react to hidden events, such as the murder of political prisoners.

Morais presented *Bloody Bundles* in the political vector of the Mercosul Biennial. In addition to Barrio, Morais showcased groups and artists including *Nueva Figuración*, León Ferrari, Cildo Meireles, and Luis Camnitzer, together with extensive archival material documenting the Argentinean actions composing the event *Tucumán Arde* (Figure 2.7) and the Chilean *escena avanzada* (advanced scene), for instance. Morais also published historical theoretical material grounding these artistic manifestations in the exhibition’s catalogue. The selection, although including artists from all participating
countries, associated the political vector primarily with artists working in the Southern cone and Brazil. Showcasing pop and conceptual art, the curator promoted the view of these movements as political in Latin America. Furthermore, the biennial presented Latin American pop as inseparable from its local context rather than derivative of North American precedents—a now widely accepted art-historical premise.52

Curator Mari Carmen Ramírez famously promoted the canonization of Latin American conceptualism as political in 1993 with the article “Blue Print Circuits: Conceptual art and Politics in Latin America,” which was published in the catalogue of MoMA’s exhibition in Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century.53 In it, she built on the notion of conceptual art as close to “concepts,” as directly linked to pure thought. Ramírez, defining the main features of the movement in Latin America in opposition to those in North America, made explicit the relationship between conceptual art and politics in Latin America by referring to the work of artists like Cildo Meireles, Luis Camnitzer, and Alfredo Jaar as “political-conceptual.” All three of these artists were

52 In 1998, Luis Camnitzer published “Political Pop,” in which he defends a view for pop art that echoes his reading of conceptualismo. See Luis Camnitzer, “Political Pop,” in On Art, Artists, Latin America, and Other Utopias, ed. Rachel Weiss (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 30-37. Recently, several exhibitions have explored the political aspect of pop art. For example, besides the two exhibitions scheduled to open in 2015—an international pop art exhibition at the Walker Art Center and The World Goes Pop at the Tate Gallery, London—América do Sul, a Pop Arte das contradições (South America, the Pop Art of Contradictions, Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro, 2013) explored local and critical forms of pop art. See http://mamrio.org.br/exposicoes/amERICA-do-sul-pop-arte-das-contradicoes/.

included in Morais’ biennial.\textsuperscript{54} This understanding led Ramírez to focus on the capacity of the artwork to intervene in social reality instead of on shared formal characteristics. Framing her discourse was the turbulent period of military dictatorships and authoritarian government in Latin America. Therefore, Ramírez adapted the 1970’s construction that the common unifier of Latin America was its precarious socio-political context—as seen in the previous chapter.

Although Morais did not publish the 1993 essay by Ramírez in the accompanying publications of the Mercosul Biennial, he included Camnitzer’s “Una genealogia del arte conceptual latino-americano” (A Genealogy of Latin American Conceptual Art)\textsuperscript{55} in which Camnitzer extensively quotes Ramírez. Camnitzer also included the Argentine Neue Figuración as a major influence for Latin American conceptual art, citing Argentine artist Alberto Greco as exemplary of the conflation of the two styles in the region. The genealogy traced by Camnitzer viewed Argentine neofiguration as originating from a rupture with the traditional idea of figurative art and therefore closer to abstraction.\textsuperscript{56} Therefore, Camnitzer suggests Neofiguration as an existential and critical bridge between the painting tradition in the region and the new

\textsuperscript{54} In her 1993 article, Ramírez attempts to delineate the characteristics of conceptual art in Latin America mainly via a direct comparison with its North Atlantic counterpart. She cites the Spanish critic Martin Fiz, who viewed conceptual art in Latin America as social and political, contrasting Fiz’s view with that of U.S. artist Joseph Kosuth. She also affirms that conceptual art in the region was concerned with a direct intervention in the “art circuit”; did not employ figuration as a means to make political interventions; and transformed the role of the viewer, making the spectator a direct participant in the artwork. All these ideas were cherished by those of Morais’ generation in Brazil, the last one being the quintessential Neoconcretist credo.

\textsuperscript{55} Luis Camnitzer, “Una genealogia del arte conceptual latino-americano,” Continente Sul Sur, no. 6 (November 1997), 179-230.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 189.
politicized currents of the 1960s-1970s and not as a mere return to figuration. This construction supported Morais’ inclusion of pop and conceptual art under the political vector as avant-garde.

Nevertheless, Camnitzer revised this position later in the ambitious exhibition *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950-1980* that he co-curated in the Queens Museum of Art in New York in 1999. The exhibition mapped political experimental practices, using the term “conceptualism” to differentiate the interventions included in the show from “conceptual art,” which was associated with North Atlantic artworks. The show included eleven geographically defined sections analyzed by a large team of international art historians to question the secondary status relegated to critical production outside of the West, thereby acknowledging the consequences of cultural colonialism in the writing of art history. In the catalogue, Ramírez published an expanded version of her abovementioned essay. In “Tactics for Thriving in Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980,” she affirmed the view of earlier artists that conceptualism should not be understood as a “style or movement,” defining it instead as “a strategy of antidiscourses whose evasive tactics call into question both the fetishization of art and its systems of production and distribution in late capitalist society.” Paraphrasing Argentine artist Roberto Jacoby, Ramírez concluded, “in its most radical form, conceptualism can be read as a ‘way of thinking’ about art and its
relationship to society.”\textsuperscript{57} The exhibition canonized the current view of conceptualism in Latin America as dematerialized and inseparable from the regional socio-political context—a construction that had been in the making since the 1970s.\textsuperscript{58}

**Cartography as Geopolitics**

As a later addition to the exhibition, the cartographic vector was initially envisaged as a separate show that presented artworks that mapped out Latin America. For instance, Morais included Anna Bella Geiger’s drawing *Amuleto, a mulata, a muleta, América Latina* (1976), (Figure 0.7) analyzed in the introduction of this dissertation. He also included Brazilian artist Adriana Varejão’s *Linha Equinocial* (Equinoctial Line, 1994) (Figure 2.8), an installation in which lacerations disrupted the four prints of oceans and seas that composed the background, and, at the forefront, suspended shards of baroque porcelain created lines uniting the figures and evoking the colonial history of the region. Hence, most of the artworks had a critical view on cartography, incorporating postcolonial debates. Helping to frame the third vector theoretically, Morais included in the magazine *Continente Sul Sur* texts by Joaquín Torres García, Brazilian social geographer Milton Santos, and critic Mário Pedrosa, among others.


\textsuperscript{58}\textsuperscript{}On the canonization of Latin American conceptual art, see Miguel A. López and Josephine Watson, “How Do We Know What Latin American Conceptualism Looks Like?,” *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry*, no. 23 (Spring 2010): 5-21.
Ultimately, the vector ended up including artworks that engaged directly with cartographic imagery but had a clear political message. Brazilian vanguard artist Ivens Machado’s *Mapa Mudo* (Silent Map, 1979) (Figure 2.9), a cement cast in the form of the Brazilian map covered with broken glass, was included in the cartographic section. In poor neighborhoods in Brazil (and in Latin America, for that matter), placing broken glass on the top of the wall surrounding a house is a measure to avoid unwanted guests. By extending this strategy to the Brazilian map, Machado’s installation represents a barrier. Similar to the spikes on the external walls of houses, the artwork operates like a frontier that limits passage. In 1979, the year the artwork was made, Brazil was still operating under a dictatorial government; however, the military had just revoked Institutional Act Number 5, which allowed political exiles to return to their home country, opening Brazilian borders. The symbolism of *Mapa Mudo* offered a bitter welcome to the homeland.

Alfredo Jaar’s iconic *A Logo for America* (1987) (Figure 2.10), the video of an intervention the artist made in New York, was also featured in the exhibition. Originally commissioned by the Public Art Fund as a part of the Messages to the Public program, the work consisted of an animation for an electronic billboard in New York’s Times Square. In 42-second sequences, images of the flag and map of the United States were intercalated with the sentence “This is not America.” The artwork reminded the viewer of the appropriation of the name America by a small part of the American continent. Through this work, Jaar, who is known as a conceptual artist, denounced U.S.
domination over the rest of the continent. Therefore, in summing up the geo-political
debates of the 1970s, the cartographical vector ended up reinforcing the premises of the
political vector.

Aftermath
In his post-exhibition report to the Mercosul Biennial Foundation, Morais highlighted
his creation of a multi-vector scheme as the most important achievement of the 1997
Mercosul Biennial. Supporting this claim, Morais quoted a letter he had received from
Ramírez in which she claimed that his decision to “organize the show according to
conceptual axes, as well as the judicious representation of artists and movements
according to an internal legitimation criterion and not according to the market gave an
unusual freshness to the event.” She concluded: “Few times have I seen a reading of
Latin American art so right in all its dimensions.”

Ramírez visited the show and participated in the Biennial’s seminars, presenting
the paper “Más alla de la identidad: Apuntes sobre la globalización y el arte en América
Latina” (Beyond Identity: Notes on Globalization and Art in Latin America). As the
title indicates, her lecture explored the internationalization of Latin American art, which,

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59 Morais composed a final report of the show for the FBAVM that he later revised into an article published in an anthology of his writings. In it, he mentioned that several foreign critics and academics appeared to better understand his curatorial scheme, quoting Jacques Leenhardt’s statement that “the great merit of the show was to organize the artworks according to axes,” composing a “sampling pedagogy.” See Frederico Morais, “I Bienal do Mercosul: Regionalismo e globalização,” in Frederico Morais, ed. Silvana Seffrin (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, 2004), 182.

60 Ibid. Morais quotes Ramírez in the article. A copy of the letter is available at the FBAVM/NDP.

she argued, operated in “a hierarchical and unequal way” and was highly dependent on
the legitimization of hegemonic art circuits.62 Advocating for a “new geography of
cultural power” that was more global and less hierarchical, Ramírez ended her paper by
questioning the ability of a regional biennial to generate an apparatus of local or
continental legitimization that could win or surpass the recognition of the center of the
art world. Ramírez, who raised concerns about the possibility of replacing existing
inequities from within the periphery, was the first curator of Latin American art in the
United States, at the art museum of the University of Texas at Austin in 1988.63

3. Latin American Constellations

In 2001, Ramírez was appointed the Wortham Curator of Latin American Art at the
Museum of Fine Arts in Houston (MFAH) as part of an initiative to make the museum
the premier institution for Latin American art in the United States.64 Well-known for her
scholarly, in-depth examinations of artists and movements then little known to North
American audiences, Ramírez established her curatorial voice at the MFAH with *Inverted
Utopias*. The exhibition built upon the structure elaborated in *Heterotopías: Medio siglo sin
lugar: 1918-1968* (Heterotopias: Half Century without a Place) part of the monumental
series of exhibitions *Versiones del Sur* (Versions from the South), a quintet organized by

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62 Although they intended to publish the conference’s proceedings, the papers remain unpublished. Some of
them, including Ramírez’s, are available at the FBAVM/NDP.
63 Part of the information incorporated here is presented in an article I co-wrote with Abigail Winograd
contrasting the 1st Mercosul Biennial and the 2004 show *Inverted Utopias*. For further information, see: Maroja
Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 84-96.
the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid from 2000 to 2001. The curators and then MFAH director Peter Marzio trumpeted their intentions to showcase and develop the most complete narrative of Latin American modernism. Ramírez stated, “We are using ‘Inverted Utopias’ as a kind of blueprint for the artists and works that we aspire to.”

The premise of the show pivoted around Ramírez and Olea’s characterization of Latin American avant-gardes as going back to “their glorious, untainted past in search of the chimerical elements for their avant-garde approach” in opposition to the “forward thrust” of the historical European avant-gardes. To highlight this difference, the exhibition adopted the concept of utopia, an idea profoundly intertwined with the image of Latin America in the global imaginary as ahistorical. The curators’ goal was to establish the quality and depth of Latin American artistic production, a gesture of repudiation intended as a rebuke to North American and European histories of art that

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65 Heterotopías also used a constellar model but differed slightly in its organization—it contained seven instead of five constellations. Cf. Heterotopías: medio-siglo sin lugar, 1918-1968, (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2000).

66 Ramírez, quoted by Arthur Lubow, in “After Frida.”


68 José Emilio Burucúa and Mario H. Gradowczyk persuasively demonstrate the anti-historicism contained in the constellation model deployed by Ramírez and Olea in the Heterotopías show, an argument that can be equally applied to Inverted Utopias. Burucúa and Gradowczyk, “¿Constelaciones o paranatelonta? Modelos y caprichos en la crítica del arte latinoamericano,” Ramona, Revista de Artes Visuales, no. 31 (April 2003), 4-16, http://www.ramona.org.ar/files/r31.pdf. It is also worth noting that the idea of a non-linear history encompassed in the constellation that was originally developed by Walter Benjamin and adapted by Adorno is undermined in the show by the presence of a particular temporal frame and its implied creation of hierarchy among movements and artists.
had marginalized the contributions and innovations of Latin America artists for
centuries describing them as derivative of European movements. As Ramírez and Olea’s
exhibition was planned to take place in a North American institution, it represented an
opportunity to critique the course of canonical art history from the center and thus to
initiate “a new geography of power” similar to the one she had advocated in her 1997
presentation. In its effort to redraw the map of curatorial interest and power, Torres-
García’s revolutionary image América invertida worked, as it had for Morais, as a vital
reference, and in this case as an inspiration for the title and spirit of the exhibition.

The exhibition proposal relied heavily, however, on European theories of the
avant-garde to elaborate a “constellar” model. In particular, the curators borrowed their
concept from Theodor Adorno’s Negative Dialectics. Adorno conceives of the
“constellation” as a site of juxtaposition in which it is possible to resist the tendency to
reduce meaning to a common core and thereby preserve the tension between the
universal and the particular, an essential idea for artists such as Torres-García.69 Ramírez
and Olea adopted the model for its ability to challenge the essentialism of Euro-North
American modernism, which located the authenticity of modernity outside of Latin
America. For the curators, the flexibility of the constellation as a model—both in its
theoretical deployment by Adorno and its schematic visual qualities—made it an ideal

Ramírez first employed constellation as a theoretical proposition in Ramírez and Edith Gibson, eds., Re-
Aligning Vision: Alternative Currents in South American Drawing, (Austin: Archer M. Huntington Gallery,
University of Texas, 1997). The model was substantially elaborated upon by Olea in his catalogue essay for
tool to organize a massive group exhibition intended to challenge the conventions of the traditional art survey exhibition.\(^{70}\)

In her 1992 article “Beyond ‘the Fantastic,’” Ramírez contended that the problem undergirding the invisibility of Latin America art was the persistence of myths and stereotypes that obscured the complexity of the region. Paramount among the falsehoods relegating Latin America to the periphery, she argued, was the perpetuation of the notion of Latin American art as existing outside of the Western tradition despite the fact the region’s colonial legacy implies a formative and sustained relationship with Europe and North America. Advocating instead that Latin American art should be considered an alternative expression of Western culture, she placed the onus of Latin America’s exclusion from the Western cultural legacy on North American curators and institutions. The problem, Ramírez suggested, was the inadequacy of curatorial frameworks based on linear models that allowed for the persistent misperception of the region’s artistic production as derivative and the assumption that exhibition visitors were “incapable of viewing the arts of non-First World societies without the ethnological lens that resulted from colonialism.”\(^{71}\)

\(^{70}\) Ramírez, “Beyond the ‘Fantastic,’” 60-68. In a later essay, Ramírez defined her three primary objections to typical survey exhibitions: they embodied the “naïve assumption” that historical developments occurred in a neat, linear fashion; they operated under the delusion that it is possible to accurately represent a specific artistic moment; and they rely upon curatorial authority to present a supposedly uncontestable truth. See Ramírez, “Re-Aligning Vision,” 18-25. For Heterotopias and Inverted Utopias, Olea and Ramírez redeployed the argument that survey shows generally fail to coherently display disparate works and groups under a single organizing principle. See Ramírez, “The Displacement of Utopias,” in Versions and Inversions: Perspectives on Avant Garde Art in Latin America, ed. Ramírez and Olea (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 121-130.

\(^{71}\) Ramírez, “Beyond the ‘Fantastic,’” 62.
Ramírez singled out the tendency of survey exhibitions toward “reductionism and homogenization” as primarily responsible for these continued misunderstandings of the region, a critique that echoed Homi Bhabha’s contention that large retrospective exhibitions always asserted the primacy of Western linear canonical museological structures, even when they attempted to deconstruct them. Ramírez’s principal complaint was that curators tended to impose a vision of continental identity onto works of art based entirely on the exoticism associated with the Latin American or Latino as “other.” Latin American identity, Ramírez argued, “was conceived of in terms of a primal, ahistorical, and instinctual essence that was presumed to convey the peculiarities of the Latin American character by allowing itself to be expressed through art.” The curatorial imposition of a unified identity was typically justified in terms of authenticity, another concept inevitably tied to indigenous aesthetics or subject matter that explained the predominance of Mexican Muralism in the public imaginary of Latin American cultural production. If the public perceived the folkloric as synonymous with authenticity, artists whose work instead engaged European art were considered unoriginal. It was the duty of the curator, according to Ramírez, to disabuse the


73 Ibid.

74 Mexico’s role in perceptions of Latin American art is difficult to diminish. Mexico’s proximity to the United States and the artistic exchange between the two countries often eclipsed the artistic scenes occurring in countries through Central and South America.

museum-going audience of this misconception by presenting alternative artists, movements, and theories that challenged the market and art historical orthodoxy toward Latin America. To do so, she argued, it was necessary to develop new curatorial models capable of accurately conveying the multiplicity of Latin American identity. Such a model would reclaim the value of hybridity and replace neocolonial, “vertical” relationships with those that fostered “horizontal” exchange. To Ramírez, the constellation was all these things: an original curatorial concept that mounted serious challenges to the chronologies, geographies, and canons of Western art by highlighting artists, relationships, and aesthetic principles that were internal, parallel, or adjacent to existing narratives of the modern. Moreover, operating by juxtaposition, the curators could rely on the constellation form to place Latin American pieces side-by-side with artworks already established in the Western canon. Therefore, Ramírez and Olea were not concerned with following the tradition of the 1970s of creating autochthonous theories for Latin American art. In their use of imported theory, they also disregarded Roberto Schwarz’s advice concerning the problems arriving from “misplaced ideas:” *grosso modo*, the accusation of generating an epigonic production instead of creating one that could be situated outside of Western parameters.

In keeping with Adorno’s understanding of the constellation as able to encompass opposing ideas, Olea and Ramírez’s conceptual framework intended to eliminate the negative connotations of derivation by equating selective assimilation with
originality. As Ramírez declared, “These are not adaptations of existing concepts . . . but rather original contributions denoting an interactive assimilation of Modernist, avant-garde, and New World principles.” Like Heterotopías, Inverted Utopias asserted the fallacy of Latin American unity that, according to the curators, promoted reductive, essentialized characterizations of Latin American identity. In this way, the constellation model differed from the unified view of the region offered by Morais’s vectorial scheme. According to Ramírez, “a constellation is a series of randomly connected luminous points that have no intrinsic relationship to one another, yet whose primary function lies in their potential to orient travelers in the exploration of vast territories.” By applying this malleable model to the diverse Latin American avant-garde scene, the curators were able “to group artists from different countries and time periods into several ensembles focused on artistic, ideological, or thematic concerns” and therefore allow the viewer to concentrate on the “luminous points” without forgetting that there were “trillions of stars left behind.” In Inverted Utopias, Ramírez and Olea organized their exhibit around six constellations or pairs of opposing concepts: “Universal and Vernacular,” “Play and

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76 Though neither Ramírez nor Olea acknowledged the influence, their non-linear, schematic drawings bear similarities to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s earlier rhizome, an open model that allowed for the establishment of connections between disparate points. Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). Martinican literary critic and writer Édouard Glissant had previously foregrounded the relevance of the rhizome for the Americas in his Poetics of Relation, a text that examined the hybrid nature of the francophone Caribbean. See Édouard Glissant, Poetics of Relation (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).


78 Ramírez, “The Displacement of Utopias,” 121-130.

79 Ibid., 126.
Grief,” “Progression and Rupture,” “Vibrational and Stationary,” “Touch and Gaze,” and “Cryptic and Committed.”

In the exhibition’s introductory text, Ramírez and Olea identified four defining characteristics of the Latin American avant-garde that informed these constellar pairs and emphasized the region’s plurality so as to avoid essentialist readings. The first was Latin America’s aforementioned tendency towards a regressive utopic vision, which granted the region an original past but also suggested decontextualized readings. The second was a syncretic, formal eclecticism epitomized by Torres-García’s proposals for La Escuela del Sur (The School of the South), which called for a universal constructivism that inserted pre-Colombian iconography into the modernist grid. The third defining feature of the Latin American avant-garde was selective assimilation of the European and American models that contributed to its hybridity and originality. The final feature was a desire on the part of the artists to influence the socio-political events of their respective countries, thus filling the space between art and social engagement.

This fourth characteristic of Latin American art disseminated the notion of Latin American art as inherently political, an idea central to the Mercosul Biennial and Ramírez’s aforementioned 1993 article “Blueprints,” which she later expanded in “Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin American Art, 1960-1980,” first published in the catalogue of the groundbreaking show Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s and reproduced for Inverted Utopias. In that essay, she described

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conceptualism as the second major development in modern art history, following the avant-garde rebellions of the previous century. In constructing this genealogy, the curator chose to ignore the importance of artists that were vital references for Latin American conceptual artists themselves, Duchamp being the most paradigmatic example. Ramírez and Olea’s sixth constellation, Cryptic and Committed, which explored the growth of conceptual art, would thus, by Ramírez’s logic, constitute the most significant twentieth-century artistic development from the region. Unlike Morais, who exhibited both conceptual and pop art under the political vector, Ramírez and Olea included the majority of their pop examples in the Play and Grief constellation, which juxtaposed social and political reflection with humor and sexuality. The curators ended up conflating conceptual art with the political aspect of Latin American art, arguably its most important feature. This emphasis explains the prominent place that Ramírez assigned to Tucumán Arde—a moment she pinpointed as a definitive “climax” in the progression of Latin American conceptualism.

82 In 1968, a group of artists, journalists and sociologists in Buenos Aires and Rosario (Argentina) carried out various actions that aimed to use art to expose the distance between reality and politics. Some of its leading members were Graciela Carnevale, León Ferrari, Roberto Jacoby, and Norberto Puzzolo. Their first action was Tucumán Arde, which aimed to expose the crisis in the impoverished region of Tucumán through an analysis of the project “Operation Tucumán.” This project was launched by the Argentine dictatorship in 1966 and announced as a series of measures to promote industry and diversify agriculture. Through texts, manifestos, and news spread through public spaces and newspapers, the group condemned the closure of the sugar mills and the consequent crisis in the region, which caused the destruction of the local trade union movement and forced workers to migrate to other areas.
Along with conceptual art, *Inverted Utopias* also privileged permutations of abstraction, whose associated movements appear in four of the six constellations: *Universal and Vernacular* (the School of the South), *Progression and Rupture* (Torres-García, Madi, and Neoconcretism), *Vibrational and Stationary* (Kinetic art), and *Touch and Gaze* (Op art). As in the Mercosul Biennial, conspicuously absent from the exhibition was any evidence of “the fantastic” or surreal. Praising the “very wise” curatorial decisions in Houston, art historian and curator Robert Storr noted, “there’s no Diego [Rivera], there’s no [Wifredo] Lam, there’s no [Roberto] Matta, and so on, in this exhibition.” For Storr, the show did not diminish the importance of those artists but, by not including the usual suspects, “other things can be seen.” As a result, we can conclude that, like Morais in his 1997 Biennial, the curators of *Inverted Utopias* wanted to create a modern narrative for Latin American art that kept a distance from the fantastic and its previous association with the folkloric, which may help to explain Ramírez’s enthusiastic appraisal of the Mercosul Biennial despite her differences with the schema it employed.

**Vectors and Constellations: The Institutionalization of Latin American Art As Avant-Garde**

Beyond both exhibitions’ efforts to repudiate the frequent conflation of the “art of the fantastic” with the cultural production of the region, Morais’ vectorial scheme and Ramírez and Olea’s constellar model shared much in common. The shows limited their scope to selections from the twentieth century and focused their geographic range on

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84 Robert Storr, “Perspective of Exhibition Craft,” in *Versions and Inversions*, 217.
countries with a stronger urban tradition—specifically Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Venezuela. The shows used their respective structural frames to spotlight the abstract and conceptual art experiments of the Latin American avant-gardes, emphasizing their political dimension as a local characteristic. Aspiring to display a large number of artworks, the curators adopted models that encouraged accretions and the possibility of growth and variation. Despite the previously mentioned differences between the linear structure of the vector and the network format of the constellation, the result was the inclusion of many of the same artists and movements, including Oiticica, Lygia Clark, Madí, Neoconcretismo, Alberto Greco, Torres-García, Jesús Soto, and Carlos Cruz-Diez. By privileging such a selection, the two shows strongly asserted that these tendencies, especially in their political aspects, formed the foundation of a new canon, which also created substantial ripples in the Latin American art market.85

In their attempt to radically transform the narrative of Latin American modernism, both shows operated as massive survey exhibitions, despite Morais’ preference for curator Catherine David’s term “retro-prospective show” to describe his biennial and Ramírez and Olea’s statement that Inverted Utopias was not a “survey exhibition.” 86 As examined above, Morais understood the 1997 Biennial as an opportunity to showcase a vision of a unified (though non-totalizing) idea of Latin American art that he had been constructing since the 1960s and 1970s. Responding to

85 Lubow, “After Frida.”
critics who accused the show of being excessively historical, Morais also stressed that the Mercosul Biennial had “particularities that differentiated it from its counterparts.”

Arguing that the past is “always open to new interpretations,” Morais insisted that the exhibition’s importance was not about “differentiating the historical from the contemporary” but the way that canonical works were approached, as “you can make an aged reading of the contemporary production or, inversely, a reading capable of actualizing art history.” As we have seen, Ramírez and Olea’s rejection of the survey exhibition was based on their understanding of the format as responsible for perpetuating distortions of the artistic production of the region, namely by presenting a uniform and general view of its art.

Regardless of the similarities between the two schemes and the complimentary appraisal Ramírez penned for Morais, in Inverted Utopias she and Olea pitted themselves against Morais’ Biennial by criticizing his lecture on constructive art. Ramírez took specific aim at his theorization of a “constructive vocation,” as it unified the abstract investigations across Latin America. Using their show’s catalogue as a platform, Ramírez distanced herself from Morais with a lengthy and pointed rebuttal of his transnational claims, associating them with “the outworn framework of art history and the naïve parameters of essentialism” and arguing that “with the exception of the well-

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88 Ibid.
89 As British critic and noted curator Guy Brett argued in his favorable review of the show, “Inverted Utopias” functioned as a survey exhibition, a format that, he argued, had a long and troubled history in its treatment of Latin American art. Guy Brett, “Inverted Utopias,” Artforum International, vol. 43, no. 3 (November 2004): 217.
documented connections between Torres-García and several Madí artists, it is impossible to establish historical links between the South American Constructive groups.” Taking issue with his notion of a “constructive will” originating among Latin American artists, she argued that “this interpretation is more closely related to the persistence of 1960s developmentalist ideology within a certain sector of Latin American critics than to the type of primeval utopia that, as we will see, the avant-garde artists and groups in question pursued.”

Ramírez and Olea differentiated their show from these views, positioning *Inverted Utopias* as pioneering in its scope and ambition. By rejecting the legitimacy of internal exchanges between constructive Latin American groups, they insisted upon a reading of Latin American art that maintained the relevance of heterogeneity and national specificity. Moreover, by presenting Latin America as a “No-Place,” Ramírez and Olea embraced a decontextualized view of Latin America, opting to present avant-garde production as fragmented and utopian rather than inserting it directly into a historicized transnational economic and political context, as in Morais’s exhibition.

Ramírez and Olea constructed a narrative of Latin American modernism based on a vision of the Latin American avant-garde as looking back into “a kind of primeval utopia”—a fundamental element in their assertion of the originality of Latin American art. Morais, on the other hand, viewed utopia as deeply linked to the artistic project of


91 Ramírez and Olea, “Prologue,” xv.
constructivist artists who wanted to build a better and more equal society. In his curatorial proposal for the Mercosul Biennial, he wrote, “The constructive project is fundamentally optimistic. And utopic. The Constructive artist believes that art can be an instrument of society’s transformation.” As Ramírez noted, Morais associated this project with the modernizing schemes implemented in Latin America in the 1950s, Brazil’s planned capital, Brasília, being perhaps the most paradigmatic example. Surely, both shows attempted to highlight the originality and distinctiveness of Latin American art without reference to the fantastic and showcased similar and sometimes the same artworks. Nevertheless, by employing the concept of a utopian past via a “‘constructive will’ [that] preceded the European presence on the continent” and anchoring this conception in modernization projects in the region, Morais’ vision was firmly rooted in time and space, escaping decontextualized notions of art.

Morais’ historicized, unified narrative of Latin American art was framed in opposition to a partisan “universal” art history that only occasionally included isolated Latin American artists such as Rivera and Matta. Supporting this view in accordance with his trajectory as a critic, Morais argued that “to construct a Latin American art history means to de-construct a metropolitan art history.” In its anti-imperialist tone, the ambition was in line with the ideology of Latin American criticism in the 1970s, as Ramirez pointed out. In contrast, Ramirez and Olea’s constellation model, following

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Adorno, located a meaningful tension in the space between the center and periphery and identified it as the site of Latin American originality. If, on the one hand, the constellar model of *Inverted Utopias* managed to keep oppositional pairs together without reaching a totalizing synthesis that, according to the curators, would generate an essentialist view of Latin America, on the other hand, their use of imported theory perpetuated a scheme that critics like Morais had been denouncing as colonialist since the 1960s. The likely motivation for this decision lies in Ramírez and Olea’s exhibition goal. *Inverted Utopias* was not a regional schema. Therefore, it did not promote a unified view of Latin America intended to foster cultural integration and establish internal networks, but rather aimed to insert another narrative of Latin American modernism into the existing canon.\(^{94}\) Therefore, an integrated, contextualized view of Latin America would have been detrimental to their project’s ultimate goal. Consequently, the new parallel art historical narrative presented in *Inverted Utopias* echoed in many ways the existing modernist canon, including its reliance on European theory (Adorno), a foundational artistic genius (Torres-García), the prominence of abstraction, and the ever-diminishing importance of the object amidst a political conceptualism. It is perhaps for this reason that *Inverted Utopias* played a decisive role in the subsequent assimilation of new names into this larger, preexisting canon of world art.

\(^{94}\) Ramírez’s decision to refrain from exhibiting the MFAH’s permanent collection of Latin American art alongside its European and North American contemporaries is further evidence of her insistence on the establishment of a parallel Latin American canon.
To demonstrate the differences between the discourses constructed by the two models—vector and constellation—we can examine how each mobilized Torres-García’s 1936 drawing as an emblematic image of their show. In both exhibitions, the drawing operates as a fundamental ideological premise regarding the originality of Latin American artistic production, but each mobilizes this premise toward a different end. Torres-García’s drawing, which he reworked for the publication Universalismo constructivo, visually reiterated the artist’s first Latin Americanist manifesto, “The School of the South” (1935), in which he famously stated that “our North looks South. For us, there must not be a North, except in opposition to our South. . . .This correction was necessary; because of it we now know where we are.”

His utopian map graphically employs the language of Constructive Universalism to define the artist’s cultural reorientation away from Europe.

In exhibitions Torres-García’s map acquired different meanings. In Morais’ curatorial proposal, the ability of this image to disrupt and nullify the old colonial relationships perpetuated in exhibitions like the São Paulo Biennial in the 1970s made a powerful visual statement that reinforced the goals of the exhibition, while simultaneously reflecting Morais’ interest in autochthonous theory. In the 1997 Biennial, the drawing became a predecessor of pan-regional anti-imperialist struggles in the 1970s and a symbol of the geopolitical ambitions of the Mercosul Treaty in the present. For Ramírez and Olea, the power of Torres-García’s drawing lies in its interrogation of Latin

95 Torres-García, quoted in Ramírez, “Inversions. The School of the South,” in Inverted Utopias, 73.
America’s relationship to Europe and North America. Both artist and curator selectively employed visual and philosophical language—both adeptly inserting European theory into a Latin America context—to propose a dramatic inversion of the status of Latin American art. In *Inverted Utopias*, Europe operated as a counter-marker, placing Latin America in an inverted or oppositional position.

Despite using different conceptual models and having different political aims, both exhibitions have helped to firmly establish a narrative of Latin American art as modern (abstract) and sophisticated (conceptual) and to affirm the centrality of political and constructive art, a narrative reinforced by several later shows that heightened the visibility of the artists associated with both programs.\(^\text{96}\) The Mercosul Biennial and *Inverted Utopias* were thus fundamental in elaborating the depth and variety of the canon of Latin American art and escaping earlier stereotypes related to the figurative and fantastic. To the global employment of these tropes, as we will see in the next chapter, Paulo Herkenhoff’s 1998 São Paulo Biennial, would contribute by launching the concept of anthropophagy internationally. Whether these models have nonetheless resulted in the construction of other, perhaps equally restrictive, stereotypes is an issue currently being debated.\(^\text{97}\)

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Chapter 3: Anthropophagy as a Geopolitical Weapon

Introduction

This chapter analyzes how the Brazilian modernist concept of anthropophagy, or cultural cannibalism, a term coined by the writer Oswald de Andrade in his "Anthropophagite Manifesto" (1928), became the core concept for the 24th São Paulo Biennial curated by Paulo Herkenhoff in 1998. Anthropophagy, which prescribed the mastication of foreign influences and their digestion together with local motives, inaugurated a new moment in the relationship with European modernism as local intellectuals positioned themselves critically in relation to the "center." The 1998 biennial was initially organized around the overarching concept of épaisseur (density), coined by the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard; anthropophagy was originally intended to serve as the theme for only one section of the exhibition, the Historical Nucleus. In it, anthropophagy, the most celebrated method for understanding Brazilian cultural identity, was initially conceived of as a strategy for envisaging a non-Eurocentric art history. However, Herkenhoff and his curatorial team ultimately used anthropophagy as a unifying theme throughout the four segments of the exhibition, each with a different political focus.

Therefore, in addition to its role in proposing a new art historiography, anthropophagy took on other roles: it allowed Brazilian contemporary art to be showcased as the continent’s exemplary artistic production, provided a theoretical
justification and a model for the presence of Brazilian art throughout the biennial, and displayed global art from the standpoint of the periphery. In this latter capacity, anthropophagy served as a method of envisaging alternative ways of creating an art narrative. As a hybrid and transnational method (and not as a metaphor or theme), the concept operated on the international platform provided by the São Paulo Biennial as a way to highlight fractures in the predominant narrative art historical discourse, which had ignored until that point most non-Western production. In the terminology of postcolonial intellectuals, including Silviano Santiago and Homi Bhabha, it is possible to suggest that it is precisely in these “in-between” spaces, in these fissures in the global narrative, that it is possible to insert difference. Thus, anthropophagy allowed Latin American intellectuals to highlight the necessity to actively incorporate local histories and traditions in the predominant discourse, thereby avoiding an apolitical and inoperative global art.

In my analysis, I focus both on the national conception of cultural cannibalism and on the transnational version that anthropophagy assumed. First, I examine the type of narrative anthropophagy allowed for in Historical Nucleus by establishing a “dialogue” between Brazilian contemporary art and canonical artworks dating from the 16th century onwards. I argue that in this dialogical form, anthropophagy operated illustratively rather than methodologically. Secondly, I claim that the openness of anthropophagy permitted this key concept coined in Brazil to act transnationally in the global art segment of the show, Routes..., advocating a “peripheral” vision. The openness
of anthropophagy thus enabled the term to retain its original national undertones in some segments of the show and, at the same time, to be utilized as a postcolonial transnational emblem. I contend that in this latter capacity to actuate as a Third-World voice, anthropophagy became associated with Latin America—vis-à-vis anthropophagy’s privileged relationship to the region.

This chapter is divided in 4 sections. The first foregrounds the history of the São Paulo Biennial from the 1980s Latin American critics reunion, analyzed in the previous chapter, to the 1998 biennial. The second examines the curatorial concepts deployed in the exhibit, namely density and anthropophagy. The third focuses on the differentiated meanings that anthropophagy acquired in each of the sections composing the biennial. The last studies the aftermath and historicization of the show, ultimately interrogating anthropophagy’s capacity to generate different paradigms for art history.

1. 24th São Paulo Biennial: Background History

When Paulo Herkenhoff was invited to curate the 24th São Paulo biennial, the FBSP had already recovered from the institutional and financial crisis of the late 1960s. The success of 23rd biennial—which was measured by its unprecedented budget and number of visitors—had confirmed the biennial’s reputation as one of the most important large scale international exhibitions, renewing the institution’s ambitions and enabling the
new curator to design an elaborate exhibition plan for the last biennial of the century.¹

This first section traces the institutional history of the São Paulo Biennial after the resolution taken during the 1980 meeting of Latin American critics, analyzed in the first chapter, to maintain the show’s agenda to display international art. Examining the exhibition history that antecedes the 24th São Paulo Biennial show permits to understand the impact of the exhibition in the trajectory of the São Paulo Biennial in the end of the 1990s, when the biennial format was under theoretical scrutiny.

As seen in the first chapter, the original mission of the São Paulo Biennial was the internationalization of Brazilian art. In institutional historiographies of the São Paulo Biennial, the accomplishment of this mission had been closely associated with the introduction of abstract art in the country.² This historical narrative builds on older narratives concerning the exhibition, particularly on Concrete poet Ferreira Gullar’s

¹ The 1996 Biennial cost 12 million U.S. dollars, and almost 400,000 people visited it. These numbers reflect the aims of the biennial’s current president, the banker Edemar Cid Ferreira, to end the Foundation’s monetary problems and institutional crisis. Curator Nelson Aguilar and he were responsible for the 1994 and 1996 Biennials, which can be seen as a continuum in their ambition and artistic program. Stating in several interviews that he wanted to “professionalize” the show, Ferreira instructed Aguilar to invite as many countries as possible and to include internationally famous artists to attract the public. Cf. Agnaldo Farias (ed.), 50 anos da bienal de São Paulo (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 2001), 240. The Foundation São Paulo Biennial has digitalized all of its publications (which include all of its exhibition catalogues) and made them available online at: http://issuu.com/bienal/docs/.

² See, for example, Francisco Alambert and Polyana Canhête, As Bienais de São Paulo: Da era do museu à era dos curadores (1951-2001) (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2004). Elaborating a periodization of the show, the authors divided the history of the São Paulo Biennial in three stages: the Museums Era (1951-1960), the Matarazzo Era (referring to its founder Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, 1961-1980), and the Curators Era (until 1998). The historians believed that it was through the introduction of abstraction in Brazil (particularly of Concrete art) that the internationalization of Brazilian art took place. This view was ratified in Claudia Calirman’s book Brazilian Art under Dictatorship. She, however, placed the show as the culmination of an ongoing process: “The I São Paulo Biennial, held in 1951, became a turning point in the evolving debate between figuration and abstraction, shifting the balance towards abstraction with the bestowal of its major international sculptural prize to a stainless steel construction by the Swiss artist Max Bill, formerly a student of Bauhaus and soon to become the cofounder and director of the Ulm School of Design in Germany....” Claudia Calirman, Brazilian Art under Dictatorship (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 12.
Gullar’s comment illustrates a tendency to conflate abstraction and (Neo) Concretism, which became one of the most successful Brazilian art movements.³

³ Ferreira Gullar in interview with the author, December 2011. Gullar has affirmed the first biennial’s importance as the propeller of geometric abstract art to Brazilian artists since, at least, the 1970s. In the exhibition catalogue Projeto construtivo brasileiro na arte (Pinacoteca de São Paulo, 1977), he wrote, for example, that sculptor Franz Weissmann was a figurative artist until Gullar saw Bill’s Tripartite Unit. The Campos brothers, Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, exponents of the Concrete movement in São Paulo, have also highlighted the importance of Max Bill in the first biennial. The Swiss artist’s prominence in both the biennial and Brazilian art history thus relates to the later significance of the Concrete and Neoconcrete movements for the national arts.

⁴ Abstract art (both informal and geometrical) was being supported and practiced in São Paulo before 1951. The MAM/SP, which organized the biennial, arranged the exhibition Do figurativismo ao abstracionismo (From figurative art to abstract art) for its 1949 opening. The museum’s director, Léon Legand, organized the exhibition with artworks belonging mainly to School of Paris. The exhibition also included three Brazilian artists: Samson Flexor, Cícero Dias, and Waldemar Cordeiro, who all participated with abstract works. In the trilingual catalogue (which denotes an internationalist intention that would be repeated in the biennial’s project), Degand wrote: “one cannot justly decide on the superiority or the inferiority of Abstract or Figurative Art.” Do Figurativismo ao abstracionismo, Léon Degand, ed. (Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 1949), 55. However, artists working with traditional figuration were not included. The curator considered artists like Klee and Miró as figurative since they abstracted from nature; only non-objective painters like Kandinsky and Magnelli were considered abstract. The museum also made a prominent solo show of Bill’s artwork one year before the first biennial. The emphasis on the presence of Concrete Art in the 1951 show was constructed retrospectively. It must be understood as a reflection of the importance that both the biennial’s mission of introducing international art and Concretism gained in local art history. Although only the prizes awarded to Max Bill and Ivan Serpa are mentioned in the current historiography of the show, there were other 43 prizes bestowed. Thus, the awards to the geometric works of Bill and Serpa eclipsed the other prizes given to national and international artists. For example, in Bill’s prize category (official prize for foreigners), Giuseppe Viviani (Italy) and Roger Chastel (France) also received awards—engraving and painting, respectively. In the catalogue Dimensions of Constructive Art in Brazil, Mari-Carmen Ramírez, while analyzing the Adolpho Leirner Collection, noted that “groups such as ruptura and neo-concretismo avoided any reference to local artistic developments and instead proceeded to position themselves as nonderivative proponents of Constructive art tendencies initiated ... by Constructivism, Neo-Plasticism, Max Bill and the Hochschule für Gestaltung. The insistence which they and their supporters stressed this point has led art historians to trace the beginning of Constructive art to the presentation of Bill’s prize-winning Tripartite Unity (1949) at the First São Paulo Biennial in 1951.” Mari Carmen Ramirez, “Fitting Pieces Out of Place? The Adolpho Leirner Collection of Brazilian Constructive Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston” in Dimensions of Constructive Art in Brazil: The Adolpho Leirner Collection (The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 178
Consequently, if the biennial’s mission of bringing international art to Brazilians reveals a colonial anxiety about the quality of the national cultural production, it also discloses the belief that a national formula could be achieved by entering in contact with international currents. This is the same rationale used to proffer anthropophagy as a hybrid method to construct national cultural identity, as will be discussed below.

Art critic Mário Pedrosa reiterated this trope of a cosmopolitan autonomous art in his text comparing biennial exhibitions titled “Inside and Outside the Biennials” (“Por dentro e por fora das bienais,” 1970). He starts the text by identifying the current international crisis of “big collective art organizations” after the paradigmatic year of 1968. He concludes by endorsing the national conviction that the elaboration of a contemporary autonomous form would be reached via contact with the international vanguard—a fruitful interaction enabled by the São Paulo Biennial:

The subsequent international movements that entered and left Brazil had the biennial as their migratory gate. After tachism and informal art, which constitute the crucial assimilation phase of novelties in Brazil, in the country initiated almost unconsciously an effort towards an autonomous elaboration of the creative field. This effort started grosso modo with Clark’s animals [bichos] and Ferreira Gullar’s non-objects. (...) When... Oiticica

2007), 14. Ramirez added that Brazilian art historian Aracy Amaral has argued that, despite the strong presence of figurative and social-realist tradition, abstraction was welcomed in Brazil as early as the late 1930s, as the presence of three Brazilian artists in the opening exhibition of MAM/SP demonstrate. Cf. Aracy Amaral, “Surgimento da abstração geométrica no Brasil,” in Trópico de Capricórnio: Modernismo, arte moderna e o compromisso (São Paulo: Editora 34, 1998), 14.

Mário Pedrosa, probably the most influential Brazilian art critic in the twentieth century, was very familiar with the history of the São Paulo Biennial. Already in 1953, he was part of the jury of the outstanding 2nd São Paulo Biennial. He also organized the 6th show in 1961 and wrote, as Minister of Culture, the project that turned the private biennial into a public foundation in the same year. Moreover, the critic took active part in the 1969 boycott, being persecuted by the Brazilian dictatorial government and exiling himself in Chile. Pedrosa wrote the crucial article analyzed above when he was in Brazil in 1970. In it, he highlighted the importance of the 1961 sculptural award bestowed to Clark’s Bicho as giving international awareness to the Brazilian invention. To the critic, the sculpture broke from the canonical understanding of the genre, greatly impacting art history.
discovers “Tropicália,” using the gardens of the Museum of Modern Art [MAM/RJ] as its headquarters, it is clear that this movement was, even more than Brazilian, essentially carioca [from Rio de Janeiro]. (...) Environmental art in Brazil, one of its precursor countries, characterizes itself mostly for its “to-be-lived” [vivencial] nature...

For Pedrosa, although this new contemporary Brazilian art is part of a larger world trend (environmental art), it has its own characteristics (its “to-be-lived nature”), being autonomous and therefore genuinely national—or, as the critic pinpointed, carioca. Brazil’s position as an environmental art pioneer (“one of its precursor countries”) acknowledges the success of the biennial’s mission in modernizing and consolidating the national arts. Furthermore, by connecting the art of Lygia Clark, Ferreira Gullar, and Hélio Oiticica (in other words, Neoconcretism) to the autonomous moment in Brazilian art obtained through international interaction with vanguard art, Pedrosa recapitulated Gullar’s statement about his visit to the 1st São Paulo Biennial in 1951. He also reiterated an artistic scheme that would later be amply capitalized upon in Brazil and abroad—including in Paulo Herkenhoff’s aims for the 24th São Paulo Biennial, by means of anthropophagy.7

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6 Mário Pedrosa, “Por dentro e por fora das bienais” (1970) in Mundo, homem, arte em crise, Mário Pedrosa (São Paulo, Perspectiva, 2007), 306.

7 Significantly, the international interaction that allowed the birth of an autonomous art happened between Brazil and U.S.-Europe and not between Brazil and its continental neighbors—as art critic Frederico Morais lamented in his book Arte Plásticas na América Latina, quoted in the previous chapters. Despite anthropophagy’s importance for Latin America as a whole, when associated with Brazilian art it does not provide a communication pathway between Brazil and the rest of Latin America. An example of this shortfall is art critic Roberto Pontual’s 1990 book, co-authored with Damian Bayón: La peinture de L’Amérique Latine au XXe siècle: identité et modernité (Painting in Latin America in the Twentieth Century: Identity and Modernity). While it presented a unified history of Latin American painting in its title, the manuscript was divided in two parts: the first encompassing the Hispanophone portion of the continent, written by Bayón, and the second conceiving of Brazil as a separated unit. The two sections were titled “L’Amérique espagnole: avant-gardes et résistances” (“Spanish America: avant-garde and resistances”) and “Le Brésil: anthropophagie et construction” (“Brazil: anthropophagy and construction”). Therefore, anthropophagy serving both as avant-garde art and resistance (and therefore being able to unite the book’s two separated parts) is not cogitated in...
Undeniably, the São Paulo Biennial was the top venue in the continent to view contemporary as well as foundational works of art, abstract or not.\(^8\) Curator Herkenhoff was keenly aware of the Biennial’s history and its importance for Brazilian art history. He included key shows in the brief institutional document titled “History of the São Paulo Biennial,” which was distributed to international curators and museum professionals involved in the 24\(^{th}\) exhibition.\(^9\) As Herkenhoff outlined in the document, by 1998 the Biennial had undergone great changes in its structure, including the establishment of a chief-curator, the implementation of a thematic organization of the shows, and the decision to organize the artists in the exhibition space according to similar artistic language rather than nationality.

This display of artists according to artistic media (painting with painting, video with video, etc.) is very much celebrated in Brazil, as it is understood as creating a spatial equivalence between Brazilian and international production. In the 1981 and 1983 shows, organized by the show’s first official curator Walter Zanini, the spatial equivalence between national and international artists occurred only in the first of the

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the manuscript. The text also evinced how anthropophagy existed as a strategy to create a Brazilian art historiography (but not as a Latin American one) almost a decade before the 24\(^{th}\) Biennial.

\(^8\) For example, the 2\(^{nd}\) Biennial in 1953 presented a Picasso’s retrospective that included Pablo Picasso’s Guernica (1937), works by the Argentinean Madi group in addition to the Italian Futurism and French Cubism shows; the 1967 Biennial organized a very important exhibition of U.S. pop art.

three nuclei of the exhibition (Nucleus I: language analogy; Nucleus II: works that had historical importance to the biennial; Nucleus III: Latin American artworks). Moreover, Zanini’s groundbreaking strategy to group artists by artistic language—a move praised by Herkenhoff—was not mirrored in the show catalogues, which maintained the division of artists according to nationality. Further, by 1989 the old model according to national art schools was re-established. Nevertheless, this short-lived display reflected an important change in the biennial’s mission: displaying national and international artists together inferred that there was no longer a gap between the two that the biennial needed to bridge. Thus, by showcasing Brazil as a key contributor to contemporary art, the show altered the event’s internationalist ambition. Furthermore, the updated format allowed for more curatorial control. Indeed, most of the Biennial’s structural innovations resulted from the efforts made by its first official curator, Walter Zanini (1980 and 1982), to give continuity to the curatorial line he had implemented during the 1970s in the MAC/USP.

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10 This third part exhibiting Latin American artworks had been previously arranged in the Latin American critics’ reunion in 1980, after the extinction of the Latin American Biennial.

11 As Zanini explained, by “organizing the installations of the works by means of the criteria of analogies in language, closeness, and confrontation with what the countries’ submissions had in common,” the curator managed “to influence the choices of the countries’ commissioners by a regulation that gave some guidance on what we [the biennial organizers] had in mind.” Further complementing this attitude of “critical responsibility,” the 1981 and 1983 shows introduced direct invitations to artists, which resulted in a more theoretically coherent and unified show. Cf. Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Lionel Bovier, A Brief History of Curating, (Zürich: JRP/Ringier, 2008), 164.

12 The curatorial policy of the MAC/USP largely privileged mail and video art. In an interview conducted by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Ivo Mesquita, and Adriano Pedrosa, Zanini discussed both his work at the MAC/USP and at the biennial as related experiences. Indeed, they both conceived cultural institutions as “art laboratories” and privileged new media art. In the words of Zanini: “In 1981 there was a sector, including a representation of invited artists, using new media. One innovation [in the biennial] was the mail art exhibition that brought together things sent in by more than 500 multimedia artists. At the next show the
Sheila Leirner, responsible for the 1985 and 1987 shows, made use of Zanini’s unified spatial display according to artistic media to evidence a change in the Biennial’s internationalist agenda. In the catalogue’s introduction, she announced the new universalist aspiration of the biennial, which was now “part of a circuit which include[d] Brazil on par with all other nations.” However, more than just indicating an alteration in the biennial’s internationalizing intentions, Leirner’s unified display ended up exposing the homogenizing influence of the art market worldwide: most artworks submitted to the show were large canvases, reflecting the current neoexpressionist boom.

Incited by the quantity of canvases submitted to the biennial in the heydays of neo-expressionist painting, Leirner decided to display all of them distancing only 12 inches apart from each other in three monumental corridors. This arrangement, titled “the great canvas,” caused protest among artists, art dealers, and critics, since an artwork could not be contemplated without the visual interference of its neighbors. Despite these objections, Leirner kept this critical space. By doing so, she evinced the powerful role of the art market in globalizing styles as well as the fact that Brazilian artists (who also exhibited large scale expressionist paintings) no longer needed the biennial as a platform from which to catch up with the latest international movements. By 1980 the Brazilian art market, which gained a new impulse in the 1970s, was already established on a national level. However, it had not yet entered the international art arena. The internationalization of Brazilian art was mostly accomplished in the 1990s by the pioneering actuation of the gallery owner Marcantonio Vilaça in international art fairs, as Art Nexus director Celia Birbragher declared in the symposium “Revista de Arte da Colômbia. Diálogos” (“Art Magazines in Colombia. Dialogues”), organized by the Casa Daros Foundation on June 4-5, 2013 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The spatial arrangement of Brazilian and foreign art together in 1985 betrayed an international ambition for Brazilian art that was unthinkable before the 1980s, at least in terms of the local art market. In his 2008 review of the São Paulo
The shows of the 1980s clearly mark a departure from the previous “catching up” internationalist paradigm after the Second World War, which had characterized Brazil’s (as well as Venezuela’s and Argentina’s) cultural politics until then. However, as discussed in the first chapter, in contrast to the experience of the 1978 Latin American Biennial, the biennials of the 1980s also signify an end to the attempt to situate Brazilian art inside the Latin American region, creating a unified narrative. The disappointing result of the 1980 Latin American art critic reunion promoted by the FBSP under the tutelage of the art historian Aracy Amaral was promptly accepted by the institution, and any efforts to create a regional identity through its most important international show were put on hold.

The two biennials curated by Nelson Aguilar in 1994 and 1996, quoted as references in Herkenhoff’s dossier about the institutional history of the São Paulo Biennial, maintained the division of artwork according to nationality restored in 1989. These shows strengthened the biennial’s museological vocation by giving weight to the special exhibition rooms. In the country’s expectant socio-economic neoliberal context of

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15 Andrea Giunta’s book Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics: Argentine Art in the Sixties (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007) analyzed the Argentinean attempt to “catch up” with the international scene mainly through the efforts of the critic Jorge Romero Brest. Spurred by the country’s economic buoyancy due to oil, Venezuela’s modernization in the 1950s was promoted by an intense international exchange. A number of chief enterprises were implemented, notably the University City in Caracas (1953) by Carlos Raúl Villanueva. In it, major artists, most of them working with abstraction, were invited to collaborate including Alexander Calder, Fernand Léger, Jean Arp, Antoine Pevsner, and Victor Vasarely—a fact that helped to consolidate the kinetic art scene in the country.
the 1990s, after Brazil’s bumpy transition into democracy and the stabilization of the domestic currency, this museological emphasis was part of the exhibit’s agenda to insert the national visual arts into a hegemonic art narrative. As such, these shows reinforced a national art historiography that was already being promoted nationally and internationally in exhibitions like MoMA’s P.S. 1 Brazil Projects (1988); Hélio Oiticica, the artist’s retrospective in Rotterdam (Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, 1992), and by Cildo Meireles, Waltercio Caldas, José Resende, and Jac Leirner’s participation in the IX documenta (1992) in Kassel.

The themes of the two biennials, “Breaking Away from Support” (1994) and “The Dematerialization of Art at the End of the Millennium” (1996), can be seen as two ends

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16 The presidency of Brazil’s first freely elected Chief of State after the dictatorship, Fernando Collor de Mello (1990-1992), ended in an impeachment due to corruption. The Real Plan, which controlled the Brazilian currency by dollarizing the economy, was effectuated in 1994. This attempt to emphasize Brazilian art, which contrasts with the post-1989 period normally associated with globalization and the development of deterritorialization, can be understood as a rejection of a Pan-American (or Latin American) identity for Brazil. Collector Oswaldo Costa, who was a representative of MAM/RJ in the U.S., wrote a critique of the 1989 São Paulo Biennial that clearly expressed this view: “Brazilian art is the victim of stereotypes and misconceptions. It is constantly included in shows of Latin American art, with willful disregard for the deep differences between Portuguese and Spanish America. (...) One thing both [Latin American and Brazilian art] face is a frequent relegation to sideshow status...” This brief extract shows the collector’s conception that a so-called subaltern position is the only common point between the two, making a unified art historical narrative difficult. In the article, by stating that Brazilian art was “more sophisticated than tropical” and by highlighting that it did not share the rest of Latin America’s love for Social Realism or “fantastic art,” the collector built on historical stereotypes to advocate the superiority of the country’s art. Cf. “Brazil’s Vital and Active Scene,” Journal of Art. 2, no. 1, (Sept.-Oct. 1989). Ultimately, the collector rejected an identity affiliated with the exotic or the folkloric in favor of a modern and autonomous one.

17 The exhibition Hélio Oiticica travelled from February 1992 to February 1994 to the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam; the Gallerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris; the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona; the Centro de Arte Moderna da Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

18 The coincidence of names and movements (e.g., Hélio Oiticica and Neoconcretism, Cildo Meireles and Conceptualism) promoted by these and later exhibitions helped build a canonical narrative to Brazilian art, as Gaudêncio Fidelis demonstrated in his survey of the visibility of Brazilian art in the U.S. Cf. Gaudêncio Fidelis, “The Reception and Legibility of Brazilian Contemporary Art in the United States (1995–2005)” (PhD dissertation, SUNY Binghamton, 2008). This historiography would be capitalized in Latin American art narratives as well, for example in MoMA’s 1993 show Latin American Artists of the 20th Century.
of a continuum, deepening theoretical concerns that were vital for Brazilian
experimental artists in the 1960s and 1970s. Accordingly, the 1994 show had three
special rooms displaying works by Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, and Mira Schendel.
These artists’ oeuvre was inserted in the show’s overall theme of enlarging the artistic
field beyond traditional media. Clark’s *Animals* had “please touch” labels next to them;
Oiticica’s *Rijanviera* environmental piece invited the viewer to walk-in barefooted;
Schendel’s *Little Nothings (Droguinhas)* series transformed bi-dimensional paper into
flexible objects, which were meant to be hung from the ceiling. The curatorial approach
to showcase these artists as a unified group was reiterated in the 1996 catalogue, when
curator Aguilar referred to them as a “triad.”

The special rooms showcasing international artists also helped in articulating the
exhibition’s conceptual framework, “Breaking Away from Support.” Further, they
operated as an art historical platform capable of legitimizing the presence of Brazilian
artists into a hegemonic twentieth century art narrative. For example, the rooms
included works by Malevich and Mondrian, who had been deigned fundamental
precursors by Neoconcrete artists such as Clark.

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19 In the 1994 as well as in the 1996 catalogue the artists are referred to as a “triad.” Commenting on this
arrangement, Aracy Amaral noted that while the alliance of Oiticica and Clark seemed natural and
justifiable (after all, they collaborated closely together), the insertion of Schendel was odd because she was
an outsider to the Neoconcrete scene and worked in isolation. See: Aracy Amaral, “Grandiloquência e
2006), 87.

20 See, for example, the celebrated “Teoria do Não Objeto” (“Theory of the Non-Object,” 1958) by Ferreira
Gullar.
Therefore, in the 1994 biennial, Nelson Aguilar managed to showcase an art historiography in which the three Brazilian artists (Clark, Oiticica, and Schendel) were presented as “basic for the assertion of an autonomous Brazilian art,” as clarified in the Special Exhibitions catalogue.\textsuperscript{21} This (re) proposition of Neoconcretism as the autonomous (and originating) moment in Brazilian art would find fertile ground in Brazil and abroad—not without criticism\textsuperscript{22}—and several artists like Ernesto Neto would be later associated with this genealogy.\textsuperscript{23} Additionally, the 1994 Biennial promoted the art of Latin America, displaying celebrities like Joaquín Torres-García, Diego Rivera, Lucio Fontana (emphasizing his Argentinean period), and Rufino Tamayo, as an additional support to insert the Brazilian art narrative inside a recognized art historiography.


\textsuperscript{22} For example in 1995 collector Oswaldo Costa, while analyzing the event “Brazilian Art in New York,” stated: “It is reluctantly that I point out this affiliation [between Oiticica and a Brazilian art historiography] ... the growing international recognition of Oiticica, Clark, and Schendel, allied to the influx of critics and art historians working on the precarious field of Latin American art has produced several attempts to rewrite art history in Brazil as a coda deriving from these three artists. This is a false and lazy revisionism, largely aided by local opportunism promoted in events such as the Bienal Brazil Século 20 and the 22\textsuperscript{nd} Biennial and by artists, for whom is convenient to claim this ascendance.” Cf. “Arte Brasileira em Nova York,” Guia das Artes (São Paulo) no. 37, March-April 1995.

\textsuperscript{23} Ernesto Neto recognized in a number of interviews and texts Lygia Clark’s influence on his works. Critics appointed his oeuvre’s connection to Hélio Oiticica later on his career, after Oiticica’s international reemergence. For example, Tate Gallery dedicated a page to the influence of Hélio Oiticica in which there is a statement of Neto together with his peer Marepe and curator Chris Dercon, responsible for P.S. 1’s Brazil Projects. In it, Neto significantly tried to highlight Oiticica’s influence as global: “Hélio was the guy who managed to transcend Postmodernism and, as a visionary, to realise the most astonishing passage from classical Modernism to the volatile experience of present-day contemporaneity. Softly, yanking from the wall Mondrian’s colour and space, he embedded it in the body and handed it to the public. He camouflaged it in architecture, stormed the sociopolitical daily life, overfilled with sensoriality the gaseous image to emerge as a bôlide (fireball) in the topology of history. His concepts of interactivity, coexistence and marginality are fundamental to what is happening now in art and in the world.” Cf. http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/be-outlaw-be-hero.
Hence, a Latin American narrative of groundbreaking and internationally renowned artists who had also absorbed the lessons of European masters was shown, reinforcing the inclusion of Brazilian art in an international art narrative. With Malevich and Mondrian presented literally as “contemporary art ancestors” in the Biennial’s catalogue, the museological special exhibitions rooms displayed an international art history in which the Brazilian and Latin American art production were an inherent part.\textsuperscript{24} According to the catalogue, “Malevich and Mondrian enable the visitor to better understand Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark, and Jesus Soto.”\textsuperscript{25}

For the 1996 Biennial, Aguilar continued to foster this museological imprint, but inserted international art stars in order to attract the non-specialized public, following the ambitious neoliberal policy of biennial president Edemar Cid Ferreira. The result was a grandiose show that displayed artists such as Picasso, Goya, and Lam, who did not fit easily into the biennial’s theme (“The Dematerialization of Art in the End of the Millennium”).\textsuperscript{26} In addition to the Special Exhibitions Rooms section, the biennial included 85 countries in the National Representations section and incorporated a third section to display global art. Curated by eight internationally renowned art professionals, the Universalis exhibition showcased 41 contemporary artists from different regions (i.e.,

\textsuperscript{24} “It was very important to create a climatized area set up according to museological conditions required to accommodate the group of contemporary art ancestors [in reference to Malevich].” Edemar Cid Ferreira, “Honoring and Renewing Tradition,” in XXII Bienal de São Paulo: Salas Especiais (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 1994), 20-21. Available at: http://issuu.com/bienal/docs/name4b2af4.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{26} Art historian Aracy Amaral keenly denounced this emphasis on numbers and celebrated nouns as resulting from the neoliberal strategy, which privatizes culture treating it as a financial investment. See Amaral’s already cited article, “Grandiloquência e marketing.”
Africa and Oceania, Latin America, Asia, Canada and the United States, Western and Eastern Europe, and Brazil) in an attempt to revitalize the outdated biennial’s Venetian model, organized around official national representations. Therefore, this section signified an important step in strengthening the biennial’s curatorial control. The show was inspired by the 1989 *Magiciens de la Terre* (Pompidou, La Villette), which presented Western and non-Western artists side-by-side. Aguilar consulted with many curators, Jean-Hubert Martin responsible for the 1989 exhibition among them. As the name indicates, *Universalis*’ ambition was to introduce a “global spirit” (as opposed to the nationalistic orientation of *National Representations*), signaling the attempt of the biennial to keep up with ongoing debates on de-territorialization of the cultural arena.

In organizing the 24th São Paulo Biennial, Herkenhoff was profoundly informed both by this institutional history and by the art world’s current debates about biennial shows. Unable to remove the problematic *National Representations* segment due to both institutional and budgetary reasons, the curator clearly built on the 1996 tripartite format originally envisaging three sections for the 24th Biennial: *National Representations*, *Historical Nucleus*, and *Universalis* (which would later be reorganized and retitled).27

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27 Herkenhoff in interview with the author, December 2011. Herkenhoff also wrote about the impossibility of ending the segment in his 2008 review and in a text co-authored with Adriano Pedrosa. Cf. Herkenhoff and Pedrosa, “O curador Carioca” in *Marcelina. Revista do mestrado em artes visuais da Faculdade Santa Marcelina*, ano 1, vol. 1 (São Paulo: Fasm, 2008): 42-52. Available at: http://pt.scribd.com/doc/76994626/Revista-Marcelina-1. Letters to international curators clearly show an effort to justify this traditional section in the São Paulo Biennial. For example, in a letter to Anna Matirola from the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome, the president of the São Paulo Biennial wrote: “We all know that the traditional model of internal biennials has recently been called into question and now faces a serious crisis. The majority of international biennials such as Istanbul, Johannesburg, and Kwangju have abandoned the notion of ‘national representations’ altogether. In São Paulo, like in Venice, we wish to maintain this model and fully explore all the possibilities of a dialogic interaction between our institution...
Although maintaining this structure, Herkenhoff carefully negotiated changes to this configuration with two main goals: 1) to update the biennial’s format, hoping to create a more cohesive exhibition closer to Kassel’s documenta, understood as a reflexive model; and 2) to strengthen the curatorial scheme, which should be present in all sections under the tutelage of an overarching theoretical concept. Finally, in early 1998, the chief-curato added a fourth segment titled One and/among Other/s containing only Brazilian contemporary art and co-curated by Herkenhoff and adjunct-curator Adriano Pedrosa. This latter addition is a reflection of the growing importance of Brazilian art in the show. Indeed, Herkenhoff clearly stated several times his bias towards Brazilian art and his desire to showcase international art from a Brazilian point of view. In sum, in contrast to the 1970s’ attempt to create a regional cohesive narrative and to the 1980s early shows curated by Zanini and Leirner—which attempted to create a international arrangement by inserting Brazilian art as equal in a transnational art world—Herkenhoff’s decision to foreground Brazilian art set him apart and marked a new period in the institutional history of the São Paulo Biennial. Herkenhoff’s aim was also distinct from the shows

and all participating countries (...) This makes us quite optimistic vis-à-vis a thorough revision of the traditional notion of ‘national representation’ to which the curatorial guidance and orientation of the XXIV Bienal is committed.” Letter dated October, 31 1997. Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Wanda Svevo Archive, Box 1385, folder 5. Herkenhoff authored this letter because this part was re-elaborated and published in the National Representations’ catalogue. In it, the chief-curato explained in detail the biennial’s structure and his attempts to change it.

28 Herkenhoff in interview with the author, December 2011.

29 Besides several newspapers interviews in which the curator stated his national intentions, he wrote in his 2008 review: “I proposed myself organize a biennial to [a] Brazil[ian audience] and focusing on Brazil[ian art].” And, “The XXIV Biennial affirmed that the place of Brazilian art is outside of the exile of the historical canon and of the 8.547.877 km² [in reference to Brazil’s territorial dimension].” Cf. Herkenhoff, “Bienal 1998: Princípios e processos,” 10 and 12, respectively.
curated by Aguilar that tried to expand the artistic canon by inserting Brazilian art into it. While Aguilar’s exhibition collaborated in solidifying and tangentially complementing a hegemonic art narrative, Herkenhoff’s exhibition intended to construct a non-hegemonic narrative, thus intervening in the Eurocentric linear model of art history.30

Helping to build this non-Eurocentric narrative, the 24th São Paulo Biennial curatorial original scheme was not dictated by a theme but, as aforementioned, arranged by a theoretical concept: density (épaisseur, a term emerging from Jean-François Lyotard’s 1971 Discours, Figure). Suggested as a “working tool” for all art professionals involved, the term should be operative in all segments of the show, including the traditional segment National Representations. Consequently, this conceptual solution would enable the chief-curato to unify the large exhibition without necessarily restricting artistic choice to a given media, subject, or temporal frame. Nonetheless, as discussed in the next section, the modernist term anthropophagy ended up being the main theoretical concept guiding the biennial’s curatorial proposal—an apt choice considering the intended focus on Brazil and on a non-Eurocentric historiography.

30 My view here departs from Spricigo’s analysis of the 1994 and 1996 exhibitions as anticipating Herkenhoff’s intentions in creating a non-hegemonic art historiography. Spricigo saw the insertion of Mira-Oiticica-Clark as well as the choice of the two themes as an attempt to depart from narratives centered on minimalism and pop art. Although I agree that both the 1994 and 1996 shows tried to correct the artistic canon I argue however that, vis-à-vis the neoliberal policy of these shows, their discourse and methodology to achieve this result were contrary to Herkenhoff’s. See: Vinicius Spricigo, “Contribuições para uma reflexão crítica sobre a Bienal de São Paulo no contexto da globalização cultural.” Available at: http://www.forumpermanente.org/revista/numero-I/discussao-bissexta/vinicius-spricigo/contribuicoes-para-uma-reflexao-critica-sobre-a-bienal-de-sao-paulo-no-contexto-da-globalizacao-cultural/#_ftn6.
2. Curatorial Concepts

This section examines the curatorial concepts deployed in the 24th São Paulo Biennial: density and anthropophagy. I approach the first via the artwork of Cildo Meireles, as Herkenhoff signaled that the artist’s installations were key to understanding Lyotard’s term. In order to examine the second, anthropophagy, I survey how the concept was historicized by the Brazilian modernist generation briefly after its coinage in 1928. I call attention to the malleability of the term, foregrounding the multiple meanings that anthropophagy acquired in Brazilian cultural history in order to understand how the sections of the biennial distinctively deployed it.

While the Brazilian modernist concept of anthropophagy became the main term associated with the São Paulo Biennial, density, as stated above, was originally suggested as the curatorial working tool that should operate at several levels at the biennial. A 1997 institutional release clarifies:

The XXIV São Paulo Biennial does not have a general theme, but rather a paradigmatic concept: épaisseur, which relates both to complexity and compactness in the articulation of object and thought. Épaisseur is suggested as a working tool for curators in all segments of the exhibition. The concept of density could be applied at least in three basic levels at the XXIV Bienal de São Paulo: the art exhibited, curatorship, and the relationship of the Biennial with its public.31

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31 “XXIV Bienal de São Paulo,” Institutional Release, 1997. Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Wanda Svevo Archive, Box 1385, folder 5. In this document, written by Herkenhoff, the 24th show was divided in three segments: Historical Nucleus, Universalis (which later became Routes...), and National Representations. Another institutional text dating from November 1997 and directed mainly to the curators explained the meaning of “density” in more details. It also added two more levels in which Lyotard’s term should operate: “reflection” (meaning the texts selected and written for the catalogue), and “presence of the work in the exhibition space” (the process by which the artwork is presented for the public that includes wall labels, fruition of the work, etc.). This two-page document also further acknowledged the place of anthropophagy in 1997 (here still envisioned as a theme) and clarified that the term “density” did not work thematically: “the XXIV Bienal de São Paulo will not be governed by any single theme, in light of the complexity of the event and the great number of curators and countries from all over the world that are involved—which makes the
In the same document, anthropophagy was described as “a special and specific moment of density in the history of Brazilian culture” and operative as a curatorial guide only in the Historical Nucleus segment of the exhibition as a key principle for a thematic exhibition.\footnote{Although it is guided by the concept of ‘density,’ the Bienal de São Paulo will realize a historical exhibit around the theme of ‘Anthropophagy’ while admitting some parallel discussions...” [Original emphasis]. “Density and Antropofagia,” Institutional Release, November 1997. Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Wanda Svevo Archive, Box 1488. Large portions of these institutional documents were printed in the four catalogues of the show, especially on the “General Introduction” written by Herkenhoff in the volume referent to the Historical Nucleus segment. However, in this published text, anthropophagy clearly appears as a method or, better, as “cultural strategy.” Cf. Herkenhoff, “General Introduction,” in Nucleo Histórico: Antropofagia e histórias de canibalismos, vol. 1 of XXIV Bienal de São Paulo (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 1998), 35-48.}

The fact that the curator chose a French term as the paradigmatic concept of the 24th Biennal highlights the lingering Francophile tradition among Latin American intellectuals at the time. Moreover, the use of imported theory—as in Inverted Utopias—emphasizes a rupture with the 1970s Latin American intellectual tradition and betrays Herkenhoff’s desire to be known as an international and not as a Latin American intellectual. Nevertheless, Herkenhoff did select a principle that performs a revision of the Western intellectual tradition \textit{via the sensory (sensible)}, opening space for alterity and desire. Therefore, by choosing “density” as the theoretical basis for an event such as the São Paulo Biennial, Herkenhoff reinstated his will to impose the self-reflexive model closer to the documenta. In addition to adding “complexity and compactness in the articulation of object and thought,” as stated in the press release, as Lyotard emphasizes...
density performs a defense of the visible world when it precludes the equivalence of seeing and reading. As such, density promotes heterogeneity. This quality results from its capacity of encompassing binaries (such as truth and error), not in Manichean terms of stark opposition or in Hegelian terms of attempting a synthesis, but “as a thickness (époqueur) that contains recto and verso.”

Anthropophagy, the term coined in 1928 by Oswald de Andrade, is the most celebrated concept in Brazil for understanding national culture. Like the Tupi Indians who devoured their enemies to absorb what was most valuable in them, Andrade urged Brazilian intellectuals should incorporate imported references into the construction of a hybrid national culture. In the 1997 institutional release, anthropophagy emerges as an ongoing “model for cultural practice” as well as an “open and dynamic” concept bearing multiple aspects: “non-Manichean, deconstructive, transcultural and appropriationist.” Thus, anthropophagy is not distant from épaisseur: both promote heterotopic identities and preclude final syntheses. Yet anthropophagy, as a term first proposed as a method for the configuration of national identity, can be deployed as a constructive strategy and, thus, is able to escape from functioning merely thematically or

33 Lyotard wrote: “Deception and truth go hand in hand, not as opposites in a system but at least as the thickness made up of a recto and a verso together.” Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 12. Desire and the baroque are, of course, other touching points between the two open, non-totalizing concepts: “This book still wants, and wants too much; one is, after all, only the least of men, and the space of this book is no more than Baroque. Still, in its defense, this desire for more remains very little. Having given up the folly of unity, of offering founding cause in a unitary discourse, on the phantasy of origins, we are bound by Freud’s utopia to the rule dictated by the so-called death drive, according to which the unification of the diverse (and not the least in that of Freudian theory), is continually deferred and always permitted.” Ibid.

as an organizing metaphor—as Herkenhoff realized when he started referring to the concept as a method and no longer as theme in 1998.\(^{35}\) It was this methodological quality that allowed the term to be taken up in all four of the exhibition segments.\(^{36}\) More importantly, since Herkenhoff desired to showcase art from a national standpoint, anthropophagy, a concept associated with Brazilian art, was the natural choice. Indeed, in a 1994 issue of the Mexican art magazine *Poliéster* focusing on Brazilian art, Herkenhoff wrote an essay entitled “Having Europe for Lunch: A Recipe for Brazilian Art,” in which he identifies anthropophagy as the main characteristic of Brazilian art.\(^{37}\)

During the preparation of the 1998 show, Herkenhoff compiled a “fragmented list of possible meanings and approaches” to the concept of anthropophagy that included entries as diverse as “transformation of taboo in totem,” “hunger,” “viscerality,” “desire,” “cultural absorption,” and “hybridism.” This document was

\(^{35}\) See footnote 33.

\(^{36}\) Herkenhoff affirmed in an interview that he would be unhappy if he believed that, after the Biennial, anthropophagy had been reduced to a model. He explained: “Any mold, any manual, would be anti-anthropophagic. What makes anthropophagy so rich is the fact that it cannot be reduced to a mold.” However, earlier in the interview, he paradoxically stated: “The biggest gain of this Biennial is the fact that people no longer have to explain what is anthropophagy in a text now, they can apply it directly.” I believe that when Herkenhoff understood anthropophagy as a strategy for cultural emancipation, he was indeed proposing it as a method, which can be established and then applied as a model and not as content. Cf. Maria Helena Carvalhães, “Dez anos depois: um debate com Paulo Herkenhoff” in *Marcelina Antropofágica*, 41. Available at: http://pt.scribd.com/doc/76994626/Revista-Marcelina-1.

\(^{37}\) See *Poliéster* 2, no. 8 (Spring 1994). This issue grouped essays by Herkenhoff, Adriano Pedrosa, Ivo Mesquita, and Lisette Lagnado, all of whom actively participated in the 24th Biennial. Thus, it anticipated many of the questions formulated in the 1998 show. For example, Mesquita’s “The São Paulo Biennial: 43 years of internationalism” identified one of Herkenhoff’s main efforts: “The São Paulo Biennial should cater to the new demands of the cultural world and deal with the artistic issues of the present. It should strive for a more objective gaze, a more organized character, one less dependent on the dictates of cultural diplomacy. It should stop being a simple stimulus for the visual arts and become a means of creating debate within the art world, becoming more provocative and taking a stand on art and the art world.” Cf. *Poliéster* 2, no. 8 (Spring 1994): 54.
offered as a theoretical guide to the metaphorical uses of the concept and was circulated among and edited by the curators the year before the opening of the biennial. The internally distributed list of definitions served a pedagogical function: to familiarize the multi-national and heterogeneous group of curators with the anthropophagic principle. The mobilization of anthropophagy is unquestionably the fruit of its historical moment, associated with the rise of multiculturalism, post-colonial studies, and globalization in the 1990s. Art professionals, who perceived that this concept had the geopolitical potential to generate a “peripheral” view articulating a non-hegemonic art world, enabled the collective triumph of anthropophagy.

Focusing on anthropophagy’s as a non-hegemonic cultural lens, most of the reviews of the show ignored Lyotard’s concept in favor of anthropophagy. This

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38 Herkenhoff explained the process and the aims of this list: “A participatory model of the definition of the concept of antropofagia and cannibalism was created. All interpretations, metaphors, opinions, concepts and aphorisms on the subject which were found in readings, conversations, or otherwise incorporated in a list. This bilingual list, still in formation, was distributed at a certain moment with the working title of ‘95 among a thousand, forms of antropofagia and cannibalism.’ Today its content is perhaps less important than its political significance.” Herkenhoff, “Dialogue Essay,” in Representações Nacionais, vol. 3 of XXIV Bienal de São Paulo (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 1998), 32.

39 For example, the magazines Art in America, ArtForum, Art Nexus, Frieze, and Third Text all published reviews of the show. From the above-cited venues only Art Nexus took the concept of “density” into account. Lisette Lagnado’s 1999 article published twice in Third Text, “On how the 24th São Paulo Biennial took on cannibalism,” makes patent this trend. Naturally, the Brazilian press also privileged the local term and the biennial soon became known as “Bienal da Antropofagia.” Curator Carlos Basualdo’s review also discussed density, but suggested anthropophagy as a vaccine against the French term: “Paulo Herkenhoff’s choice of anthropophagia (cannibalism) as theme for the 24th Biennial of São Paulo was doubtless one of the great successes of this edition of the biennale. In the words of Herkenhoff, the curatorial direction was an attempt to depart from a consideration of the Lyotardian concept of ‘density’ as the show’s structuring axis, choosing instead to inscribe the Biennial in the socio-cultural and historical values of Brazil.” Since the chief curator chose both concepts (density and anthropophagy), Herkenhoff’s clarification above is at the very least paradoxical. It is also interesting to note that Basualdo considered anthropophagy as a thematic choice, as in the original plan in 1997 that was altered when the concept was operative throughout the show. Cf. Carlos Basualdo and Vincent Martin. “The 24th São Paulo Biennial.” Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art 10, no. 1 (1999): 58-61.
reaction was unsurprisingly mirrored in later accounts of the show (including Herkenhoff’s own review in 2008), casting the term as the definitive centerpiece of the exhibition.\textsuperscript{40} In fact, with the growth of exhibitions’ history as a field of study, the 24th São Paulo Biennial has been officially canonized as “anthropophagic”. The 1998 show was the only South American exhibition selected for the 2013 anthology, \textit{Biennials and Beyond – Exhibitions that Made Art History, 1962-2002}, and emblematically, the editor Bruce Altshuler did not mention the concept of density in his brief descriptive essay, which included photos and documents concerning the show. By neglecting to cite the French concept of “density” in the exhibition anthology, the show could figure in the book as the representative of a peripheral articulation—enabled by the use of an autochthonous term, namely anthropophagy—in a global art historical context.

\textbf{Density}

Although the word \textit{épaisseur} is absent from the “concept index” at the end of the original French edition, it is present throughout Lyotard’s book \textit{Discours, Figure}. As the title indicates, the work portrays a tension between figure (understood as the dense visible world captured by the “savage eye,” to use André Breton’s expression as quoted by Lyotard) and discourse (the transparent system of language, the “the eye that recognizes

\textsuperscript{40} Significantly, Paulo Herkenhoff in his 2008 revision of the show omitted the concept of “density” as part of the biennial’s curatorial approach, beginning his retrospective narrative with a quote from the “Anthropophagite Manifesto” and referring to the show as the “bienal da antropofagia.” Herkenhoff only briefly referred to density in relation to the work of Cildo Meireles and to the concept of “reading” as contrary to “seeing.” Cf. Herkenhoff, “Bienal 1998: Princípios e processos,” 14.
sound,” to quote Paul Claudel, whose words open the book). This tension remains unresolved, much like the Freudian hesitation between Eros and the death drive introduced in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). In other words, it is impossible to completely dissociate or fully integrate figure and discourse (or the sensory and the intelligible), as the double meaning of the verb “reflection” indicates. As Herkenhoff noted in his 2008 review of the Biennial, *Discours, Figure*, is a passionate statement against the absorption of seeing into reading, a process that both Western thought as well as in art history assume to be true, and constitutes a powerful critique to scientific discourse.

Lyotard sets his task in the first page of his text:

This book protests: the given is not a text, it possesses an inherent *thickness* [*épaisseur*], or rather a difference, which is not to be read, but rather seen; and this difference, and the immobile mobility that reveals it, are what continually fall into oblivion in the process of significatio. [My emphasis]

A constitutive difference that cannot be reduced to a code or to any kind of regulative power such as language, density is pure heterogeneity. It is an “otherness” that escapes scientific discourse, an alterity that is continuously under the threat of losing its visibility in its translation into systematic knowledge.

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41 “For the eye ‘to recognize sound,’ as Paul Claudel put it, the visible must be legible, audible, intelligible.” Lyotard, *Discourse*, 3.

42 Ibid. The English version published in 2011 translated *épaisseur* as thickness, however in this work I will give preference to the word “density,” as it was translated in the 24th Biennial catalogues and institutional material.
Significantly, Herkenhoff arrived at the concept of density via the artwork of Cildo Meireles. In a list enumerating the seven curatorial principles that were crucial for the 1998 biennial, he identified the fifth concept as “ghetto.” He explained:

For Cildo Meireles this word means a high voltage concentration of creative energy. Hence, it signifies the opposite of ghetto understood as a persecution of difference aiming at its exclusion. The biennial would be a big Brazilian art ghetto to provoke its decompression [de-refoulement]. Meireles directed me towards the idea of the density of the sign, by Lyotard.

To further develop this relationship among Meireles’ work, his conception of ghetto, and density, Herkenhoff wrote an essay on the artist one year after the 24th Biennial entitled “A Labyrinthine Ghetto.”

In this monographic-length text, Herkenhoff critically surveys Meireles’ oeuvre, from his early drawings to his late installations. To the Brazilian critic, just as in the explanation of density written in the 1997 institutional release, by abolishing the hierarchy in scale, Meireles’ artworks add “compactness and complexity to things”:

The focus of his art can range from international capitalist economic expansion to small cultural gesture by Brazilian Indians in the Amazon forest. His works have no hierarchy of scale or consistency of materials, varying from a minute sculpture consisting of a tiny wooden cube, Cruzeiro do Sul (The Southern Cross, 1969-1970), to the temple-like installation incorporating hundreds of thousands of coins, Missão/Missões (How to Build Cathedrals) (Mission/Missions [How to Build Cathedrals], 1987). These two artworks, The Southern Cross (Figure 3.1) and Mission/Missions (Figure 3.2), are carefully analyzed in sections of the essay named “Condensations” and “The

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43 See Herkenhoff’s “Bienal 1998: Princípios e processos,” 16. Meireles came to the concept of ghetto as a positive space when he was living in New York in the early 1970s. He realized that while the white residents ghettoized themselves via extensive security arrangements and technology, their black neighbors were able to circulate more freely—inverting the original situation. In his view ghetto is a space of dense information.

44 Ibid.

Cannibal Returns,” respectively. Although Herkenhoff does not directly cite Lyotard, an examination of Lyotard’s text and the artworks themselves can allow for a better understanding of Herkenhoff’s intentions in using both density and anthropophagy in the 24th Biennial. *The Southern Cross* shows the critic’s intentions of adopting the concept of density as a curatorial guide by means of the artworks; *Mission/Missions* brings in the concept of anthropophagy in tandem with a warning of the risks involved in its use as a celebratory national methodology—a warning unheard by Herkenhoff. This examination also illustrates why density, a concept to be seen rather than to be articulated systematically, was unable to consistently operate as a method.

**Density in “Condensations”**

Herkenhoff describes *The Southern Cross*, a minute cube made of two pilled wooden blocks, as “an emblem of the modern condition, generating reflections on the meaning of knowledge, its myths, and the European-rooted discourses of modernity.”46 Miniscule (the artist provocatively sizes it 9 x 9 x 9 millimeters, avoiding the precise measure of 1 centimeter), it is composed of soft pine and hard oak. These trees were sacred to the indigenous people of Brazil, since by rubbing them together they learned how to produce fire. Ideally, Meireles conceived of showing the work in the vast space of an empty museum. These disparate scales, according to the artist, embody “the idea of immense energy contained in a minimal body.”47 In this sentence (and in the relation

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47 Ibid.
between the scale of the artwork and that of the exhibition room), the concept of density as well as its potential as a critical curatorial and institutional tool is revealed.

Density, thus, is literally a constitutive part of The Southern Cross: it enables the work to operate as a symbolic threat. Being a condensation of a “fiery power,” the diminutive cube “has the potential to expand and consume the entire surface of the earth,” as Herkenhoff notes. In other words, the cube is pure fire “made compact and complex.” As an agent of Prometheus, bringing knowledge, the density contained in the cube introduces new types of understanding that can operate as a guide for an attentive audience, including the group of curators working on the 24th São Paulo Biennial.

Density is also present in the cube’s relation to the institutional space. As Herkenhoff writes, the wooden cube is, despite its size and because of its potential destructive power, monumental: a monumentality that exists in an unresolved (and unresolvable?) tension within the vast museum space it barely occupies. Hence, tension as density works as a powerful institutional critique; it exposes the space of the museum by virtually burning it down. To someone who identifies himself as part of the “conceptual generation,” as Herkenhoff does, this tension should be an integral part of every curatorial project. Thus, by embodying thickness, the cube renders visible how Herkenhoff envisaged density to operate as a curatorial tool and as an institutional probe at the 24th São Paulo Biennial. In doing so, the chief-curator was being faithful to

48 Ibid.
his early career as a conceptual artist in the 1970s, in which he developed pieces that questioned institutional limits.\textsuperscript{50}

Although in his text Herkenhoff analyzes the cube that composes the artwork *The Southern Cross*, its title also refers to an essay written by Meireles in 1970.\textsuperscript{51} The text was published in the catalogue of the exhibition *Information* (MoMA, 1970), functioning as an artwork in its own right. Herkenhoff was obviously familiar with Meireles’ essay, since he quoted Meireles’ opening sentence in his article “Dialogue Essay,” published in

\textsuperscript{50} Herkenhoff started his involvement with the art world working as a conceptual artist in the 1970s while he was a law student and, later, professor. It was during this time that he met most of the artists that he would later work with together as a curator and museum director. For instance, in 1973 he exhibited at Jovem Arte Contemporânea (Young Contemporary Art, JAC), Walter Zanini’s groundbreaking initiative at MAC/USP (1973), and in 1975 at the Area Experimental (Experimental Area) of the MAM/RJ, which also showed works by Tunga and Cildo Meireles, among others. More importantly, in his work as an artist he anticipated most of the concerns that shaped the 24\textsuperscript{th} Biennial. For example, at the MAM he presented a series of artworks and performances that included *Auto-Retrato do artista subdesenvolvido* (*Self-Portrait of Underdeveloped Artist*, 1975) as part of his biography. This work consisted of a photograph of Herkenhoff together with Joseph Beuys after having eaten a rose petal of the German’s work *Ohne Rosen tun wir’s nicht* (*We Won’t Do It without the Rose*) in the Ronald Feldman Gallery in New York in April 1975. In the opening, he also made a performance entitled *Sobremesa* (*Dessert*, 1975), part of his *Estômago Embrulhado* (*Upset Stomach*) series in which he ate an artwork. For *Dessert*, which was recorded in video and exhibited during the show, he ate a newspaper in which artist Antonio Manuel had induced a fake reportage with the headline *Pintor ensina Deus a pintar* (*Painter teaches God how to paint*, 1973). In a newspaper article promoting the show Herkenhoff stated that this work was related to anthropophagy, indicating that it “was an anthropophagy of art itself.” See, Francisco Bittercourt, “A Arte Experimental quer ‘questionar a arte vigente’” (*Experimental art wants to “question the current art”*), *Tribuna da Imprensa*, December 6-7, 1975. Later describing this experience for the art magazine *Malasartes* in 1976, he said that the importance of the experimental area was not only to foster an artist’s community but also to probe institutional limits: “The ‘Experimental Area’ began in a moment in which contemporary art production, because of the importance of its questionings, needed some kind of response from the art circuit. (...)The MAM itself is tested as an institution. The problems that the artists faced (set up, funds, press release, etc.) evoke questions such as: To what extent did the MAM define its position in relation to the ‘experimental area’? The existence of such problems (to deal with this kind of art) would be created from the MAM’s (implicit) ideological position vis-à-vis contemporary art? (...) Thus, together with other factors, [the Experimental Area] stimulates art politics and probes in the artists their conscience of art as a social activity.” Published originally in *Malasartes*, 3 (1976): 25-27. Herkenhoff was not the only art professional affected by this experience: curator Fernando Cochiarelli and museum director Lauro Cavalcanti performed artworks that criticized cultural institutions and art itself in this space as well.

\textsuperscript{51} Writing about the indigenous people of Brazil, Herkenhoff inserted in his analysis a sentence from the essay: “To paraphrase Meireles, a people whose history is no longer that of legends and fables, is an unhappy people.” Herkenhoff, “A Labyrinthine Ghetto,” 41.
the National Representations catalogue, as well as in earlier texts. Together with the cube, the essay presents Meireles’ critical attitude towards the national and colonial history of Brazil. The critique implicit in the installation Mission/Missions, is made explicit in Herkenhoff’s essay “A Labyrinthine Ghetto,” analyzed here. By considering these texts in conjunction with the artworks, I hope to help to imbricate seeing into reading, mirroring Herkenhoff’s ingenious use of Meireles’ oeuvre as a mediator to the French concept of density in the 1998 biennial.

Meireles wrote The Southern Cross when he was travelling back from Minas Gerais to Rio de Janeiro after presenting the overtly political work Tiradentes: Totem-Monumento ao Preso Político (Tiradentes: Totem-Monument to the Political Prisoner, 1970), in which he tied living chickens to a pole and burned them alive. In his brief essay, written especially for Information’s catalogue, the artist is keenly aware of his geographical location. The entire text functions as a manifesto of regionalism escaping nationalism, as the artist carefully explained. During the difficult years of the military dictatorship in Brazil, any official territorial division could easily be identified with the authoritarian state. Conversely, to participate in an international exhibition could be understood as a national representation endorsed by the government. Consequently, Meireles began his essay stating that he was not participating in the show in order to propel his career or to represent “any nationality.” He continued:

I would rather speak about a region which does not appear in official maps, a region called the SOUTHERN CROSS. Its original inhabitants never divided it. Others came, however, who, for some reason, did. Such a division remains to this day. I believe every region has its boundary lines, imaginary or not. The line I am referring to is called
Tordesillas (...) I would like, however, to speak from the other side of this border, with my head under the line of the Equator (...).

The artist advocates a regional identity, refusing imposed national borders that are inseparable from the violent process of colonization, as the reference to the Treaty of Tordesillas demonstrates. Signed in 1494 by the kings of Portugal and Spain, the treaty traced the so-called Tordesillas line on the globe, presumptuously dividing the American continent between the two kingdoms. Since, by that date, Europeans had “discovered” and mapped out only the Caribbean, Portugal secured the land that would later be named Brazil even before its official “discovery” in 1500. Revealing how the presence of an imaginary line (Tordesillas) can make the history of a people (original inhabitants of Brazil) invisible, the essay re-enacts the cube’s tense relation with visibility.

Herkenhoff would emphasize the notion of invisibility as an erasure while discussing the concept of history proffered by the installation The Southern Cross: as easy as it is to overlook a minuscule cube in an empty museum, so is it easy to overlook the history of the non-European people engulfed by the vast North-Atlantic narrative. Thus, for Herkenhoff, “[t]he concept of history implicit in The Southern Cross is in direct opposition to the Hegelian or Positivist understanding of history as the culminating realization of modern European civilization.”

52 Herkenhoff, “A Labyrinthine Ghetto,” 42.
narratives. However, since each has a different locus of enunciation (Western European and South American, respectively), their geopolitical potency is radically distinct.

Lyotard opened the concept of density to support non-narrative discourses by positioning the figure as a critique of scientific discourse and as a defense of the visible world, as seen above. Following the same rationale, Herkenhoff described anthropophagy as a non-linear historiography when he named it “an occurrence of extreme density in the history of Brazilian culture.”\(^5^3\) However, more than constituting an episode of colonial national history, anthropophagy was suggested as method to achieve a non-European art historical approach—as Herkenhoff made explicit in his explanation of the concept of the *Historical Nucleus* to international curators.\(^5^4\) As much as *époque* could support anti-Hegelian historical approaches, being a European concept born out of a revision of Western aesthetics and philosophy, this term could not operate *geopolitically* with a non-European voice. Moreover, as set out by Lyotard, as pure desire that does not abide to systematic knowledge production, which depends on

\(^{5^3}\) Paulo Herkenhoff and Adriano Pedrosa, “Ninety five, among a thousand, forms of cannibalism and *antropofagia*.” Version dated from October 30, 1997. Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Wanda Svevo Archive, Box 1384.

\(^{5^4}\) As stated before, in 1997 Herkenhoff first suggested anthropophagic as a thematic exhibition, but by December 1997 he was already referring to the term as a method rather than a theme. “The *Núcleo Histórico* will be a unique part of the XXIV Bienal, as the arena for a new approach to art history from a non-European perspective. It will consist of several shows of artists carefully selected for their relevance to the central concept of the exhibition *antropofagia*, which should be understood historically and theoretically, rather than thematically.” Julio Landmann in a letter to Natalia Kohen dated from January 15, 1998. Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Wanda Svevo Archive, Box 1384. Although the president of the Biennial signed the letter that requested the loan of a painting by David Alfaro Siqueiros, the chief curator prepared the Portuguese and French drafts that were used as models.
codification, density did not qualify as a method that implies something that can be processed and repeated.

Let’s now return to Meireles’ *The Southern Cross* as a way of rendering knowledge visible. Reflecting on the history of colonization and contemporary globalization, art historian Esther Gabara remarked on the resistance of this artwork to endorsing a cohesive view of the nation while evoking the Brazilian flag:

The titular Southern Cross is a constellation of stars visible only south of the equator; it was mapped by Amerigo Vespucci during his trip to South America in 1501. (...) Grounded in the history of colonial expansion, it offers a kind of prototypical global positioning system, which allows the viewer to know precisely where she stands depending upon what she can or cannot see. (...) These same stars of the Southern Cross also appear on the flag of Brazil, a nation under the rule of military dictatorship when Meireles made these works; they refer to the nation even as they defy the ideology of nationalism that proclaims each nation to be unique and integral. 55

According to Gabara, by simultaneously suggesting national symbols and refusing a totalitarian view of the nation, *The Southern Cross* invites the viewer to ponder other possible conceptions of the nation. Indeed, as philosopher Walter Benjamin suggested, the concept of constellation embodies collectivity while escaping from totalitarian structures of power: it simultaneously groups together and is evinced by the cluster of individual stars. Although anthropophagy champions a heterogeneous identity and opens space for baroque configurations of history, as Concrete poet Haroldo de Campos realized, Herkenhoff’s use of anthropophagy inside the main

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55 Esther Gabara, “Perspectives on Scale: From the Atomic to the Universal” in *Art and Globalization*, James Elkins, Zhivka Valiavicharska, and Alice Kim, eds. (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2010), 201.
Historical Nucleus did evoke Brazilianity and consequently, to the structure of national art schools, as discussed below.

**Anthropophagy Emerges: “The Cannibal Returns”**

In *The Southern Cross*, Meireles established a critical conversation between Western and native cultural traditions. In *Mission/Missions (How to Build Cathedrals)*, the artist continues this conversation by materializing metaphorically and metonymically an episode of colonial history. The title of the work refers to Jesuit evangelization missions in Brazil (1549-1759), which attempted to unify and homogenize the Brazilian territory by converting the indigenous population (called Brasis) to Christianity. In the turbulent times of Counterreformation in Europe, when religion and politics were intertwined, catechization operated as a tool for territorial expansion. Hoping to integrate the Brasis into the colonization process, the Jesuits taught European customs and values in an attempt to save the Amerindians from carnal vices, particularly anthropophagy and polygamy. Cannibals, “the most vile and miserable heathen in the world,” were especially feared vis-à-vis the fate of Brazil’s first Bishop, Pedro Sardinha (literally, Peter Sardine), who was slaughtered and eaten by the Caeté tribe after a shipwreck.

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56 This artwork, which was also displayed in the 1st Mercosur Biennial examined in the previous chapter, was specially made for the exhibition *Missões: 300 anos (Missions: 300 years, 1987-88)* curated by Frederico Morais. The show invited several artists (including nine Brazilians, one Argentine, and one Brazilian living in Paraguay) to think critically about the historical episode. In the exhibition’s catalogue, Morais briefly analyzed the work in the light of anthropophagy. Cf. Frederico Morais, “Missões: 300 anos – a visão do artista” [Missions: 300 years – the artist’s vision] in *Frederico Morais*, Silvana Seffrin, org. (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, 2004), 113.

57 This episode, which would be cited by Oswald de Andrade in his 1928 manifesto, provoked a hardening in the Jesuit attitude toward catechization—that after this event became stricter. Although the Jesuits were often in conflict with Sardinha, they were appalled by the Bishop’s fate in 1556. “The Jesuit superior
Mission/Missions is composed of a golden rectangular floor made of 600,000 coins connected to an ivory ceiling made of 2,000 bones by a white column of 800 communion wafers. The dramatic illumination coming from above is framed and intensified by a translucent black curtain around the piece. Evoking baroque theatricality, this dense space is extremely seductive until the viewers realize the ominous presence of the bones. This contrasting fusion between attraction and repulsion further reveals the baroque nature of the work. The piece’s materiality (which combines metal, the incarnation of Christ, and carcasses) in tandem with the title’s reference leave little space for imagination. Mission/Missions performs a powerful and direct critique of the violence inherent in the conversion of the other during colonization.

In “The Cannibal Returns,” Herkenhoff structures his interpretation of Mission/Missions by bringing in the concepts of the baroque and anthropophagy, reiterating a fruitful combination that was introduced by the painter Tarsila do Amaral in the 1920s and reiterated by the Brazilian Concrete generation:58

Baroque architecture functioned like a catechism—literally the ideological preparation—for the Conquest. Through these bones of Meireles’ ‘cathedral,’ the artist makes visible what has been obscured by history: the conquering and devouring of humankind, as well as the physical connection between the body and God which occurs in the holy space of the church.59

[Manuel da Nóbrega, responsible for the Jesuit mission in Brazil] wholly approved of the ensuing Portuguese punitive campaign and indignantly wrote that he could not comprehend how the Portuguese race, ‘which is the most feared and obeyed in all the world, is patiently enduring and almost subjecting itself along this coastal region to the most vile and miserable heathen in the world.’” Dauril Alden, “Changing Jesuit Perceptions of the Brasis During the Sixteenth Century,” Journal of World History, 3, no. 2 (Fall, 1992): 214.

58 Tarsila do Amaral linked the birth of anthropophagy to the baroque colonial churches in Minas Gerais, and poet Haroldo de Campos juxtaposed cultural cannibalism and the baroque, as we will see below.

Herkenhoff continues by endorsing the view of art historian Régis Michel, who curated Nineteenth century artworks at the Historical Nucleus segment, “that the Christian communion is the supreme version of Western cannibalism.” Guided by this premise, Herkenhoff postulates the process of colonization as a war among cannibals.

The suggestion of Europeans being cannibals is not new: Mointagne, in his famous essay “Of Cannibals,” fabricates the myth of the New World’s good savage by exposing European atrocities and thereby questioning the notion of “savage.” The parallel between cannibalism and eating the transubstantiated body of Christ Eucharist is also not a novelty, as the missionaries themselves were well aware. However, in this war among cannibals, to use Herkenhoff’s suggestion, it is important to highlight the difference between the European and Brazilian understandings of cannibalism. It was this profound difference that enabled Oswald de Andrade to propose anthropophagy as a method for the configuration of a hybrid national identity in 1928.

For the Jesuits, anthropophagy and polygamy were unacceptable because they hindered the integration of the Indigenous other into the European normalized subjectivity. In other words, European subjectivity is not pliable enough to encompass other types of subjectivity without dissolving itself. The necessity of total commitment to European values implies that catechization (or Christian cannibalization) requires full

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60 For an exhaustive analysis of the trope of the cannibal throughout Latin America see: Carlos Jáuregui Canibalia. Canibalismo, calibanismo, antropofagia cultural y consumo en América Latina (Madrid/Frankfurt : Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2008).

61 Montaigne’s essay “Of Cannibals” is available online at: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3600/3600-h/3600-h.htm. (See Chapter XXX.)

62 Cf. Jáuregui, Canibalia.
elimination of the other’s previous identity. As is clarified in the sermons of Antonio Vieira, a Portuguese Jesuit who used images of cannibalism as aids to conversion, Christ’s words *occide et manduca* (kill and eat) should be interpreted as meaning the complete integration of difference into oneself.\(^{63}\)

According to anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, the main hindrance to Indigenous assimilation by the Jesuits lay precisely in the fact that Europeans had difficulty understanding the indigenous conception of otherness, which incorporated (and accepted) difference as heterogeneity.\(^{64}\) As the Jesuits quickly observed, although the Brasis did not offer any resistance to catechization, when converted, they did not abandon their old habits, which included anthropophagy.\(^{65}\) Having an integrationist sense of identity, the Brasis managed to incorporate Catholicism into their own system of values and beliefs by re-elaborating (but not erasing) their cosmogony. Consequently, the Brasis’ notions of alterity enabled the preservation of indigenous cultural identity; even when the Amerindians received a new influence, they were able to re-elaborate it without forgetting their previous traditions. Conversely, in ritual anthropophagy, the

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\(^{63}\) See “Sermão do Espírito Santo” (*The Holy Spirit Sermon*, 1754). In his sermon Antonio Vieira suggested that as animal flesh is incorporated into the body of the man/woman who eats it, so the natives would become fully human once converted and included in Christianity.


\(^{65}\) “The Indians had no maniac desire to impose their identity on the other, nor did they reject the other in favor of their own ethnic excellence. Rather, they aimed, by producing a relationship with the other—a relationship that had always existed, in a virtual mode—to transform their own identity. The inconstancy of the savage soul, in its moment of openness, is the expression of a mode of being where ‘exchange rather than identity is the fundamental value to be sustained,’ to recall Clifford’s profound formulation.” Ibid., 30-31.
qualities of the eaten prisoner were incorporated by the victorious tribe, augmenting (but not erasing) the cannibals’ own assets. In this sense, the significance of cannibalism goes much beyond a source of nourishment, it is the crucial means to the articulation of the Tupi’s social life that revolves around the concept of vengeance. Only after a man has killed an enemy—and theoretically offered his or her body to the rest of the tribe—can he gain full access to adulthood. In the Tupi society, the act of killing the enemy would signify the full integration of a man in the social life of his people: granting access to marriage, fatherhood, and social prestige. Anthropophagy played a key role in this rite of passage.  

Meireles’ Mission/Missions (How to Build Cathedrals) does not present the hybrid form of indigenous anthropophagy. Instead, the installation connects cannibalism to the colonial violence of Catholic conversion. Consequently, the Brazilian artist frustrates the viewer, who wants to indulge in celebratory forms of the national. As Gabara notes about the artwork The Southern Cross, the wood that composes the small cube are pine and oak, and not the famous Brazilwood that names the country as well as Oswald de Andrade’s first manifesto (“Manifesto Poesia Pau-Brasil,” “Manifesto Brazilwood Poetry,” 1924); similarly, the form of cannibalism represented in Mission/Missions is the absorption of the other as annihilation of difference, not as the integration of

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difference. As such, the encounter between two heterogeneous subjectivities does not result in any hybridism that can be capitalized upon as a triumphant form of national configuration. Contrary to anthropophagy as “a special and specific moment of density in the history of Brazilian culture,” as in the 24th São Paulo Biennial, Meireles brings the consumption of the other as a national historical episode to be mourned and not repeated. If *The Southern Cross* works as an invitation to conceive of new forms of the national, as Gabara suggests, *Mission/Missions*, in connecting anthropophagy to colonial history, works as a warning against the use of anthropophagy as a form to commemorate the Brazilian nation.

**The Ambiguous Politics of Anthropophagy**

In 1939, more than ten years before the opening of MAM/SP and the São Paulo Biennial, artist and engineer Flávio de Carvalho organized the third and last *Salão de Maio* (May Salon) in São Paulo. The event promoted abstract and modern art in the country, exhibiting artworks by Josef Albers, Alberto Magnelli, and Alexandre Calder, among other national and international names. For this event, the May Salon published the

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67 See Gabara, op. cit.


69 The *Salão de Maio* had three editions: 1937, 1938, and 1939. It was at first organized by the artist and journalist Quirino da Silva (who conceptualized the event), the critic Geraldo Ferraz, and Carvalho together. However, the latter registered the event solely under his name in 1939, triggering the end of the association. The salon can be seen as part of a genealogy of events that intended to promote modernism in Brazil, like the *Salão Revolucionário* (Revolutionary Salon) organized by the architect Lucio Costa in 1931. During its short life, the May Salon exhibited the artworks of national artists such as Alfredo Volpi, Di Cavalcanti, Tarsila do Amaral, and Guignard in addition to artworks by international artists such as the British Ben Nicholson and the Mexicans Leopold Mendez and Dias de Léon, among others. The salon also organized conferences by artists and intellectuals like the futurist Anton Giulio Bragaglia, philosopher Jean Maügue,
magazine-catalogue RASM. The avant-garde looking publication, bound in a square of flexible aluminum, began with a quote by U.S. president Franklin Roosevelt on the occasion of MoMA’s opening, included the salon’s manifesto advocating abstraction written by Carvalho in both Portuguese and English, and ended with several essays composing a retrospective of the Brazilian modernist movement. This latter text mainly focused on the 1922 groundbreaking event Semana de Arte Moderna (Modern Art Week).

and sociologist Roger Batiste—the two latter were living at the time in São Paulo as part of the founding group of the São Paulo University (USP).

70 Being translated into English and quoting President Franklin Roosevelt’s speech in the occasion of MoMA’s new building inauguration in 1939 in its first page, RASM serves as an index of the growing importance of New York for modernism—as the presence of Latin American artists Anita Malfatti and Joaquín Torres-García in New York during the teens and the twenties respectively also denote.

71 The manifest advocated abstraction as “cerebral art.” The English translation, which differed from the Portuguese version, read: “Art definitely ceases to the [sic] a ritual in its struggle for greater sensibility; and as such one cannot but recall Anna Pavlowa’s words: ‘Dance with your heads.’ We would recommend Pavlow’s [sic] dictum to all whose principle sphere is manual training and technical dexterity: ‘paint and build with your heads.’” Cf. RASM, Revista Anual do Salão de Maio, no. 1 (São Paulo, 1939). The fascist-oriented government of President Getúlio Vargas (1930-1945) officially supported figurative artists—notably Cândido Portinari, who completed the murals on the Ministry of Education building in 1945. Paradoxically, the stricter sector of the communist party in Brazil also supported figuration—and harshly criticized the creation of the MASP museum and the MAM/SP for its affiliation with the American magnate Nelson Rockefeller. Thus, the polemics between abstraction and figuration often acquired political tones. For a detailed account of this period cf. Aracy Amaral, Arte para que? A preocupação social na arte brasileira 1930-1970 (São Paulo: Studio Nobel, 2006 [1984]).

72 In total 18 articles were published, plus a catalogue of the artworks exhibited and the authors’ biographies. Among the articles that made historicized modernist enterprises in Brazil, there were: Lasar Segall “1912”; Anita Malfatti “1917”; Carminha de Almeida “História da Semana de Arte Moderna”; Guilherme de Almeida “Idéias de 1922”; Cassiano Ricardo “Verdamerlismo”; Tarsila do Amaral “Pintura Pau Brasil e Antropofagia”; Oswald de Andrade “Da Doutrina Antropofágica (1928)”; and Flávio de Carvalho “Recordação do Clube dos Artistas Modernos.”

73 The Semana de Arte Moderna was an art festival that lasted from February 11 to February 18, 1922. The impact of the Semana in Brazil can be compared to the International Exhibition of Modern Art (Armory Show), held in New York City in 1913. The Semana took place at the Municipal Theater in São Paulo, featuring art exhibitions, lectures, concerts, and poem reading. In its breadth, however, it differed significantly from the Armory Show. It was organized chiefly by the painter Emiliano Di Cavalcanti and the poet Mário de Andrade. Due to the radicalism of the pieces presented, the public pelted poets such as Manuel Bandeira and musicists such as Heitor Villa-Lobos with tomatoes. The press and art critics, in general, followed the audience’s opinion. Tarsila do Amaral was then in Paris and did not take part in the event. Cf. Aracy Amaral, Artes Plásticas na Semana de 22, (São Paulo: Editora 34, 1998), 55.
and its main agitators, in addition to the 1928 anthropophagic movement\textsuperscript{74} launched in São Paulo by Oswald de Andrade’s manifesto of the same name.\textsuperscript{75} The fact that RASM published a detailed account of the 1920s modernist movement in Brazil represents an early attempt to historicize this important production as well as to contextualize the 1939 show by inserting it into an avant-garde trajectory that had been at work in the country for at least the previous two decades.

Besides reprinting an abridged version of the “Anthropophagite Manifesto,” RASM commissioned painter Tarsila do Amaral, who was involved in a romantic relationship with writer de Andrade from 1922 until 1929, to write a piece about her participation in the movement. In “Brazilwood Painting and Anthropophagy” (“\textit{Pintura pau-brasil e antropofagia}”), Amaral wrote an account in which she combines her “Brazilwood painting” (her artistic period immediately associated in Brazil with de Andrade’s eponymous poem published in 1925) to de Andrade’s two modernist manifestos: his 1924 “Manifesto of Brazilwood Poetry” and his 1928 “Anthropophagite

\textsuperscript{74} The 1922 and 1928 events became benchmarks of \textit{modernismo} in Brazil, comprising the so-called “heroic phase” of Brazilian modernism.

\textsuperscript{75} To launch his manifesto Oswald de Andrade emulated the European avant-garde, choosing to print it in his \textit{Revista Antropofágica (Anthropophagic Magazine)}, which started in May 1928 and ended in August 1929. The magazine had only 26 numbers and was divided in two editions (or dentitions as its organizers named them). The first dentition, directed by the writer Alcântara Machado and supervised by Raul Bopp, published the writers Mário de Andrade and Oswald de Andrade, poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade, as well as the ultra-nationalist writer Plínio Salgado, leader of the Tapir School (\textit{Escola da Anta}), among others. The second dentition was conducted extra-officially by Oswald de Andrade and, officially, by Raul Bopp and Jaime Adour da Câmara. It was printed on Thursdays in the daily newspaper \textit{Diário de São Paulo} and had only 16 numbers. This second dentition was marked by a political exacerbation that would culminate in public fights with collaborators such as Mário de Andrade and Carlos Drummond de Andrade. The magazine also openly confronted the narrow nationalistic perspective of the Tapir School, which had published the fascist-oriented “\textit{Manifesto Nhengaçu Verde-Amarelo}” (“Green-Yellow Nhengaçu Manifesto”) in May 1929. According to Raul Bopp, the polemical inflection of the magazine was responsible for its abolition because its tone irritated the newspaper’s readers.
Manifesto.” In the essay published in RASM, Amaral dates the birth of her Brazilwood phase to the couple’s 1924 trip to Minas Gerais, a state in the interior of Brazil famous for its colonial baroque cities. This association between the baroque style, which, being (re) elaborated together with local vernacular, came to represent Brazil/Latin America, and de Andrade’s two manifestos were both later explored by Haroldo de Campos. This link between local baroque and anthropophagy is fundamental to an understanding of why the 1998 Biennial’s deployment of anthropophagy became synonymous with Latin American art and was viewed as a strategy to emancipate art from hegemonic (i.e., European) constructions.

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76 The trip took place when Amaral and de Andrade were coming from their yearlong sojourn in Paris. By travelling to the interior of Brazil, the painter hoped to find typical “Brazilian motifs” to inspire artworks for a future exhibition in the French capital. Tarsila do Amaral and Oswald de Andrade travelled together with Brazilian writer Mário de Andrade, French poet Blaise Cendras, the intellectual René Thiollier, and Brazilian coffee-plantation owners Paulo Prado and Olivia Guedes Penteado, all strong supporters of modernismo. During her stay in Minas, Amaral illustrated Cendras’ poetry book Feuilles de Route. Le Formose, which was published in Paris at the end of 1924. The cover featured an ink drawing portraying the 1923/4 painting “A Negra,” executed in Paris and considered as a “pre-antropophagic” artwork by Tarsila. It was during this trip that Oswald de Andrade started his Brazilwood poetry manuscript. Indeed, he dedicated the book’s first edition to the French poet: “To Blaise Cendras in the occasion of Brazil’s discovery.”

77 Haroldo de Campos associated the meanders of the baroque to anthropophagy in his article “The Rule of Anthropophagy: Europe under the Sign of Devoration.” As an art historical hybrid style characteristic of (and characterizing) Latin America, the term barroco mestizo was first used by Angel Guido (1925) to describe the fusion of baroque architecture with indigenous art forms in South America, especially in Bolivia and Peru. In it, motifs incorporating indigenous fauna and flora were used as decorative motifs as well as Pre-Columbian details all of which composed the dense ornamentation. Beyond this formalist reading, with the crisis of Enlightenment and the rise of a postcolonial conscience in the Americas, pre-Hegelian baroque was seen in the region as a mechanism, a modus operandi that could generate an emancipated form. Therefore, since the 1950s Latin American and Caribbean intellectuals like Alejo Carpentier, Octavio Paz, and Edouard Glissant have turned the term into a method of counter-conquest, a hybrid expression of cultural autonomy. The common characteristic of the baroque and anthropophagy (namely, both are hybrid methods of cultural emancipation) allowed the 24th Biennial’s segment Routes... to operate as a Global South voice and enabled Oswald de Andrade’s nationalistic term to act transnationally, as analyzed below.
Further developing the link with de Andrade’s artistic production, Amaral described the anthropophagic movement as deriving from one of her canvases created on the de Andrade’s birthday: Abaporú.\textsuperscript{78}

The anthropophagic movement of 1928 had its origin in a work of mine that was titled “Abaporú,” anthropophagus. A solitary monstrous figure with huge feet sat in a green lane, a folded arm resting on the knee, a hand sustaining the weightless minuscule head. In front of this figure, a cactus explodes into an absurd flower. This canvas was drafted in January 11, 1928. Oswald de Andrade and Raul Bopp – the creator of the infamous Cobra Norato poem – in shock in front of “Abaporú,” they contemplated it at great length. Imaginative as they were, they believed that from there could stem a great intellectual movement.\textsuperscript{79}

Amaral’s narrative, despite obviously highlighting the importance of her work in the development of de Andrade’s intellectual trajectory, emphasizes two important factors of the anthropophagic movement. The first factor is the strong and direct interconnection between the movement and the visual arts. The second key factor is the movement’s affiliation to the ideas previously laid out in the “Manifesto of Brazililwood

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\textsuperscript{78} Abaporú means cannibal in Tupi indigenous language—ABA: man, PORU: eater. De Andrade and Bopp baptized the painting with the help of a dictionary. See Aracy Amaral, Tarsila, sua obra e seu tempo (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1975).

\textsuperscript{79} Cf. RASM, Revista Anual do Salão de Maio no. 1 (São Paulo, 1939). In the same essay, Tarsila further affiliated Oswald de Andrade’s work to hers, saying that the anthropophagic movement had a “pre-anthropophagic” moment in her artwork “A Negra” painted during the couple’s stay in Paris during 1924. Poet Bopp would narrate in his chronicle “Restaurante das rãs” (“Frog’s Restaurant”) another genealogy for the movement. According to Bopp, the anthropophagous movement started during a dinner: faced with French frog legs as appetizers, Oswald de Andrade made a long speech placing the frog as the missing link of humanity. A sentence by Hans Staden, a German traveler who was captured by cannibals in colonial Brazil and whose story was in vogue after a 1925 Portuguese translation, came naturally to the other guests — “Here comes our food jumping along!” and de Andrade composed the famous dictum present in the manifesto, “Tupi or not Tupi, this is the question.” For an English version of the story, cf. Luis Madureira, “A Cannibal Recipe to Turn a Dessert Country into the Main Course: Brazilian Antropofagia and the Dilemma of Development,” Luso-Brazilian Review 41, n. 2 (2004): 96-125. However, both versions (Tarsila’s and Bopp’s) affiliate the movement to an avant-garde group composed of writers, artists, and intellectuals.
Poetry” and made visible in her Brazilwood paintings. Both the manifesto and Tarsila’s Brazilwood paintings resulted from a synthesis between local naïve themes and avant-garde techniques acquired in Paris. The outcome of this fusion was a national and modern poetry/painting that could be exported internationally, not as exotic raw material to be appropriated by other avant-gardes, but as a freestanding cultural production. Moreover, the assimilation of imported form to frame local motives suggested a method for the construction of a cosmopolitan national production, which de Andrade would more radically develop in this 1928 manifesto.

The publication of the “Anthropophagite Manifesto” ensured de Andrade’s position as one of the country’s main intellectuals and constructed an indelible national image—inaugurating, in retrospect, post-colonial thought in Brazil. Like its predecessor, the manifesto can be inserted into an intellectual trajectory that started with the writer’s close contact with members of the avant-garde in Europe. Oswald de Andrade commented on his “national discovery abroad” in a well-known statement: “If I brought something from my stays in-between wars in Europe, it was Brazil. The native primitivism was our only novelty […].” In the 1928 manifesto, “native primitivism,”

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80 Drawing upon Brazil’s first raw-material taken to Europe, Brazilwood, the writer suggested in the 1924 manifesto a new exchange: “Let’s make the division: imported Poetry. And Brazilwood Poetry, for exportation.” Thus, by proposing a radical alteration in the lingering coloniality of the traditional trading route, which presupposes the ex-colonies exporting raw materials and importing cultural products, de Andrade designed the ideological structure of the 1928 work.

81 Once in Paris, Tarsila do Amaral and Oswald de Andrade met the poet Blaise Cendrars who introduced the couple to the avant-garde. Through him they met the painters Picasso, Léger, Gleizes, Lhote, Brancusi, Delaunay, and Chagall; the writers Cocteau, Supervielle, Morand, Larbaud, and Romain; and the composers Satie, Debussy, and Milhaud.

82 Cf. Amaral, Tarsila, sua obra e seu tempo, 137.
which represented the original Brazilian contribution to modern culture, was carefully constructed by appropriating the figure of the cannibal to portray Brazilians as over-sexualized, creative, spontaneous, and vital—stressing national characteristics that could be easily identifiable with the European avant-garde trope of the primitive.  

Simultaneously, however, the figure of the cannibal also represented a resistance to Europe’s civilizing mission and a critique to the violence of the colonial process inseparable from it.

Primitivism was important to de Andrade because, from the point of view of the European avant-garde, it did not represent something that had to be rejected from Brazilian culture in order to catch up with Europe. Rather, as literary critic Roberto Schwartz noted, it represented something to be exchanged, reinforcing identity and making cultural interchanges more symmetrical. Yet, in accordance to this rationale, in

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83 As innumerable art historians have noted, Oswald de Andrade could perform the transformation because the figure of the cannibal still retained its ideological force as an icon of primitivism among the international avant-garde. Indeed, the cannibal was a recurrent motif among Dadaists and Surrealists, as Francis Picabia’s short-lived magazine Cannibale and homonymous manifesto reveal. The magazine, part of the internationalizing Dadaist strategy, had only two numbers, launched in April 25, 1920 and May 25, 1920. Among the collaborators were Louis Aragon, Céline Arnauld, André Breton, Margueritte Buffet, Tristan Tzara, Jean Cocteau, and Marcel Duchamp. The “Manifeste Cannibale Dada” was read by André Breton at the third Soirée Dada at the Théâtre de la Maison de l’Oeuvre, March 27, 1920 and first published in magazine Dada, (March 1920). British art historian Dawn Ades, in her “The Anthropophagic dimensions of Dada and Surrealism,” published in the first volume of the 24th São Paulo Biennial catalogue, emphasized that while the Dadaists used the figure of the cannibal they used it as an anti-modern trope, differently from the Brazilians: “The primitive connotations of ‘cannibal’ were possibly an ironic reference to the claims put out by the futurists to be the ‘primitives of a new sensibility,’ as well as to the preCubist Africanist paintings of Picasso. Dada of course to an extent participated in the primitivising strand of modernism, particularly when it could be turned to polemical use against its own bankrupt civilization. But Dada did not claim to be part of the modernist avant-garde (“Dada is not modern,” it insisted).” See: Dawn Ades, “The Anthropophagic dimensions of Dada and Surrealism,” in Nucleo Histórico: Antropofagia e histórias de canibalismos, vol. 1 of XXIV Bienal de São Paulo (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 1998), 242. See the first volume of the 24th São Paulo Biennial, available at: http://issuu.com/bienal/docs/name41dbe4.

order to maintain their agency within the category of “primitive,” the Brazilian cultural elite should produce theory as well as art in order to break away from the colonial cycle subverted in de Andrade’s 1924 manifesto—Brazil exporting raw materials and importing labored products. As such, the intelligentsia would not merely provide a theme to be appropriated by Europe—as in Picasso’s use of African art, for example—but actively contribute towards a transatlantic dialogue, producing both form and content. By providing a formula to achieve genuine national culture (masticating foreign influences and digesting it together with local motives) anthropophagy constituted a method, which could be systematically applied and then exported. Because the anthropophagic method did not allow for the assimilation of external influences in terms of copying or derivation, but it did in terms of active and autonomous (re-) elaboration, it granted a new status for the Brazilian cultural production. Herkenhoff highlighted this argument when analyzing the importance of Suprematism, Constructivism, and Neoplasticism for the Brazilian artists exhibiting in the Monochrome show. He pointed out that the decades of 1950s-1960s marked the moment when the relation to European art was no longer of influence but rather of reference, thus becoming autonomous.\(^{85}\)

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\(^{85}\) The Brazilian artists exhibiting in the Monochrome show, part of the Historical Nucleus segment, were: Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark, Hercules Barsotti, Mira Schendel, Manabu Mabe, and Tomie Ohtake. Herkenhoff wrote: “In this century our artists came to have a direct productive relationship with art history, one they no longer handle as a history of styles or of images, but which has the consciousness of the historical process of questioning plastic issues. Those European artists thus become points of reference as opposed to mere influence.” Herkenhoff, “General Introduction,” in Núcleo Histórico: Antropofagia e histórias de canibalismos, vol. 1 of XXIV Bienal de São Paulo (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 1998), 39-40. Available at: http://issuu.com/bienal/docs/name208154.
De Andrade started his manifesto with the transnational affirmation that “Only cannibalism unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically. The unique law of the world.” He continued with the same bombastic tone:

The spirit refuses to conceive of spirit without body. Anthropomorphism. The need for an anthropophagical vaccine. For the equilibrium against the religions of the meridian. And foreign inquisitions. We can only attend to the oracular world. We had the justice codification of vengeance. And science codification of Magic. Anthropophagy. The permanent transformation of taboo into totem.  

In this text, cannibalism is a sign of agency, autonomy, and an intentionally adopted primitive identity. It is more an issue of legitimation than of representation. Therefore, de Andrade dislodged the hierarchy contained in binary constructions such as savage/civilized, dismantling tropes commonly used to justify colonial enterprises. As Latin Americanist Sara Castro-Klaren explains: “In the act of devouring, the colonial or subaltern culture changes from a passive entity into an aggressive and conquering agent, unexpectedly capable of transformations that affect both self and other.” But this alteration in the colonial legacy does not imply a blind rejection of Europe. After all, since the “permanent transformation of taboo into totem” was a goal of the European avant-garde of the 1920s as well, de Andrade carefully allied Brazilian intellectuals with their foreign peers. By allowing its cannibals to be part of a multinational clique,

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anthropophagy did not restrict itself to reductive or orthodox understandings of nationalism.

Thus, the intention to adopt a so-called primitive identity challenged binary oppositions typically constructed under colonialism, and yet did not isolate Brazil from the international avant-garde. Dismantling binaries without proposing a totalizing solution, de Andrade’s manifesto allowed and even championed the coexistence of anachronistic heterotopian identity: as Brasis could juxtapose the ambiguous hybrid identity of cannibals and Christians, so Brazilian cannibal-intellectuals could construct a national identity while being part of a multinational clique. The attractiveness of anthropophagy rested precisely on its fluctuating dialectics, which left no space for a final synthesis. For the elite Third World intellectual Oswald de Andrade, and for the ex-colony Brazil, any attempt to resolve identity according to European canons could only result in an unsatisfactory ending. Thus, the “Anthropophagite Manifesto” operated as a remedy against totalizing and monolithic constructions of the nation. In art, anthropophagy stood for the creation of a paradoxically autonomous artistic language for Brazil via contact with imported references—a modus operandi repeated in the São Paulo Biennial’s 1951 mission and in Pedrosa’s 1970 article quoted at the beginning of this chapter.
The image of the cannibal open to several interpretations skillfully affirmed hybridism as typically national. The analysis of the formation of hybridism as positive clarifies the interdependence that the national/international binary assumed in the anthropophagous construction of a Brazilian emancipated cultural identity and further informs the São Paulo Biennial mission of putting local artists in contact with international artistic production as part of a recurrent national strategy—the “biennial effect,” as Herkenhoff named it. Moreover, the ambiguity in its discourse (between national/international, savage/civilized, and so on) gives anthropophagy its perpetual currency. Thus, the concept would re-emerge in several moments of Brazilian history with distinct political expediency in 1939, in the pages of RASM as an avant-garde predecessor; in the 1950s, in a series of articles published on the subject by Oswald de Andrade; in the Tropicália movement (1967-1968), both in the work of Oiticica and in

88 Besides Oswald de Andrade, important intellectuals postulated hybridism (especially racial miscegenation) as the essence of Brazilanity historically such as Mário de Andrade, Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda, and Gilberto Freyre. The latter, famous for the seminal work from the 1930s The Masters and the Slaves: A Study In The Development Of Brazilian Civilization, in his early work did not conceive of miscegenation as a totalizing fusion among three races (black, white, and Indigenous) as his Brazilian peers, but as a “wealthy of antagonisms.” For Freyre, the Brazilian would be simultaneously African, Portuguese, Jewish, and Indigenous, never reaching a totalizing synthesis. As a result, Brazil would be a country characterized by its unstable nature. The intellectual only developed the idea of the country as a happy “racial democracy” beginning in the 1940s. Cf. Ricardo Benzaquen, Guerra e Paz – Casa-Grande & Senzala e a obra de Gilberto Freyre nos anos 30 (Rio de Janeiro: Editora 34, 1994).

89 Herkenhoff, “General Introduction,” 40.

90 Randall Johnson studied the reemergence and reevaluation of anthropophagy in Brazilian culture both as a way to advocate a non-contaminated culture and as a way to digest and incorporate the world’s cultural objects. Cf. “Tupi or not Tupi, cannibalism and nationalism in contemporary Brazilian literature,” in Modern Latin American Fiction: A Survey, ed. J. King (London and Boston: Farber and Farber, 1987), 41-59.

91 Oswald de Andrade retook the anthropophagous trope in the 1950s, after his delusion with communism, by emphasizing the Dionysian and utopic dimension in the movement: the cannibal is then presented as a vaccine against bureaucratic work, metaphysic fears, and authoritarian approaches. In this later work, the cannibal becomes a trope for technological and industrial utopia that would replace the authoritative State
the musical movement enabling the use of foreign references and musical instruments;\(^\text{92}\) in the 1969 film *Macunaima* by Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, to question nationalism during dictatorship;\(^\text{93}\) in the title of Lygia Clark’s 1973 performance *Anthropophagic Drool (Baba Antropofágica)*, as therapy;\(^\text{94}\) in the 1975 reprint of Oswald de Andrade’s texts by the Brazilian Concrete poets; and in Haroldo de Campos’ understanding of translation as “vampirization” as a way to mediate the tension between the national identity of a

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\(^\text{92}\) Hélio Oiticica exhibited *Tropicália* in 1968 in Rio de Janeiro and declared it in the newspaper *Jornal do Brasil* as “the most anthropophagic artwork in Brazilian art history.” In the installation, the artist constructed a labyrinth using materials as diverse as parrots, sand, object-poems, plastic, television sets, music, capes, tropical plants, and cheap plywood. In order to reach what the artist called “a state of art,” the visitant had to experience the installation barefoot, integrating sensorial stimuli to visual input. Combining materials conventionally associated with precarious, tropical, third-world aesthetics such as sand and plywood with technological devices such as TV sets, Oiticica’s installation served as a commentary to the in-between place that the country occupied in the late 1960s. “Tropicália,” a word that Oiticica had coined and registered, was appropriated alongside with the artwork’s aesthetic by the musician Caetano Veloso. It was first used to name one song and then the musical movement, which was characterized by the use of electrical guitars and popular references.

\(^\text{93}\) *Macunaima: Hero without a Character* is the modernist masterpiece of Mário de Andrade, written in 1926 and published in 1928. The novel was immediately claimed as an Anthropophagist piece by Oswald de Andrade in his Anthropophagic Magazine, which led to a discontent between the two intellectuals. As in the “Anthropophagit Manifesto,” the novel emphasized the problematic relation between national identity and foreign influences, bringing along with it the questioning of (peripheral) modernity itself. Joaquim Pedro de Andrade cannibalized the novel in the context of military dictatorship in Brazil and produced a current filmic version in which anthropophagy functioned as a critique of the straightforward national project supported by the military.

\(^\text{94}\) According to Herkenhoff, Lygia Clark understood anthropophagy in the psychoanalytic perspective of the cannibal. He conceived of her appropriation of the term as a fusion between Brazilian cultural cannibalism and her experience with the French psychoanalyst Pierre Fédida, with whom Clark did psychoanalysis in the 1970s and who had published in 1972 the essay “Le Cannibalisme Mélancholique.” Cf. Herkenhoff, “General Introduction,” 45.
peripheral country and incoming contributions from hegemonic ones— to mention only a few.

Again, this multiple reemergence of anthropophagy is enabled by the concept’s methodological nature. In Paulo Herkenhoff’s Biennial, the term associated with modernismo and described as a dense moment in Brazilian art history, juxtaposed to Baroque, Neoconcretism, and the 1960s-1970s. Thus, in the Historical Nucleus section of the Biennial, anthropophagy was a method to position art from a Brazilian viewpoint, showcasing the best of the national art production. Therefore, cultural cannibalism operated as the national mediator of an international conversation, aiming at constructing a non-Eurocentric art historiography by displaying Brazilian contemporary art alongside historical pieces from important collections located mainly in Europe.

3. The Use of Anthropophagy in the 24th São Paulo Biennial

As the malleable concept of anthropophagy was appropriated by different political purposes in Brazilian cultural history, so did it have multiple connotations in the sections of the 24th São Paulo Biennial: Historical Nucleus; Routes, Routes, Routes, Routes, Routes, Routes, Routes; One and/among Other/s; and National Representations. Here, I first

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96 “The Núcleo Histórico should depart from a non-Eurocentric vision. Which is the dense moment of art history in Brazil? The concept of ‘thickness’ determined answers: baroque, modernism, neoconcretism or the ‘60s/’70s. Modernism offered a challenging answer: antropofagia.” Cf. Herkenhoff, “General Introduction,” 36. All the moments that the curator lists as “dense” are also historically identified with anthropophagy and considered the best of Brazilian twentieth-century art—allowing the curator to include the other periods as well in his artworks’ choices.
analyze in detail the “contamination” strategy used in the *Historical Nucleus* as an approach to subvert and propose an alternative to a Eurocentric art history. I then examine how anthropophagy acted as a Third World and a Latin American voice in the *Routes...* global art segment. Finally, I discuss the *One and/among Other/s* and *National Representations* segments, together with the show’s education policy and catalogues, all of which deployed anthropophagy to highlight an autonomous theory that ended up conflated with nationalism.

**Historical Nucleus: a dialogical deploy of anthropophagy**

Covering art from the seventeenth century to the 1990s, *Historical Nucleus: Antropofagia and Histories of Cannibalism* was designed to fulfill the show’s museological function. Indeed, the exhibit renewed the traditional *Special Exhibition Rooms* that had gained greater visibility in the 1996 exhibition by showing renowned artists like Van Gogh, Munch, and Warhol. Like its antecedent, *Historical Nucleus* was intended to be the biennial’s highlight and to operate as a museum space. By changing the segment’s nomenclature and associating it with anthropophagy, Herkenhoff not only tried to

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97 In the *Historical Nucleus* catalogue, the curator clarified: “The curatorship of XXIV Bienal de São Paulo took as a starting point the ‘thickness of the gaze,’ following Jean-François Lyotard’s *Discourse, figure, as an operational concept displaced towards the idea of ‘density.’ Thickness should not merely be present in art (its portrayal as ‘theme’ would not be as significant), in the work of the curators, and above all, in the institution. The idea of a Núcleo Histórico indicates a cornerstone that differs from the tradition of ‘special exhibition rooms.’ We have abandoned the ideas of status (‘special’) or territorialization (‘exhibition rooms’), as we felt it necessary to define our concrete historical debate, integrated by conceptual criteria effectively developed in terms of ways of seeing in both exhibition and text.” See: Herkenhoff, “General Introduction,” 35. The exhibition was presented in the third floor of the pavilion in which the biennial has taken place since 1957. The biennial’s space contains a tacit hierarchy: traditionally the best shows are reserved for this third floor, and the first floor is considered a weaker space that showcases national representations from “less important” countries such as the Caribbean region, for instance. The 1998 show followed these logics: the *Historical Nucleus* was displayed on the last floor, *Routes...* and *One and/among Other/s* were shown together in the second, and *National Representations* on the first.
remedy problems raised in Aguilar’s 1996 biennial, but he also inverted the inclusion strategy used for the national artworks—namely, from inserting Brazilian artworks into the hegemonic canon to proposing a new model of historiography by foregrounding Brazilian art.

Herkenhoff used the local concept of anthropophagy in the *Historical Nucleus* to display international art from a national perspective. In *Historical Nucleus*, the modernist method should have worked in tandem with the overarching concept of density, transforming the segment into “the arena for a new approach to art history from a non-European perspective.” A series of exhibitions framed as “histories of cannibalisms” proposed this non-Eurocentric art historical narrative. The chief-curator grouped

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98 The main problems were the creation of a spatial hierarchy by means of segregated climate-controlled rooms, as well as the near absence of Brazilian artists in these favored spaces in 1996 (from the eighteen artists selected only three were Brazilians). In a review of the 23rd São Paulo Biennial (1996) published in *Art Nexus*, María Elvira Iriarte expressed concerns that were reformulated by Paulo Herkenhoff: “One did not go to see the Biennial, but to see Picasso, Goya or Klee. (...) But it is worth asking whether the enormous effort involved in this museological presentation was consistent with the main objective of the São Paulo Biennial. It would seem that those objectives should be redefined and clarified. Could the event not be made a showcase for art from the continent, for example? (...) It would seem rather that the special exhibitions should serve as a complementary argument to the Biennial exhibition, rather than a lamp shade to obliterate it.” María Elvira Iriarte, “23rd São Paulo Biennial” in *Art Nexus Brasil en Colombia*, ed. Adriano Pedrosa (Bogotá: Arte en Colombia SAS, 2011), 77. The eighteen artists chosen for the Special Rooms were: Francisco Goya, Edward Munch, Pablo Picasso, Louise Bourgeois, Wiig Hansen, Paul Klee, Cy Tombly, Gego, Wilfredo Lam, Tomie Otake, Mestre Didi, Rubem Valentim, Arnulf Rainer, Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Anish Kapoor, Pedro Figari and Qiu Shihua. In total the Special Rooms featured six Latin American artists. Indeed, finding a common thread among these artists is challenging because it seems problematic to group the works of Goya, Mestre Didi and Figari, for example, under the aegis of the theme, “The Dematerialization of Art at the End of the Millennium.”


100 These histories were considered as a series of thematic exhibitions in mid-1997, when anthropophagy was not described yet as a theme. I argue that when Herkenhoff allowed anthropophagy to work as a theme in *Historical Nucleus*, including artworks that related to the concept illustratively or metaphorically (as in the artworks of Goya and Gericault, for instance) contributed to the failure of the curatorial strategy of “contamination” to deploy anthropophagy as a method. The contamination curatorial strategy will be analyzed in detail below.
several art historians, including as Dawn Ades, Mari Carmen Ramírez, Aracy Amaral, and Régis Michel, to formulate multiple individual and group exhibitions such as Dada and Surrealism (displaying Masson, Picabia, Dalí, Bataille, and Caillois, among others), Monochrome (showing artists such as Malevich, Meireles, Oiticica, Fontana, Manzoni, Kusama, Ryman, and Klein), as well as monographic shows of David Siqueiros, Francis Bacon, and Tarsila do Amaral, among others. Selecting most of the artists from the American and European continents, the multipart show thus focused on a transatlantic conversation between the Americas and Europe, further evoking Oswald de Andrade’s manifesto.

To ensure that the multiple exhibitions that formed the Historical Nucleus would generate a coherent discourse, the curator exposed the interconnections between the artists and movements in a diagram distributed among art professionals involved in the exhibition. The diagram was aesthetically and politically similar to the famous 1936 map for twentieth century art created by MoMA’s first director Alfred Barr Jr., which was put into tangible form in the museum’s show Cubism and Abstract Art. “Intended

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101 In addition to these shows, a film section curated by Catherine David presented anthropophagic incursions in cinema.

102 This diagram was not a reflection of the exhibition’s display due to spatial restrictions, as Herkenhoff clarified in his “General Introduction.” Instead, Brazilian architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha, responsible for transcribing the curatorial scheme into space, was asked to keep the modernist pavilion that houses the biennial as open as possible, creating “an exhibition that is conceptually complex and spatially light.” Cf. Newsletter addressed to all curators and institutions responsible for National Representations dated from January 9, 1998. Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Wanda Svevo Archive, Box 1379, folder 2.

103 Art historian Susan Noyes Platt described Barr’s enterprise: “Alfred Barr ... presented ... an apparently absolutely systematic version of the development of Cubism. This grand scheme was epitomized in an evolutionary chart that traced the ancestry and descendants of Cubism. The chart was posted throughout the exhibition and used on the dust jacket of the catalogue. Divided into five-year periods, the chart

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as an historical survey of an important movement in modern art,”104 Barr’s chart was located in Europe and was a fundamental agent in casting the canon of Modernist scholarship in the U.S. and abroad.105

Herkenhoff’s diagram (Figure 3.3) drew upon the powerful image designed by Barr (Figure 3.4) to advocate his anthropophagic method. Similar to its North-American counterpart, the diagram was envisioned to promote an art historical trajectory—this time non-Eurocentric.106 Herkenhoff’s chart repeated Barr’s scheme of art, including presented a genealogy of modern artistic styles. At the top it demonstrated that Redon, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cezanne, Seurat, and Rousseau generated Fauvism and Cubism, whose non-European and non art sources were set off in red boxes. About midway through the chart, Cubism was shown as the progenitor of Futurism, Purism, Orphism, Neoplasticism, Suprematism, and Constructivism, with Fauvism, less centrally, as the direct ancestor of Abstract Expressionism and Surrealism. Finally, these styles evolved into just two directions: ‘geometrical abstract art’ and ‘non-geometrical abstract art.’ The thesis and structure of the chart was reflected in the order and sequence of the installation.” Cf. Susan Noyes Platt, “Modernism, Formalism, and Politics: The ’Cubism and Abstract Art’ Exhibition of 1936 at the Museum of Modern Art,” Art Journal 47, no. 4, Revising Cubism (Winter, 1988), 284. For an extensive comparison between Barr’s image and Herkenhoff’s cf. Camila Maroja, ”Visualizing Other Histories: Paulo Herkenhoff’s Cannibalization of Alfred Barr’s Chart,” Carte Semiotiche, forthcoming.


105 Since the history of the European canon of modern art was cast at the MoMA, it is possible to affirm that Modernism is deeply Eurocentric even when geographically displaced to New York—as Paulo Herkenhoff is aware when stressing the term ‘Eurocentric.’ Author in conversation with Herkenhoff, December 2011. Conversely, a 2011 article clarifies the Eurocentrism built into Barr’s 1936 display and historiography: “While walking through MoMA, a majority of the American museumgoers there probably had no idea that what they were seeing was not Europe’s present, but its past. Although all the artworks were from Europe, hardly anyone was aware that the story told through the arrangement of the museum’s exhibits was not European; it was a story told by an American—namely, Alfred Barr. This story did not merely preserve the memory of European modern art, but in fact reinvented it by categorizing artists according to ‘international movements’ instead of ‘national schools.’” See: Walter Benjamin, “The Making of Americans”, e-flux Journal, 2013. Available at: http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-making-of-americans/. The purpose of charts differed. Barr intended his chart to have a significant educational effect (as it was published in the show’s catalogue), while Herkenhoff intended his to educate the curators and art professionals involved in the biennial, as it was only distributed internally.

106 Art historian Meyer Shapiro was among the first to criticize Barr’s diagram in his 1937 essay “Nature of Abstract Art.” He noticed that by privileging aesthetics and formal characteristics and isolating the artworks and movements from their original contexts, Barr de-historicized the narrative he was weaving. I contend that Herkenhoff obtained a similar a-historical result with his “contamination” curatorial strategy—analyzed below. It is clear that the Brazilian curator, by choosing the meandrous and not arboreal design of
external references to art and multiple media. Most importantly, as MoMA’s director had carefully avoided the national art school display in a time when the U.S. did not yet represent a cultural hegemony, so did the Brazilian curator ignore nationalities, privileging artists and movements instead.\textsuperscript{107} In Herkenhoff’s version, the plethora of names, including Georges Bataille, Alfredo Volpi, Armando Reverón, Siqueiros, Clark, Maria Martins, Cobra, and “Brazilian contemporary art,” among others, referred both to artworks present in the \textit{Historical Nucleus} and to references that informed the show.\textsuperscript{108}

In the 1998 diagram, names and movements are arranged into three columns interlinked by radial lines converging on boxes containing the names of artists associated with the anthropophagic movement in Brazil. As such, anthropophagy occupies the central part of the map. Herkenhoff’s image, like Barr’s who delineated the genealogy for abstract art, also presented a cultural lineage in its central column, which traces a line of descent for cannibalism. The first box in this column contains the names of Michel de Montaigne (who in 1580 wrote the essay “Of Cannibals”) and Hans Staden

\textsuperscript{107} Barr’s chart fostered a number of reactions and parodies, including Ad Reinhardt’s famous “How to Look at Modern Art in America,” published in 1946. Yet, painter Nathaniel Pousette’s 1938 version, titled “A Tree Chart of Contemporary American Art,” was the only one arranged by national art schools: in the center stood tall the European and (North-) American tree full of leaves, each representing one artist, adjacent to it there are three riddled trees symbolizing the Chinese, the Mexican, and the Japanese schools. The trees embodying Mexico and Japan have only two leaves each (i.e., two representative artists) while the Chinese has only one. This illustration was published in the June-July 1938 issue of \textit{Art and Artistes of Today}. 

\textsuperscript{108} As Barr’s in 1936, Herkenhoff made several adjustments to this diagram reflecting the artworks incorporated to the show during the curatorial process of this segment as well as new associations. For instance, the numbers next to the names were a later accretion, and the box containing the names of the artists Hesse, Smithson, Nauman, Oppenheim, and Bourgeois was isolated in earlier versions and was later linked to the names of Clark and Oiticica as well as to the monochrome show. Herkenhoff sent updated versions of the chart to the curators involved in the show.
(whose 1557 narrative detailed how he escaped a cannibal tribe in Brazil as aforementioned)—foundational figures for the construction of the cannibal imaginary in the Americas—and names of colonial chroniclers and eighteenth-century art references. The next boxes contain a list of artists including Goya, Géricault, Pedro Américo, figures belonging to the Dada and Surrealist circles, and the Mexican painter David Siqueiros. Finally, after a central cluster spotlighting the Brazilian intellectuals associated with the 1928 Anthropophagic movement, this column loses its sharp verticality, incorporating interdisciplinary references (to Brazilian literature, cinema, and music) at the lower part of the diagram.

While this cartographical plan arranges time vertically, it arranges space horizontally, betraying the fact that by restricting its geographical locations to Europe and the Americas, the curator privileged the vertical North-South axis instead of South-to-South interchanges. The two lateral columns, which contain only twentieth-century art references, lack the temporal suggestion of the progressive history of cannibalism but are geographically displayed. The left side predominantly features Latin American artists, interrupted only by the “monochrome” show. The right side presents European artists or South American artists who worked in Europe (including Van Gogh, the Cobra movement and Roberto Matta, a Chilean painter associated with the Surrealist movement). This geographical divide between Latin America and Europe—with anthropophagy located in the middle, serving as a dense mediator—can be understood as representing the curator’s intended transatlantic conversation. But given that the two
sides of the Atlantic are not graphically connected, the map does not help viewers visualize it. Numbers were also inserted inside the boxes in the later versions of the map and operate not as a suggested reading of the image but as references to information in the accompanying list of textual information about the entries. Therefore numeration serves as a poor guide to understanding the relationships between the boxes, as it does not appear to correspond with the relationships indicted by the lines linking the boxes.\textsuperscript{109} If we view the diagram’s inconsistencies as suggesting multiple ways of reading the image, they would seem to support the curatorial claim that the show was intended to reflect “the multiplicity of history’s threads and that, in the case of art, the Eurocentric stance with its Hegelian orientation, had created excluding parameters in the art environment,”\textsuperscript{110} This reading, of course, also reiterates the vision of contemporary art as having an open reception and post-structural paradigms like Deleuze and Guatarri’s rhizomatic model.

Guided by anthropophagy, Herkenhoff’s diagram—like the \textit{Historical Nucleus} show itself (and the “Anthropophagite Manifesto”)—left little space for other cultural geographies outside the Americas and Europe.\textsuperscript{111} “Africa,” the only reference external to these areas, was included in the same box as “America” and labeled as “material

\textsuperscript{109} Herkenhoff, as Barr, made several adjustments to his diagram in order to reflect artworks incorporated to the show as well as new associations between the works. Thus, the missing references (as Artur Barrio) and numbers (as 6 and 8) reflect that the image is a work in progress; Herkenhoff added information progressively as he confirmed loans for the show and received information from the co-curators.

\textsuperscript{110} Herkenhoff, “General Introduction,” 35.

\textsuperscript{111} Here, in this blatant preference for a Brazilian framework, it is evident that Herkenhoff was not searching for a global art display or to promote cultural diversity but rather to showcase Brazilian art, mainly Brazilian contemporary art, internationally.
“culture,” along with São Paulo University’s (USP) French anthropologists Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roger Bastide. Because he associated these French intellectuals with their work in Brazil, this grouping reinforced Herkenhoff’s curatorial intention to display international art according to a national viewpoint. By connecting Africa to America, however, Herkenhoff reduced the art of the African continent to its visual and material contribution to Brazilian culture, even though his stated purpose was to highlight Brazil’s artistic and cultural debts. Moreover, by adding a reference to the French anthropologists, Herkenhoff filtered African visual and material presence in Brazil through a discipline historically associated with exoticizing and primitivizing these cultures.\textsuperscript{112}

Following the same rationale displayed in the diagram, Historical Nucleus’ resulting narrative was distinct from chronological art historical views. Anthropophagy’s lose guidance provided a trans-historical arrangement that Herkenhoff named “contaminations”: the juxtaposition of artworks stemming from different temporal or/and cultural frames on both sides of the Atlantic. “Contamination,” thus, exemplified Herkenhoff’s view of the task of the curator as “submitting an artwork to an hermeneutical hypothesis.”\textsuperscript{113} As such, “contamination” embodied the entire aim of the 24\textsuperscript{th} Biennial: to serve as a platform from which to

\textsuperscript{112} This part of the diagram would be materialized in a show relating Claude Levi-Strauss and Florestan Fernandes to Brazilian art, which was cancelled due to lack of funds.

legitimate Brazilian art vis-à-vis canonical art history. Thus, even though it showcased historical artworks, the Historical Nucleus constructed a contemporary commentary on history. This strategy aimed at creating new connections between the artworks displayed and at suggesting new ways of accessing art history:

Contamination, i.e., to establish a dialogic gesture with the inclusion of a meaningful artwork of a Brazilian artist in the room of a European or North-American artist, as in the case of Barrio and Schendel. Although some misunderstood it, contamination allows for exchanges, infers a faith in the object’s potency, is able to sustain itself—no matter the circumstances. And it has the function of demonstrating historicity: as in contrasting Lygia Clark and Mira Schendel with Eva Hesse and Louise Bourgeois, who were grouped in the same area for the first time.

“Contaminations,” therefore, built on Herkenhoff’s conception of “dialogue,” framed in a 1991 essay, “The Void and the Dialogue in the Western Hemisphere.” In this brief article, openly written from a Brazilian standpoint, he analyzed the power relations involved in cultural exchanges, ultimately asking:

How is it possible to establish a dialogue in a landscape of outstanding hegemony? How will it be possible to establish dialogue among such antagonistic neighbors? What are the functions of such a dialogue in the conjecture of these 500 years of resistance [in reference

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114 In 2008, Herkenhoff defined what curate means to him: “Curating (...) has to generate history. A São Paulo Biennial will always be the most appropriate moment for the international art world to recognize Brazilian art.” Ibid., 11.


117 After quoting the coincidence in the Information show catalogue (in which both Meireles and Oiticica stated they were not representing Brazil in the show), Herkenhoff wrote: “Although I do not represent Brazil either, I do recognize that this is the starting point of my outlook. I take the work of Cildo Meireles as the guide for my own discourse, reuniting within it the symbolic and the real. I am talking here of art and not just the relations between institutions.” Ibid, 69. Note the curator situated his vantage point from Brazil and used the work of Meireles (who in the 24th Biennial suggested to him Lyotard’s concept of density) to weave his narrative.
to the 500 years of the “discovery” of America? What is the geopolitical function of such a dialogue in the context of the radical transformations in Eastern Europe that bring no hope to the poor people of the world? 118

Thus, Herkenhoff located his notion of cultural dialogue geopolitically “[i]n the Western hemisphere [where] the dialogue is split by a line that separates the North and South slightly ‘above’ the Equator.”119 Therefore, Herkenhoff includes Brazil and the rest of Latin America with the Southern U.S. and Europe—all located in the Western Hemisphere but with different political potency.120 In the text, as well as in the 24th Biennial, there is an inconsistency between Brazil being perceived as if in isolation (as in the beginning of the article, when Herkenhoff affirms his geo-specific Brazilian perspective) and Brazil conceived of as part of Latin America (when it comes to geopolitical struggles against the North).

Ultimately for Herkenhoff, what is at stake in trying to promote a dialogue between the North and the South of the Western world is the certainty that even if material inequalities do not restrict artistic quality and production, “they may most certainly affect the social circulation of cultural assets.”121 Believing that “[a]ll attempts at

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118 Ibid.
119 Ibid., 73.
120 Indeed, the essay centers on relationships across the Americas and also in relation to Europe. Describing the relations in the American continent as loaded with mutual resentment, Herkenhoff commented on U.S. hegemony: “In the expansion of imperialism what ideals were juxtaposed and displaced? In the 1960s why did the focus of the dialogue on pan-Americanism change to Latin Americanism?” In a later passage, he acknowledged internal colonialism in Brazil as well as the country’s tense relation to the rest of Latin America: “We could ask what real interest does Brazil have in the art produced in Bolivia or Guatemala. It seems that we cast the same vague glance upon the art of many our neighbors as the one that historically we seem to have experienced on the part of the U.S.A or Europe in relation to Brazilian art.” See Ibid., 70.
121 Ibid., 73. Affirming that underdevelopment does not entail underdeveloped artworks, Herkenhoff answered a question raised in the 1970s by Latin American intellectuals such as Ferreira Gullar who asked if a vanguard art was possible (and useful) in a third-world country. See, for example, Gullar, Arte em questão.
cultural diplomacy start with political games and stop in front of the determinant forces of the art circuit and the art market,” and that “[p]olitical hegemony has its correspondence in the writings of art history and curatorial practices,” he saw in the 24th São Paulo Biennial an opportunity to reconfigure the history of art, taking it away from its Eurocentric focus, legitimizing the non-Eurocentric art narrative.122

Consequently, Herkenhoff saw dialogue as a necessary formula to undermine monological approaches to art history that ignore artistic production from places with less political power. The transforming power Herkenhoff attributed to dialogue was patently informed by Brazilian poet Haroldo de Campos’ notion of anthropophagic appropriation as a subversive form of dialogue. Campos explains:123

Actually, what takes place here [in the appropriation of international codes such as the baroque style or concrete poetry] is the radical change of the register of dialogue. Instead of the old question of influences, in terms of authors and works, a new process is opened up: authors of a supposedly peripheric literature suddenly appropriated the whole code, reclaimed it as their patrimony, like an empty shoe, waiting for a new historical subject, to rethink its function in terms of a generalized, radical poetics, of which the Brazilian

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122 Ibid.
123 In his 2008 review of the São Paulo Biennial, Herkenhoff listed Campos’ 1980 essay “Da razão antropofágica: diálogo e diferença na cultura brasileira” (“Of anthropophagic reason: dialogue and difference in Brazilian culture”), which was revised and published in English in 1986. I am using this translated version here.
case comes to be the differentiating optics and the condition of possibility. The difference could now be thought of as a foundation.\textsuperscript{124}

By describing the baroque and anthropophagy as dialogical structures, Campos conceives them as able to operate beyond binaries and to subvert the canonical logic that declares U.S. and European art original and Latin American art derivative. In his view, the mouth operates as the locus of speech, situating enunciation, as well as the place of ingestion and incorporation of the foreign corpus. According to Campos, both the baroque and anthropophagy enable Latin American intellectuals to participate in an international conversation while maintaining and affirming their local differences.\textsuperscript{125}

What is more, difference is now seen as a foundational point, solving the problem of the uncertain point of origin in “discovery” countries that do not adhere to the nineteenth century organic notion of national development.

This notion of dialogue evokes Mikhail Bakhtin’s conception of conversation as a means of ending monologism’s solipsistic doctrine that there is no other “consciousness capable of responding in equal footing.”\textsuperscript{126} Building on Bakhtin, Herkenhoff and Campos conceive of dialogue as a two-way exchange capable of reshaping hegemonic views, a conception that is less persuasive when applied to a transatlantic scenario,

\textsuperscript{124} Haroldo de Campos, “The Rule of Anthropophagy: Europe under the Sign of Devoration” in \textit{Latin American Literary Review} 14, no. 27, Brazilian Literature (Jan.-Jun., 1986), 52.

\textsuperscript{125} This notion of universal codes that allow the maintenance of local differences was the core of the Concrete poetry movement. “With Concrete Poetry, the difference (the national) came to be the operating space of the new synthesis of the universal code. More than a heritage of poets, this is the case of assuming, criticizing and ‘chewing over’ a poetics. In some sense, Max Bense is correct when, discussing Brazilian Concrete Poetry, he first makes a distinction between a traditional (classic) and a progressive (non classic) concept of literature.” Ibid., 51.

\textsuperscript{126} Mikhail Bakhtin, \textit{Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics}, ed. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 293.
which contains different power dynamics. Walter Mignolo theorized this dichotomous imbalance as “colonial difference,” namely the ontological distinction between center and periphery.¹²⁷ In the 24th São Paulo Biennial, anthropophagy was intended to regulate this subversive dialogue,¹²⁸ mainly established between Latin American and U.S./European artworks (i.e., Barrio-Bacon, Schendel-Hesse). In Herkenhoff’s own words, anthropophagy as a cultural strategy “offered a dialogue model—the anthropophagic banquet—for interpretation”¹²⁹ (my emphasis).

In order to “contaminate” hegemonic art history and promote dialogue, the show mixed historical and contemporary Brazilian pieces, aiming to re-assess the past and showcase art from a national perspective. Thus, Herkenhoff placed a contemporary sculpture by Brazilian artist Tunga, TaCaPe (1986) (Figure 3.5), near Albert Ekhourt’s seventeenth century canvas Dance of the Tarairiu (1641-43) (Figure 3.6). The two artworks were visually linked by the presence of a common element: the baton. Depicted mimetically in the war dance performed by the Tapuya natives in the work of the Dutch painter and formed by a cluster of iron held together by powerful magnets in Tunga’s sculpture, the club associated the two artworks iconographically. Viewed side-by-side

¹²⁷ For an application of the concept and the proposition of transculturation, a concept coined by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Otiz, as a way of going beyond these colonial dichotomies see: Mignolo and Schiwy. “Beyond Dichotomies: Translation/Transculturation and the Colonial Difference” in Beyond Dichotomies Histories, Identities, Cultures, and the Challenge of Globalization, ed. Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).
¹²⁸ Because this dialogue is mainly established with U.S.-European artworks (i.e., Barrio-Bacon, Schendel-Hesse, etc.), it consistently differs from Morais’ attempt to create a horizontal or inter-continental dialogue in the cartographic vector of his 1997 Mercosur Biennial, which abandoned old, cosmopolitan transatlantic endeavors. See chapter 2.
(Figure 3.7), they presented different artistic traditions (bi-dimensional painting as a window frame to the world, autonomous art object), different temporal traditions (Renaissance, Contemporary), and different representational and symbolic modes of elaborating Brazil’s anthropophagic tradition and colonial history.

Following the same strategy, Herkenhoff positioned Proposal for a Catechesis – Part I Diptych: Death and Dismemberment (Proposta para uma Catequese – Parte I Morte e desmembremento, 1993) (Figure 3.8) by Adriana Varejão next to sixteenth century books (Figure 3.9) by European travellers in Brazil that narrated and illustrated the anthropophagic scene appropriated by the Brazilian artist in her work. Further along, a portrait of the founder of psychoanalysis made of chocolate by Vik Muniz, Sigmund Freud (1997) (Figure 3.10), was placed inside the Surrealist show. Since the contemporary artwork was obviously not a part of the historical movement, it provided a visual reminder of the importance of Freud’s theories to the Surrealists as well as a ludic reference to cannibalism—both in the fact that a person could (theoretically) eat the work, but also because chocolate, a Mesoamerican food, was “cannibalized” by the Europeans.

One of Artur Barrio’s Bloody Bundles (Trouxas Ensanguentadas, 1970) (Figure 2.4.)—analyzed in the previous chapter—was apposed to Frances Bacon’s Triptych (1976), which viscerally displayed the human body. Included in a room showcasing Bacon’s oeuvre (Figures 3.11 and 3.12), the Bloody Bundle provided a tridimensional example of what Deleuze famously referred to as the “body without organs” depicted in
Bacon’s canvases. It also suggested new paradigms of authorship and influence, ratifying Herkenhoff’s belief that “the object’s potency, [is] able to sustain itself—no matter the circumstances.”

Following the dialogical form of anthropophagy, Herkenhoff’s contamination strategy helped to question the traditional linear arrangement of the discipline of art history and simultaneously challenged the São Paulo Biennial’s historical role as an international platform allowing local artists to catch up with the latest artistic trends.

By stating that the 24th São Paulo Biennial “positions itself vis-à-vis the discipline of art history,” Herkenhoff demonstrated his intention to create an art historical narrative that offered an alternative to the dominant canon and its notions of a universal and disembodied narrative, showing that other art histories are possible.

By opting to juxtapose artworks whose aesthetic parameters resonated with each other, the curator highlighted the quality of the local contemporary art production and provided subtle examples of the use of cannibalism both by Brazilians and Europeans—as in Tunga’s cannibalization of Eckhout’s image of Brazil and the metonymic use of chocolate, for example. However, his dialogical “contaminations” did not create a

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131 Pablo Lafuente wrote an extensive critique of the “contamination” approach in the 24th São Paulo Biennial, which he presented during a seminar on the 24th Biennial promoted in April 2013 in São Paulo by Lisette Lagnado at Escola São Paulo. After discussing the temporality in Historical Nucleus that departed from linear arrangements by being fixed in the present, he analyzed the “contamination” approach. Grosso modo, he understood the Historical Nucleus as a museum of the (European) Other that was cannibalized and re-written by means of objects that are key for its history. This re-interpretation built a museum that has a “certain” Brazilian national identity. The essay is available in Spanish online. See: “Lado a Lado: modos de exposición (24 Bienal de Sao Paulo y otras exposiciones)” Available at: www.escolasaopaulo.org/ESCOLA SP PDF 2013 .pdf/view. See especially page 42.

historicizing strategy that intervened geopolitically in the art world. This is because the artworks were decontextualized from their local art histories and contextualized in a transatlantic exchange. The colonial difference, to use Mignolo’s concept aforementioned, imbedded in the transatlantic frame with its colonial implications precluded the possibility of the establishment of dialogue as equal footing. For instance, even if Barrio’s isolated artwork can maintain its artistic potency by evoking raw flesh and pain, by being placed next to Bacon’s better-known triptych it loses its placement in Brazil and Latin America’s art historical and political context. Differently from the contamination strategy that consisted of isolated pieces, the individual shows that composed the *Historical Nucleus*, which included Latin American artists, were carefully...

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133 Crucially, Herkenhoff’s strategy of contamination did have an impact on other exhibitions, although not always with the purpose of constructing a non-Eurocentric art historiography. Here, it was contamination and not anthropophagy that operated a method. For example, as a result of Herkenhoff’s arrangement we can see the current trend of displaying artworks from multiple time periods—as in the show *Rioutous Baroque! From Catellan to Zurbarán* (Guggenheim Bilbao, 2013). Herkenhoff noted this influence in his 2008 revision of the biennial: “The juxtaposition of artworks to constitute a new art history was noted by Nicolas Serota, in Tate Modern, John Elderfield, in MoMA, and Yves-Alain Bois, in a conference at the Getty.” Cf. Herkenhoff, “Bienal 1998: Principios e processos,” 16. In the above-mentioned exhibition, the transhistorical and fluid strategy was used to create a dialogue among European artworks produced in different centuries—maybe creating a different art history, but undeniably a Eurocentric one. Mostly important, the strategy of “contaminations” was crucial for the show *Fricciones* (*Frictions*, Reina Sofia, Dec. 12, 2000 - March 26, 2001) curated by Adriano Pedrosa and Ivo Mesquita as part of the grandiose Five Versions project, which showcased Latin American production. Although the show can be seen as an attempt to criticize master narratives associated with Europe, differently from São Paulo, it only displayed Latin American art pieces. Explaining how their strategy built on “contaminations,” the two curators wrote in the catalogue: “The take on the historical theme is contemporary. It is necessary to say that *Fricciones* is indebted to the curatorial strategy denominated ‘contamination,’ developed by Paulo Herkenhoff for the *Historical Nucleus* of the 24th São Paulo Biennial in 1998. (...) What we are doing here, in an inverted but very close trajectory, is to ‘contaminate’ or to ‘friction’ the modern and contemporary show with historical artworks. In this arrangement emerge our desire to make not a historical exhibition—something that was discussed in our first communications with the institution—but rather a contemporary comment on the historical exhibition.” Adriano Pedrosa and Ivo Mesquita, “Plástica” in *Fricciones* (Madrid: Versiones del Sur, 2000), 213.
inserted into chronological or monographic exhibitions.\textsuperscript{134} For instance, Mari Carmen Ramírez curated a solo show of Siqueiros in which she proposed contextualizing his production vis-à-vis the Latin American historical avant-gardes, giving a full idea of “Siqueiros’ innovative production”:

In order to emphasize Siqueiros’ leadership role on behalf of a Latin American avant-garde—a role which, I argue, unites him with Oswald de Andrade and his notion of antropofagia—the exhibition here proposed will depart from traditional characterizations of this artist that portray him exclusively in terms of his relationship to Mexican Muralism and the Mexican revolutionary moment. Instead, Siqueiros’ production will be framed in terms of the discussions that surrounded the emergence of an autonomous avant-garde in Latin America. Accordingly, the proposed exhibition will consist of 15-18 key works produced for the most part in the 1930s, the decisive decade in Siqueiros’ innovative production.\textsuperscript{135}

The isolated Brazilian pieces deployed as “contamination” ended up reinforcing more widely known contexts and histories displayed in extensive monographic shows. It was the strategy of contamination itself, rather than anthropophagy, that operated primarily as a method— weaving a dialogue that, due to colonial difference imbedded in the relationship between Europe and Brazil, did not create equal footing.

There is, however, a fundamental difference between Herkenhoff’s dialogical contamination strategy and that of exhibitions that have intended to create a “dialogue”

\textsuperscript{134} Historical Nucleus included monographic shows of Reverón, Matta, and Siqueiros. About this Latin American inclusion, Herkenhoff wrote: “These shows meant that we would not make the trajectory of Occidental art without passing by Latin American art. About Brazilian art, or it would contaminate all the museological space (Pedro Américo, Lygia Clark, Cildo, Varejão), or it would be integrated in the post-war white monochromes room (Brazilians were exhibited side-by-side with other Latin Americans, North American and Europeans, as part of Malevich’s heritage). This infiltration was part of an affirmative and historiographical guerilla.” Herkenhoff, “Bienal 1998: Princípios e processos,” 10-11. Here as well, the relation of Brazil and Latin America is not an inclusive one because the two are conceived as being separated.

\textsuperscript{135} Mari Carmen Ramírez, “Proposal for the Siqueiros Exhibition,” fax transmission from December 11, 1997 to Adriano Pedrosa. Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Wanda Svevo Archive, Box 1384.
between Western and non-Western arts as these shows did not aim to create a new non-linear historiography for art history. *Primitivism and Twentieth Century Art: Affinities Between the Primitive and the Modern* (MoMA, 1984) displayed, side-by-side, European modern art and the African “primitive” artifacts that inspired it, and *Magiciens de la Terre* (Centre Pompidou and La Villette, 1989) promoted a transcultural dialogue under the banner of “magicians” instead of “artists,” depriving non-Western objects of their place in art history as free-standing art. 136 Differently, Herkenhoff wove his transhistorical dialogue using contemporary art pieces together with historical ones. 137

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136 While the 1984 exhibition used the passive concept of “affinity,” dialogue was an important term in the show *Magiciens de la Terre*. Curator Jean-Hubert Martin used it in the show’s introduction since the exhibition attempted to stage a dialogue between Western and non-Western artists. “All the artists from the Third World who we could meet have a contact, even if tenuous, with the Occident and its culture. The grouping of one and the other conduct to a vast dialogue.” *Magiciens de la terre* (Centres Georges Pompidou, 1989), 9. To form this dialogue, the show presented an equitable quantity of Western and non-Western artists, most of who were summed up to create in loco artworks. Divisions according to nationality or cultural heritage were avoided as well as the term “artist,” which was replaced by “magician.” Unified under the bonds of magic, the artists were further removed from their socio-historic context: “‘Magiciens de la Terre’ singled out artists and presented them exclusively in relation to other artists, without in principle any giving connection. (...) In ‘Magiciens de la Terre,’ the artists or magicians were all presented as equally capable of signifying independently from their context, even though at least some of the non-Western artists were less equal than the others because of their lack of familiarity with the new context that they had (suddenly) entered.” Pablo Lafuente, “Introduction” in *Making Art Global (Part 2) “Magiciens de la Terre” 1989* (London: Afterall Books, 2013). Significantly, Martin used surrealist leader Andre Breton’s private collection display (bought by the Centre Pompidou in 2003 and ever since displayed) as a model—unsurprisingly, Breton privileged stylistic effect over contextualization or history.

137 A significant example of this departure from the “primitive” conception of Brazilian (and Latin American art) is the critique written by Adriano Pedrosa, adjunct-curator of the 24th Biennial, in the number of *Poliéster* dedicated to Brazilian art. After describing young Brazilian artists such as Ernesto Neto and Leonilson, who were included in the Biennial, he wrote: “The exotic, the primitive, the wild, that is the place constructed for this art to live in. Does it reflect such stereotypes? Far from the much-hyped art markets and its array of galleries, artists, collectors and critics, this art lacks the irony, humour and self-mockery so often found in contemporary art. Here there is no space for the primitive, but no space for the jaded either.” Adriano Pedrosa, “The Art of Life: A New Generation” *Poliéster* 2, n. 8 (Spring 1994): 23. This critique can be inserted in the 1990s strategy of showcasing Brazilian art separately from Latin American briefly discussed in the beginning of this chapter. In the 2000s, after Latin American art was dissociated of the “fantastic” identity and the emergence of Global art that privileges regions instead of national configurations, Brazilians would review this position.
Even if this contamination dialogue did not create a method to create a localized art historiography, nonetheless, the term “anthropophagy” was rapidly incorporated into the larger international art world’s vocabulary, being today inseparable from considerations about Latin American cultural identity—as Herkenhoff noted in his 2008 review of the show.\(^{138}\) Moreover, anthropophagy regained its potency as an emancipatory strategy and a localized Third World voice in another segment of the biennial, analyzed below.

**Routes, Routes, Routes, Routes, Routes, Routes, Routes: anthropophagy as a transnational post-colonial weapon**

In the 24\(^{\text{th}}\) São Paulo Biennial, the 1996 segment *Universalis* was reconsidered by its new curatorial team and retitled as *Routes, Routes, Routes, Routes, Routes, Routes*.\(^{139}\) This renaming is significant for elucidating the exhibition’s aspirations as well as the new role that anthropophagy acquired in the show.\(^{140}\) The new title is a direct quote from Oswald de Andrade’s “Anthropophagite Manifesto.” By electing the Portuguese

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\(^{138}\) For instance, Gerardo Mosquera, in his 1996 essay *O Cozido e o Cru*, did not cite the term anthropophagy when discussing hybrid process and identity in Latin America. In contrast, his essay for the 2013 book *Global Art and the Rise of New Art Worlds* is titled “Beyond Anthropophagy: Art, Internationalization, and Cultural Dynamics.”

\(^{139}\) Herkenhoff and Adriano Pedrosa carefully explained to all invited curators that the name *Universalis* was a working title: “As a title, *Universalis* corresponded to the curatorial project of the XXIII Bienal de São Paulo, held in 1996. All curators involved in this segment of the XXIV Bienal are now rethinking, restructuring and retitled the model introduced in 1996. Next year, *Universalis* will exhibit works from about 50 artists chosen by 11 curators, some of them working in pairs, responsible for selecting artists in 8 different regions of the world.” Brazil was kept as part of the show until November 1997. Cf. Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Wanda Svevo Archive, Box 1385, folder 5.

\(^{140}\) The section’s re-organization, renaming, and focus on anthropophagy probably happened in a collective curatorial meeting in São Paulo that occurred on November 27 – 28, 1997. By June 1998, when the essays were submitted to the catalogues, anthropophagy was already *Routes*’ (and the show’s) main organizational principle. That is also when Brazil was conceived as a separated unit from *Routes*, forming the new segment *One and among Others*. 

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word “Roteiros,” repeated seven times as the manifesto, the new curatorial team localized the seven regions that comprised the global segment and dismissed the previous biennial’s universal focus. Indeed, theoreticians have questioned the geopolitical validity of the term “universal” in creating a more inclusive narrative, unveiling its Eurocentric roots. Consequentially, global insertions with universalizing aspirations do not necessarily disrupt canonical constructions in the art world, nor do they question conventional ways of thinking about art. Rather, such multicultural shows can be uncritically incorporated into the overall structure of its host institution as a marketable multicultural experience, as in the case of the 1996 biennial. Therefore, the

141 Several postcolonial and decolonial intellectuals have questioned the myth of a non-located and universal knowledge, exposing the fact that in European Western philosophy the body of the subject who speaks is concealed, therefore, passing as universal. As remedy to this hegemonic view, the decolonial school clearly exposes its locus of annunciation. Argentinean theoretician Walter Mignolo explained: “The decolonial epistemic shift is both geopolitical and body-political. The first aspect brings to the foreground the relationship between geo-historical location and epistemology, and it was one of the consequences of the Cold War. Argentinean philosopher Enrique Dussel in 1977 launched his philosophy of liberation by asking for the relationship between geopolitics and philosophy and established a correspondence between economic and epistemic dependency in the history of the modern colonial world. (...) [T]here is no knowledge detached from experience, as Kant claimed; and that the experience and memories in question are part of the modern colonial world, structured by the colonial and imperial differences. The geopolitical and body-political shifts are decolonial in the sense that they delink (i.e., it is no longer an internal critique, like those of Marx, Freud, or Horkheimer) from the hegemonic history of Western civilization....” Cf. Walter D. Mignolo, “Citizenship, Knowledge, and the Limits of Humanity,” American Literary History, 18, no. 2 (Summer, 2006): 328.

142 An incident involving the curator of the Malevich show, Wim Beeren, and dancers from a local community wearing Oiticica’s parangolés illustrates well how the inclusion of art from the periphery may not change hierarchies in the art world, being just a passive and innocuous accretion. When the group entered the Malevich special room wearing Oiticica’s work, the Dutch curator vigorously expelled the dancers. The act was registered by a photographer from Jornal do Brasil, a daily newspaper, and started a heated debate in the arts, especially since the event evoked an episode in 1965 during the show Opinião 65 when dancers wearing the artwork were also expelled from an institutional space, namely MAM/RJ. The critic Guy Brett published an article about the occurrence. Cf. Brett, “Museum Parangolé” Trans: Arts, Cultures, Media Magazine 1, 1995. Available at: http://www.transmag.org/nuevo_transmag/nuevodiseño/content/vols.php?vista=issue&tipoproy=Cultural%20Conditioning&proyeccion=87&descproy=Museum%20Parangol%C3%A9%20/%20Museo%20Parangol%C3%A9.
renaming of this part of the exhibition signifies a crucial attempt to localize culture in the global discourse emerging at the end of the 1990s. Homi Bhabha theorized this challenge:

> What must be mapped as a new international space of discontinuous historical realities is, in fact, the problem of signifying the interstitial passages and processes of cultural difference that are inscribed in the “in-between,” in the temporal break-up that weaves the “global” text.¹⁴³

Building on the insights of this postcolonial intellectual, it is possible to say that anthropophagy as a hybrid and transnational method (and not as metaphor or theme) could operate in the international platform provided by the São Paulo Biennial to highlight fractures and incorporate local histories, thereby avoiding an apolitical and inoperative global art. Differently from the *Historical Nucleus*, whose multiple temporalities were located in the present via a transatlantic dialogue that ended up reinforcing the context of the hegemonic canon, “Roteiros” clearly voiced a plural geopolitical proposal as a Third World critical articulation—as analyzed below.

*Routes, Routes, Routes, Routes, Routes, Routes* featured 50 contemporary artists from seven regions of the world: Africa, curated by Lorna Ferguson and Awa Meite; Latin America, curated by Rina Carvajal; Asia, curated by Apinan Poshyananda; Canada and the United States, curated by Ivo Mesquita; Europe, curated by Bart de Baere and Maaretta Jaukkuri; Oceania, curated by Louise Neri; and the Middle East, curated by Ami Steinitz and Vasif Kortun. Each individual project kept its curatorial and conceptual cohesion, but also provided “areas of dialogue, clash, and friction among the

several ‘regional’ exhibitions, thus integrating the entire segment globally.”144 Therefore, the program enabled each curator to weave, vis-à-vis the selection of artists and artworks, local histories that together formed what decolonial theory would call a “pluriversal” global art history—not possessing only one hegemonic center, but bringing together several points of views.

Unlike the 1996 São Paulo Biennial, Herkenhoff composed a curatorial team that would provoke a critical geopolitical reflection—for example, for the Middle East region he chose one curator from Turkey (Kortun) and Israel (Steinitz).145 For the hegemonic regions that figured in Routes..., namely Europe and the U.S. and Canada, Herkenhoff deliberately chose professionals working at the margins of these two mainstream zones: a Flemish (de Baere) and a Finn (Jaukkuri) curator represented a unified Europe,146 and

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144 “Roteiros, Roteiros, Roteiros, Roteiros, Roteiros, Roteiros.” Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Wanda Svevo Archive, Box 1380.

145 In the 1998 show, all the curators were based in the region they were responsible for, differently from the previous biennial. For example, the 1996 show invited the Frenchman Jean-Hubert Martin, curator of Magiciens de la Terre, to be responsible for African and Oceanic countries. About the curatorial approach for the Middle East, Steinitz wrote in an email: “The Middle East has never been defined as a cultural entity in international contemporary art exhibitions. The conditions of the region make an overall presentation impossible. (...) In order to confront this delicate reality, and allow a sectional-regional working process, the curators have developed a bipolar process: They have decided not to include Israeli or Turkish artists as part of the four nominated artists. (...) It is an effort to establish a regional perspective by connecting to other artists from different Middle East communities and cultures. It signifies the beginning of a regional network and linkages.” He pinpointed that the text was part of the invitation letter to artists Ali Jabri (Jordan), Chant Aavadessian (Egypt), and Kalil Rabah (Palestine). Ami Steinitz, email to Adriano Pedrosa dated from March 9, 1998, entitled “re: Roteiros, meeting, urgently, as usual”. Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Wanda Svevo Archive, Box 1379. Thus, the curatorial approach contains a marked concern in an original and regional selection of artists.

146 In an email addressed to the curatorial theme in Routes..., the European curators wrote about their selection approach: “As you may see we choose for a ‘europe of the small countries’, [sic] because we feel there is at present a lot of the energy that Europe may offer to Brazil. There’s one as yet not completely articulated idea which we want to negotiate with the biennial. It has to do with the shift from an ‘universalis’ with a ‘list of best artists’ to a ‘roteiros’. It also has to with the complex and complicated situation of artistic references within Europe and with levels of necessities in our discussions about the gift.
U.S. Brazilian-based curator Mesquita was selected for the U.S. and Canadian display.\textsuperscript{147}

The result of this focus on non-hegemonic parts of the globe (even in dealing with mainstream areas) was intended to highlight artists outside of the “global representative system.” Curator de Baere employed this term in a 2004 lecture to address a global system in which artists are carefully chosen to stand for their nation, most of the time in a celebratory manner, as Chinese Cao Guo Quiang came to signify post-communist China and Ukrainian-born Ilyba Kabakov to represent, paradoxically, Russia.\textsuperscript{148}

Unsurprisingly, both artists cited above by de Baere were included in the 1996 \textit{Universalis} show.

that we want to make to the population of São Paulo.” Bart de Baere, email to *Routes...* dated from March 12, 1998, entitled “our weekend home work, coming from Helsinki through Ghent.” Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Wanda Svevo Archive, Box 1379.

\textsuperscript{147} During my conversation with Paulo Herkenhoff, he stated that strong evidence that the art world’s hierarchies were no longer valid would be provided when a Brazilian art historian was invited to write about a non-Latin American artist. Thus, the invitation of Ivo Mesquita, a Brazilian curator based in the U.S., should be understood as geopolitically significant and as an attempt to create a curatorship that would incorporate new artists into this hegemonic area. Nevertheless, Mesquita’s curatorial selection was unoriginal, focusing mostly on conceptual artists. To compose the U.S./Canada region, he invited Andrea Fraser, General idea, Janet Cardiff, Jeff Wall, Michael Asher, and Sherrie Levine. His catalogue essay, however, was much more surprising. Using de Andrade’s strategy, the curator provocatively appropriated and altered several critical texts by authors such as Zygmunt Bauman and Mari Carmen Ramirez. In the latter, he introduced the idea of a “Latin North-America” by performing small alterations in the original text.

\textsuperscript{148} “This has led to a global representative system, in which key artists have been singled out to stand for their country, some on the level of official celebration, others on the level of contemporary hype. Ilya Kabakov, though born in the Ukraine, came to stand for Russia. Gabriel Orozco became a Mexican inclusion, and with him the Belgian-born Francis Alÿs. Many of the African countries have their single artist, like Pascal Martin Tayou or Meshac Gaba. China, for an extended time, was highlighted by some of the radical artists of the first generation after the Cultural Revolution, like Huang Yong Ping, Chen Zen, or Cai Guo Qiang. Often these representative artists are expatriates, and sometimes their relation to their native country is problematic, as with the Angolan Fernando Alvim.” See “Addressing Progressive Social Values,” originally delivered during the Apexart international conference (Honolulu, Hawaii, 2004). Available at: http://www.apexart.org/conference/debaere.htm.
Further emphasizing Routes...’s poignant geopolitical view, for the 1998 Biennial, Herkenhoff altered the division of the regions, avoiding the separation between Eastern and Western Europe, separating Oceania from Africa, and incorporating Brazil into Latin America (only to later propose Brazil for a separate segment, One and/among Other/s, discussed below). Thus, this geographical revision privileged non-mainstream areas of the globe. Highlighting this focus on his curatorial approach, curator Poshyananda wrote to Herkenhoff: “I am keen to create this section as a Third/Fourth world section; these are the countries [Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Burma] hardly ever represented in biennales, but the works and contents are extremely strong.”

Thus, anthropophagy came to signify a marginal voice, being able to operate on the political behalf of other geographical zones, including Latin America.

This peripheral articulation, which presupposes that cultural marginalization, analogous socio-economic conditions, and similar political struggles can build a common identity, is not new. In the massive struggle for African decolonization in the 1960s and 1970s, in the tense context of military dictatorships supported by the U.S. in South and Central America during the 1970s and 1980s, and in the heyday of dependency theory, this alternative became popular among Latin American intellectuals. Third Worldism thus came to represent an effort to articulate a new political identity for the Americas parallel to Latin Americanism. For example, the third Havana Biennial in 1989 changed its focus, building upon 1960s-1970s Cuban revolutionary

149 Fax transmission, March 9, 1998. Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Wanda Svevo Archive, Box 1379.
history and spotlighting a Third World agenda. This proposal of a global view from the expanded South was made conspicuous in the essay “Notes on the Visual Arts: Identity and Poverty in the Third World” by Peruvian art critic Mirko Lauer, who promoted poverty as a common identity in the continent and beyond.\textsuperscript{150} Similarly, Cuban curator Gerardo Mosquera, in presenting the show \textit{Ante América} (Bogotá, 1993), the second show planned and showcased in South America that attempted to write a regional Latin American art history, wrote:

\begin{quote}
The problem [of finding an artistic identity] is not only a Latin American problem, but also a problem of the entire Third World. One of the puzzles of the South is its lack of integration and horizontal communication, which contrasts with its vertical—and subaltern—connection with the North. In Latin America, this situation stands out even more by virtue of its cultural, geographic and historical proximity. But even the cultures and countries of the South, so dissimilar in many respects, face common problems derived from the postcolonial situation, which has determined structural similarities able to frame diversity. (...) It is as rhetorical “to speak of a Third World and to include in the same package Colombia, India and Turkey” as it is to ignore what unites them, or what can unite them, to face hegemonic power, namely poverty. These cultures need to know and reflect upon each other, exchange experiences, take on new common projects.\textsuperscript{151}
\end{quote}

Thus, according to Mosquera, under the aegis of common problems and struggles, the Third World, as well as Latin America, can find a shared identity that still enables individual differences to be upheld.

Of course, in this Global South scenario, the union between anthropophagy and Latin America is favored because of the concept’s locus of enunciation and its historical

\textsuperscript{150} Originally presented in the forum organized by the III Havana Biennial (1989). The article was republished in English in: Mosquera, \textit{Beyond the Fantastic}, 327-338.

\textsuperscript{151} Gerardo Mosquera’s introduction for the catalogue of \textit{Ante América}, (Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango, Bogotá, 1992). Available in Spanish online at: http://www.banrepcultural.org/blaavirtual/todaslasartes/anam/anam03.htm. Gerardo Mosquera, Carolina Ponce de León, and Rachel Weiss curated the show, which was the second attempt of an exhibition organized in Latin America that tried to conceive of a common artistic identity for the region, after the 1978 Latin American Biennial.
importance for the region. Curator Carvajal clarified this point in her text about the Latin American section in *Routes*...

Transgressive and irreverent, Brazilian *antropofagia* initiated a crucial discussion in Latin American cultural history. Its metaphor of appropriation, consumption, and selective digestion of differences not only became a foundational image for critical reflection about the intellectual and cultural autonomy of Brazil and its ability to challenge hierarchical relations with other cultural emancipation in the rest of the continent. The *mestizaje*, the ingestion and repeated contamination of notions of cultural purity or superiority first proposed in the anthropophagite project of the 1920s, still offers today, at the close of the millennium, a provocative framework for examining significant dynamics at work in Latin America’s artistic production.  

As Carvajal explains, in Latin America, the concept of anthropophagy joins other hybrid metaphors that help to define identity in the region, including the racial concept of *mestizaje*, the term *ajiaco*, a dense stew suggested by Fernando Ortiz as a metaphor for Cuba’s miscigenation and later employed by Mosquera to describe Latin American art, the perception of Latin America as a “third” or “in between space” postulated by Brazilian writer Silviano Santiago, and new-readings of the baroque. These hybrid terms are also widely used as transnational postcolonial devices since they undermine hegemonic notions, including purity and originality, which are constituent parts of a Eurocentric linear framework thereby suggesting other regional articulations.  

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152 The English translation of the article was inserted in a separate folio inside *Routes* catalogue, due to time constrains. Mosquera, in his above-cited introduction, criticized the notion of *mestizaje* as part of the totalizing nation-state project: “The ideology of the *mestizaje* as a rhetoric that intends to solve in an harmonious and equitable way our socio-ethnic diversity has greatly contributed to depart us from the problems of our own otherness.” Available in Spanish online at: http://www.banrepcultural.org/blaavirtual/todaslasartes/anam/anam03.htm.

153 Discussing Asian diasporas, Arif Dirlik wrote: “Popularized through the works of influential theorists such as Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Homi Bhabha, and Edward Soja, among others, hybridity is an important key word of contemporary cultural studies. Judging by the pervasiveness of the term in discussion of identity, hybridity also has come to define the self-identification of intellectuals around the world, in effect becoming a social force of sorts. (...) Hybridity (along with associated terms such as ‘in-betweenness’ and ‘thirddspace’) is intended to challenge the homogenization and essentialization of cultural identity (...) Its
Moreover, these terms expand the concept of “national identity” beyond classical views of nationalism, organic models that are “misplaced ideas” when dealing with regions that do not conform with Western paradigms.

It is this expanded notion of nationalism that Haroldo de Campos explored in his seminal article “The Rule of Anthropophagy”: an idea of the nation as a “dis-character, instead of the character, the rupture instead of the linear course; historiography as the seismic graph of fragmentation, rather than the tautological homologation of the homogenous.”

Here, as already seen, anthropophagy and the baroque are associated because they both constitute a method of emancipation from normative historiography. In his words:

Already in the Baroque a possible “rule of anthropophagy” develops; it deconstructs the logocentrism we inherited from the West. Differential within the Universal, it began in the Baroque the distortions and contortions of a discourse which could disentangle us from the same. It is an anti-tradition which passes through the gaps of traditional historiography, which filters through its breaks, which edges through its fissures. This is not based on a directly derived anti-tradition—for this would be the substitution of one linearity for another—but on the recognition of certain marginal paths or patterns along side the preferred course of normative historiography.

goal is to undermine the assumption that boundaries may be drawn around nationality, ethnicity, and race on the grounds of cultural homogeneity.” Arif Dirlik, “Bringing History Back In. Of Diasporas, Hybridities, Places, and Histories,” in Beyond Dichotomies, ed. Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 103.

154 Haroldo de Campos, “The Rule of Anthropophagy,” 45. Appropriating Derrida, Campos speculated a “modal nationalism” that accepts difference in contrast to an “ontological nationalism,” which conceives of the nation as a biological model.

155 Ibid., 49-50. Campos postulated the baroque as “universal” in the sense of offering a transnational code that was appropriated locally with different expedients. Thus, to Campos, we can speak of a “difference” disseminated internationally through a universal code. For example, he and other Brazilian Concrete poets adapted James Joyce’s concept of “verbi-voco-visual” to structure their poems according to the graphic qualities of the words. For Campos this appropriation of a code defines his understanding of “dialogue” as a subversive form, which inspired Herkenhoff’s “contamination” curatorial approach, as seen above.
By choosing a non-linear method such as anthropophagy to compose a historical narrative, the curators in Routes... operated beyond the normative paradigm. They thus solved the problem of non-canonical artworks being considered unoriginal and falling “behind” history’s official trajectory—effectively realizing Herkenhoff’s curatorial program of proposing a marginal art history. Different from the transatlantic structure of the Historical Nucleus that ended up displaying metaphoric uses of anthropophagy, Routes...’s global model championed a geopolitical vision of the hybrid concept as an articulation strategy capable of decentering art history through its affirmation of the periphery as autonomous from the (US-Euro) center.156 By symbolizing a “Third/Fourth world,” anthropophagy was able to transgress nationalistic tones and operate as a vision coming from the margins—simultaneously reinforcing the association between anthropophagy and Latin America in the contemporary art world and serving as an early proponent of the current articulation of global art and eccentric modernisms.157

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156 As explained earlier in this chapter (Section 2, Curatorial Concepts), the invited curators quickly ignored Lyotard’s concept of thickness and focused on anthropophagy—especially on the Routes... show. Even when the appropriation of cannibalism was literal, as in the case of Asia, the result escaped illustrative and metaphorical uses of anthropophagy largely due to the nature of the global segment. Differently from the Historical Nucleus, the artworks were not dialoguing solely with each other or with a hegemonic narrative, but rather were contextualized as peripheral and largely ignoring artworks and discourses from the center to articulate a marginal narrative.

157 As global art tries to expand beyond its U.S.-Eurocentric frontiers, it revitalizes articulations between the so-called “Third World countries” (Third Worldism or tercermundismo) put forth in the 1970s and rapidly endorsed by Latin American intellectuals. For example, critic Mário Pedrosa conceived of poverty as the first step toward Latin American unity during the First Latin American Biennial in 1978—as seen in the first chapter of this dissertation. The majority of discourses on global art articulate artworks from Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe, and/or Asia—most of the time without pinpointing the differences between the regions or, worse, under the mediation of so-called central or core countries. As recent examples of this articulation of the peripheral zones in art to promote global art, it is possible to cite the Guggenheim’s UBS MAP Global Art Initiative (South and Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa) and MoMA’s C-MAP enterprise (Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, and East Asia)—which are investigated in the conclusion of this dissertation.
Moreover, by symbolizing a “Third/Fourth world,” the session subverted the traditional institutional mission of the São Paulo Biennial of presenting the newest trends in the art world for the benefit of local art professionals. The old historical model inferred by the São Paulo Biennial agenda—in which art history is constituted as a succession of artistic movements reacting to each other and where precedence is conflated with originality and quality—was no longer valid.

One and/among Other/s, National Representations, and other uses of anthropophagy as affirmation of an autonomous (national?) thinking

Displayed on the second floor of the biennial’s pavilion, close to the space dedicated to Routes..., One and/among Other/s exclusively showcased contemporary art from Brazil. However, “besides constituting its own segment”, Brazilian contemporary art “had a complex presence through contaminations, insertions, punctual presences, project in the books, web art and other presentations.” Thus, Brazilian contemporary art was presented as an articulated and disruptive force throughout the 24th São Paulo Biennial, acting everywhere as dialogical “contamination.”

Because the Brazilian exhibition was located in the same open space as the globalized regional show Routes..., the juxtaposition of the two exhibits visually

158 “Besides constituting its own segment, with an exhibition title Um e/entre outros [One and/among Other/s], Brazilian contemporary art has a complex presence at the XXIV Bienal de São Paulo through contaminations, insertions, punctual presences, projects in the books, webart and other presentations.” Adriano Pedrosa and Paulo Herkenhoff, “Brazilian Contemporary Art: a Complex Presence” in Arte contemporânea brasileira: um e/entre outros, vol. 4 of XXIV Bienal de São Paulo (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 1998), 28. A similar narrative featured in the press release: “Besides the exhibition dedicated to contemporary artists, Brazilian art appears in various segments and instances at the XXIV Bienal de São Paulo, establishing a complex presence.” “XXIV Bienal de São Paulo.” Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Wanda Svevo Archive, Box 1380.
suggested a contrast between Brazil and the rest of Latin America, enabling the presence of a display according to nationality to undermine Routes’ regional arrangement. This segregating effect was reinforced by the fact that Carvajal’s selection for Latin America included three Brazilian artists (Ana Maria Maiolino, Miguel do Rio Branco, and Regina Silveira). Additionally, the segment established a hierarchical relationship between Brazil and its neighbors since Brazilian art occupied a larger area, showcasing a greater number of artists than the rest of the continent. Co-curator Adriano Pedrosa made this hegemony of Brazilian art explicit in the catalogue:

In the Latin American context, Brazil has enjoyed a special interest, significantly larger than its subcontinental neighbors— in a recent visit to São Paulo, a curator of an emerging North-Hemispheric Biennial told me that it is the most interesting contemporary production at the moment. What is (not) Brazilian contemporary art? The question has not been posed only over the past ten years, and not only by foreigners. It constitutes a preoccupation of Brazil’s Art History...

Consequently, the second floor of the biennial visually indorsed the view of Brazil, “a country of continental proportions,” as separate from the rest of the continent—due not only to a different language and colonial history, but also (and more importantly) to the

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159 Although chief-curator Paulo Herkenhoff and adjunct-curator Adriano Pedrosa (who was in charge of coordinating the communications and logistics of Routes...) had proposed to unify Brazil to the rest of Latin America, differently from the 1996 São Paulo Biennial, this geographical inclusion was problematic—especially since Brazilian art gained its own separate section in the final layout of the exhibition. Pedrosa, for example, wrote an email on January 22, 1998 to the other curators of Routes... in which he communicated that the curator for Latin America, Rina Carvajal, would choose more “Brazilian artists,” making evident the tense relationship between Brazil and the rest of the continent: “We were worried about the integration of Brazil at “Routes...,” as we had decided not [sic] make our country an eight[th] region in the exhibition. Brazil is, after all, in Latin America. We thus have agreed that Rina could include Brazilian[s] in her selection, but did not want those choices to decrease the number of non-Brazilians. We thus decided to give Rina the option to chose two extra Brazilian artists (a number she herself suggested), and she is now in charge of selecting 10 artists, as opposed to 8.” Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Wanda Svevo Archive, Box 1366.

superior quality of its artistic production. In this scenario, Brazil emerges as the natural leader of Latin American art, discrediting Argentina’s historical cultural leadership in the region.\footnote{161}

Intending to offer a “non-totalizing conceptual cross-section of Brazilian contemporary art,” One and/among Other/s was divided in two “thematic axes”.\footnote{162} One and Other highlighted subjective and psychoanalytic approaches to anthropophagy, and One among Others incorporated political and social concerns.\footnote{163} The fact that some artists included in One and/among Other/s also appeared in other sections (such as Tunga, whose Eixo Exógeno [Exogenous Axis, 1985-97] was selected by Adriano Pedrosa and TaCaPe by Herkenhoff for the Historical Nucleus) helped to promote the idea of a unified conception of Brazilian art under the “contamination” enabled by anthropophagy.\footnote{164} Further reinforcing this homogeneous national narrative, Herkenhoff analyzed all the Brazilian artists participating in the show conjointly in his essay “One among Others.”\footnote{165} Thus,

\footnote{161} Successful in its internationalist enterprises, Argentina (or Buenos Aires) was seen in Brazil as the natural artistic leader of Latin America and the country’s biggest rival. See Frederico Morais, Arte Plásticas na América Latina: do transe ao transitório (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1979), 54.

\footnote{162} “The exhibition does not define totalizing nor ultimate paradigms, does not wish to precise a general panorama or list of high selections, but offers instead one organization and conceptual cross-section (among many possible other ones) of Brazilian contemporary art.” Adriano Pedrosa, “Arte contemporânea brasileira,” 99.

\footnote{163} One and Other, curated by Adriano Pedrosa, showcased artists like Lygia Clark, Rivane Neuschwander, Tunga, Leonilson, Valeska Soares, Artur Barrio, and Cildo Meireles. One among Others, curated by Herkenhoff, presented artists like Regina Silveira, Anna Bella Geiger, Antonio Manuel, Claudia Andujar, and Vik Muniz.

\footnote{164} In this segment there was also artworks by Bruce Nauman (South American Triangle, 1981) and photographs of the city of São Paulo by Esko Männikkö and of U.S. shantytowns by Michael Asher. However, these “contaminations” were not as polemical as the ones inserted in the Historical Nucleus and did not receive extensive criticism.

\footnote{165} This strategy was also used in the press release of the show. The document was divided in five explanatory sections: Historical Nucleus; Routes, Routes, Routes, Routes, Routes; National
anthropophagy in this segment functioned as the main feature of Brazilian art—as related in Herkenhoff’s 1994 essay “Having Europe for Lunch: a Recipe for Brazilian Art,” quoted above.

For the National Representations segment, in addition to the curatorial strategies of organizing the exhibit with the concept of density as its driving force and displaying the art in an open format that did not segregate countries according to the old assumption that “one nation = one artist = one room,” Herkenhoff established other measures to obtain a coherent exhibition with consistent quality. He diminished the number of invited countries (66 instead of the 87 of the previous biennial) and assigned curator Virginia Pérez-Ratton to coordinate the selections of Central American and Caribbean countries to fit the bigger curatorial plan of the show.

In order to “visually problematize” the National Representations section, the chief curator exhibited hand-made flags by Brazilian artist Emanuel Nassar representing the counties of the artist’s home state, Pará, which is primarily located in the Amazonian forest. Since Brazil was not represented in this section, the insertion of Nassar’s works was part of the curatorial approach of “contamination,” originally envisioned for the Historical Nucleus segment. According to Herkenhoff, the precariousness of the design

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Representations, Contemporary Brazilian Art (explaining the show One and/among Other/s) and Brazilian art at the XXIV Bienal de São Paulo (which listed all the Brazilian artists included throughout the show). Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Wanda Svevo Archive, Box 1380.


167 Pérez-Ratton personally visited the countries and selected the artworks. This effort was intended to ratify the fact that poor countries had been underrepresented or absent in shows since they could not afford sending official representations. Author in conversation with Herkenhoff, December 2011.
and manufacture of the flags, the upmost national symbol, established a pungent counterpoint to nationalism and regionalism during the period of globalization.\textsuperscript{168} Paradoxically, this attack on nationalism contrasted vividly with privileged treatment that Brazilian art received in the show.

Further questioning the validity of the segment (and signaling the art professionals’ discomfort with it), the National Representations catalogue opened with a quote by Canadian official curator Jon Tupper: “It is impossible to represent the contemporary artistic activity of a country through the work of one artist.”\textsuperscript{169} This epigraph was followed by Herkenhoff’s “Dialogue Essay,” an essay that undermined the authority of the National Representations’ structure, and tried, at the same time, to justify the presence of the section in the biennial. Assertions like “The National Representations segment is the first framework and most consolidated basis of the Bienal de São Paulo. It is the exhibition’s major asset and main weakness,” resulted in a double bind that did not validate the inclusion of the segment in the overall show.\textsuperscript{170} In the concluding paragraph of the essay, Herkenhoff reproduced the already mentioned statement of Brazilian artists Cildo Meireles and Oiticica published in the 1970 catalogue.

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\textsuperscript{168} Herkenhoff analyzed all the Brazilian artists together in the essay “One among Others” published in the catalogue dedicated to Brazilian contemporary art. Strangely, in the bilingual catalogue (Portuguese/English) this essay was not translated into English. Herkenhoff, “One among Others” in Arte contemporânea brasileira: um e/entre outros, vol. 4 of XXIV Bienal de São Paulo (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 1998), 117. Available at: http://issuu.com/bienal/docs/name423574.


\textsuperscript{170} Herkenhoff, “Dialogue Essay,” 30. In the same essay, Herkenhoff stated that besides operating like a register of the processes of decolonization and (recently) globalization in the world, historically the segment gave “space to the place of difference. Regardless of the desire of the Biennial curatorship or its project, difference has made itself felt through political, geographical, artistic and curatorial means.” Ibid.
of MoMA’s *Information* show: “Cildo: ‘I am here, in this exhibition, to defend neither a career nor any nationality.’ Hélio: ‘i am not here representing brazil, or representing anything else... [sic].’”171 Again, these sentences were written in the heyday of Brazilian dictatorship; thus, one wonders about their intended meaning in the context of the late 1990s, particularly vis-à-vis the importance the chief-curator gave to displaying international art from a Brazilian perspective. The inconsistency of the *National Representations* segment in globalized times was finally officially proclaimed in 2006, when Lisette Lagnado, the curator of the 27th São Paulo Biennial, terminated the section.

The catalogues of the 24th São Paulo Biennial functioned as an expanded exhibition site, continuing the dialogues proposed by the curatorial team, rather than as a traditional exhibition register “doomed to remain a pallid copy of the real show.”172 Each section of the biennial (*Historical Nucleus, Routes..., One and/among Other/s, National Representations*) had its own catalogue. Mirroring the strategy of “contamination,” Brazilian artworks were printed in all four catalogues of the show. By making Brazilian art ubiquitous in the 24th São Paulo Biennial itself as well as in its publications, Herkenhoff reinforced the presence of Brazil and anthropophagy and its national perspective in the biennial. Indeed, the show gave visibility to certain national names

171 Ibid., 35.
172 Letter to David Elliot, 30 December 1997, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Wanda Svevo Archive, Box 1384. Adriano Pedrosa repeated this statement in his editor’s announcement in the catalogues.
and movements by repeatedly showcasing some artists who became, in retrospect, affiliated with anthropophagy and Brazilianity.\footnote{This is the case of Adriana Varejão, whose work initially associated with the colonial baroque but became conflated with anthropophagy and Brazilianity. I am using here the concept of visibility coined by Gaudêncio Fidelis in his already cited PhD dissertation.}

Opting to publish theoretical essays rather than descriptive ones, the publications constituted a significant basis for art professionals working on subjects as diverse as globalization, appropriation, and cultural identity.\footnote{Although the idea of the exhibition catalogue as a place for critical reflection was not new, as 1997 documenta’s catalogue curated by Catherine David demonstrates, it represented a novelty in São Paulo and can be understood as an index of the curator’s effort to associate the show with Kassel. The publishing enterprise proved extremely popular, and by January 1999 the book dedicated to the Historical Nucleus segment (the biggest volume, containing essays by curators Mary Jane Jacob, Germano Celant, Mari-Carmen Ramírez, among others) was sold out.} Authors included not only art professionals directly involved in the Biennial, but also references in a variety of fields, such as Donald Preziosi, Homi Bhabha, and Georges Didi-Huberman.\footnote{Historical texts that have influenced the curators were published as well. For example Vilém Flusser’s 1963 essay “On Gluttony” published on the Brazilian contemporary art catalogue. Cf. Arte contemporânea brasileira: um elêntre outro/s, vol. 4 of XXIV Bienal de São Paulo (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 1998), 156-159.} Since essays on anthropophagy were printed in the four catalogues, the publications further helped cast anthropophagy (instead of density) as the main curatorial concept of the show.

Anthropophagy and Brazilian art were also the crux of the Biennial’s educational sector strategy, which was entirely reformulated from the previous years.\footnote{As the president Júlio Landmann wrote in the introduction of the catalogues, the triad “exhibition, education and publication” formed the new tripartite mission of the show. Public school students were granted free access and counted with the guidance of monitors.} The biggest novelty instituted by the educational sector coordinated by Evelyn Ioschpe was the
creation of preparatory didactical material to be used by teachers with students in the classroom across levels. Since the material centered on the notion of anthropophagy, schoolchildren discussed fundamental issues of contemporary art and Brazilian history through textual and visual information as well as pedagogical activities. Herkenhoff has affirmed in several interviews that the main difference of Brazilian projects and their international counterparts has been the emphasis on education, which constitutes an ethical imperative in a country like Brazil. More than serving an ethical purpose, however, the educative sector was a key factor in fund raising and a persuasive asset in negotiating multiple loans with art institutions all around the world. Denouncing this focus on fund raising as well as the employ of anthropophagy in the show, literary critic Carlos Jáuregui made a harsh critique of the Biennial, evaluating it as a demagogical

177 The kit functioned as an introduction to the exhibition prior to the school visit, but it could be used independently of the show—potentially informing future generations of students. Teachers and art educators also received training through special courses and seminars developed by the educative sector. The 24th show welcomed 120,000 students from the public schools of Brazil—a number that constituted an important parcel of the total 298,000 visitors. In a 2013 seminar organized by the Foundation São Paulo Biennial, Ioschpe complained that the educative sector historically was seen as being responsible for making the show a numeric success, augmenting the number of visitors. The seminar “Arte em Tempo” happened in Sesc Belenzinho São Paulo, June 25-26, 2013.


179 The bank HSBC gave to the biennial’s educative sector the record sum of 1 million U.S. dollars. This quantity was entirely deductible from the bank’s taxes in accordance to the Brazilian Rouanet law. In the official letters requesting artworks for the exhibition, the curator explained in detail the educative program of the biennial. In a January 9, 1998 letter to the director of Astrup Fearnley Museet Kunst, Hans-Jacob Brun, Herkenhoff wrote while negotiating the loan of Bacon’s “Triptych inspired by the Oresteia of Aeschylus”: “I think you would enjoy knowing at this point that the XXIV Bienal de São Paulo held in 1996 was attended by 400,000 visitors, of which about more than one fourth were students. This public was the second largest in any exhibition anywhere in the world in 1996. Also 40% of this audience is coming for the first time to an art show. This means that we have a serious educational challenge. Mr. Per Hovdenakk was very optimistic that you would be sensitive about sharing this major art-piece with a large audience, which we are estimating on half a million visitors, almost half of which will be students. We have started our educational planning for we hope to reach thousands of children from families of very low income.” Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Wanda Svevo Archive, Box 1384.
project, affirming that in the end Brazilian anthropophagy was really cannibalized by “the financial establishment.” ¹⁸⁰ Although organized in the height of neoliberal times, when culture in Brazil had been conflated with business, the main aim of the 24th São Paulo Biennial was not to create a spectacle aiming to generate money: at stake here was the assertion of a new historical project that would put the national artistic production in a dialogue (understood as equal footing) with U.S.-European artwork.

4. Aftermath

The history of exhibitions as a field of study in its own right is a recent phenomenon, from the emblematic 1996 book *Thinking About Exhibitions* to the recent wave of remaking exhibitions, such as the polemical project *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*” curated by Germano Celant at the Fondazione Prada (Italy, 2013). As already mentioned, in its appearance in the anthology *Biennials and Beyond*, the 24th São Paulo Biennial was historicized as associated with the concept of anthropophagy. In his introduction to the show, Altshuler stated that by employing anthropophagy, the 1998 exhibition “satisfied the representational demands of an international biennial” as much as “the intellectual needs of a large thematic exhibition and the non-Eurocentric interests

¹⁸⁰ Járeugui, *Canibalia*, 551. The literary critic also disparaged the nationalism bias of the show (which I agree), the theoretical voracity of the show, and its confusing employment of both density and anthropophagy. By analyzing how anthropophagy was slowly mobilized and expanded in the show, I hope to have shed some light on the reason of this excess of theory. I will not map an extensive criticism of the Biennial. Unsurprisingly, the most criticized segment of the show was the polemical *Historical Nucleus*. For a extensive discussion of the critiques that the Biennial received, see Mirtes Martins de Oliveira, “Recepção Crítica da 24 Bienal de São Paulo: Notas Iniciais.” Available at: www.escolasaopaulo.org/ESCOLA SP PDF 2013 . pdf/view.
of a global art world.” I argue precisely this: if anthropophagy had been used only to satisfy “representational demands” of a “large thematic exhibition,” it would not have been successful as a non-Eurocentric tool to foster a critical global art discussion. Again, it was the deployment of anthropophagy as a methodological tool that allowed the show to have an impact on global art history and on the institutional history of the São Paulo Biennial.

By choosing a paradigmatic concept to mediate as a method of both curatorial and institutional relations, the 24th Biennial departed from its original model, namely the Biennale di Venezia, and associated itself with more self-reflexive exhibitions. Indeed, in his 2008 retrospective account, Herkenhoff explained his decision to slowly transition “from the political model of Venice to the intellectual of Kassel.” Consequently, the use of an overarching curatorial concept in the 24th São Paulo Biennial started a series of transformations that culminated in the aforementioned abolishment of the session National Representations in favor of a conceptual structure during the 27th exhibition curated by Lisette Lagnado (2006) and in the Latin American focus given by Luis Pérez-Oramas to the 30th São Paulo Biennial (2012).

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182 He also made clear that the decision to change the model of the São Paulo Biennial had geopolitical connotations when he wrote that unless that the bienal would choose ambitious and experimental curatorial criteria it would also be considered less than Kassel and Venice. Cf. Herkenhoff, “Bienal 1998: Princípios e processos,” 3. The 1998 biennial also served to spotlight the figure of the chief-curator, which after 1998 had a much bigger impact on the show.

183 In the 27th Biennial, titled “How to Live Together” after Roland Barthes’ seminars at the Collège de France between 1976 and 1977, Lagnado (co-curated by Cristina Freire, Rosa Martínez, José Roca, Adriano Pedrosa, and Jochen Volz) privileged marginal, collective, and activist aspects of art. The show promoted a
The problematic presence of the display according to national art schools in the 1998 show was not restricted to the maintenance of the National Representations segment. It was also inferred by the term “anthropophagy” and the curator’s aim to convey a national standpoint for art history. After all, Herkenhoff chose a concept that, signifying Brazilianianity in a historical sense, was inherently associated with the formation of a national culture. Thus, only when identified as a peripheral articulation in a global art historical context could anthropophagy operate as a transnational method and untie the international biennial from its national representation paradigm. Aiding the formation of this transnational view was anthropophagy’s locus of enunciation stemming from the Southern part of the globe, as well as the historical importance of the hybrid trope to Latin America and other marginal regions. It was the capacity of the concept of anthropophagy to operate as a method of emancipation that allowed its expanded potency. Functioning only as a theme or metaphor, anthropophagy could be easily associated with exoticism and folklore—an image that Brazil and Latin America were eager to depart from.

series of international seminars and artists’ residences in peripheral areas of Brazil such as the Acre state, situated in the Brazilian Amazon, attempting to amplify the repercussions of the event. Pérez-Oramas, MoMA’s curator for Latin American Art and former director of the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, declared that he wanted to make a Latin American-focused biennial. Most of the artworks presented were photographs, a fact that helped consolidate the impression that Conceptualism was the show’s privileged movement. However, Pérez-Oramas did not focus on the celebrated political aspect of conceptual art in the region, as the leitmotif “The Immanence of Poetics” suggested. Instead, I believe that the curator inferred a Latin American image by amplifying the concept of “artist” by including names such as Bispo de Rosário, who spent his life in a mental institute in Rio de Janeiro, and amateurs like the Brazilian Alair Gomes and Venezuelan Alfredo Cortina. Gomes photographed young men exercising on the beaches of Rio and made nude pictures of his lovers from his apartment window. The photographs only became public after his death and were later exhibited as art. Cortina had his portraits presented publicly for the first time at the biennial: in the 1950s, one of the leading intellectuals of Venezuela, photographed his wife in recurring landscapes, “staging” her body into poetic compositions thereby transforming the natural landscape into a fiction.
Thus, the 24th São Paulo Biennial was inserted into a genealogy of shows that constituted, in retrospect, the so-called “global turn” of art history. Together with the Havana Biennial, which was also included in Altshuler’s anthology and in Afterall’s “Exhibition Histories” series “Making art global,” the 24th São Paulo Biennial came to embody a powerful voice presenting theories and artists from other parts of the globe in the international art world. As analyzed in the second chapter of this dissertation, this genealogy, although including exhibitions that took place in the Southern Hemisphere, focuses intrinsically on a Northern standpoint as it maintains a logic that searches for inaugural points that benefit a model of art history deeply imbedded in modernity. In such a Eurocentric model, peripheral inclusions capitulate to a model centered in notions like linearity, originality, and “avant-garde”—in which concepts like “anthropophagy” find space only as a “theme” and not a method of constructing new paradigms for the relationship between center and periphery.

The 2003 show How Latitude Becomes Form: Art in a Global Age (Walker Art Center) ratified the 24th São Paulo Biennial as having been able to propose a different model of art history in its introductory essay, “Globalization From the Rear: "Would You

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184 The Phaidon publication selected the Second Havana Biennial (1986) shows like the Magiciens de la Terre (1989) as well as documenta 11 (2002, Kassel), which also became famous for advocating a less U.S.-Eurocentric vision of art history. The only geographical area outside the U.S. and Europe (aside from Brazil and Cuba) that featured in the exhibition anthology was China. As the first part of the series “Making Art Global,” Afterall published a volume on the 3rd Havana Biennial and the already mentioned publication dedicated to the show Magiciens de la Terre. A third book on the 24th São Paulo Biennial will come out in August 2015: Lisette Lagnado et al, Cultural Anthropophagy: The 24th Bienal de São Paulo 1998.
Not coincidently, chief-curatorial Philippe Vergne worked closely with Herkenhoff, who was a member of the exhibition’s “global advisory committee.” Vergne cited the 1998 show as exemplary of displaying a non-Eurocentric art history:

[I]t is fair to say that a project such as the XXIV Bienal de São Paulo introduced a very large range of art historical scholarship stemming from a history of ideas and movements barely known within the Eurocentric perspective. This biennial offered an alternative history of art, not an institutionalized art history. Although many artists were familiar to an art-educated audience, the methodology implied that there are as many art histories as there are art historians, as many cultures as there are cultural lenses. What is interesting to note here is that anthropophagy is understood as a method to write new art historiographies, creating different ways to think about art and artistic practices. Thus, anthropophagy restructures our way of envisioning art history. However, it is necessary to ask if this new structure can function beyond canonical paradigms. For as Gerardo Mosquera skillfully noted in his critique of anthropophagy and global art, “cannibals are only cannibals if they have somebody to devour.” In other words,

185 As the title How Latitude Becomes Form implies, the show formulated a notion of global art as being the result of a juxtaposition of regional constructions of art as an antidote to mainstream art historiography, centered on Europe and US productions and associated with Cold War internationalism. This regional discourse is frequently advocated to highlight the political effect of global art as destroying hegemonies, alongside the need to expand the Modernist canon of art. However, most of the regional inclusions showcase mainstream artists from the periphery or, more precisely, who are working in the centers of these “other” locations. Thus, the mainstream of the periphery, so to speak, is showcased. The transnational unification of peripheral zones of the world promoted by this discourse ultimately produces a homogenization of these marginal spaces, which are geopolitically connected under the banner of “marginal.” In the case of Latin America, the result is that artists from great art centers such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Buenos Aires end up representing the region. The 2003 exhibition’s map of artists and zones included in the show, available online, makes this geographical arrangement patent: http://latitudes.walkerart.org/index.html.


under which rules does anthropophagy rearticulate differences? And for whose benefit? Currently, the biggest challenge of anthropophagy, as of other hybrid methods, in proposing a new art history seems to be precisely that of making sure that the “in-between” space it inhabits is really a differentiated territory, one that can create different ways of sanctioning artworks independently of hegemonic art systems and their institutions.
Final Considerations

In 2014, two of the so-called bastions of modernism showcased Latin American art: MoMA presented *Lygia Clark: The Abandonment of Art, 1948–1988* (May 10–August 24, 2014) and the Guggenheim Museum presented *Under the Same Sun: Art from Latin America Today* (June 13–October 1, 2014). This was not a coincidence. The regional art shown in New York was the result of a project carefully delineated over the last 40 years by Latin American intellectuals to promote the artistic production of Latin America as an original and freestanding form. To conclude, I will briefly survey on-going projects that aim to incorporate art from non-hegemonic areas: Contemporary and Modern Art Perspectives in a Global Age Initiative (C-Map) at MoMA and The Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative. We still see today that the artistic construction that museums are propagating from New York, at least in the case of Latin America, is one that was formed regionally.

Although MoMA, as the first institution in the U.S. to collect Latin American art, had a strong historical investment in the region, the 1990s marked a re-engagement with modern and contemporary artists from Latin America.¹ This renewed interest is

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¹ The 1971-established “Projects” series commissioning work from contemporary artists showcased Cildo Meireles (1990), Guillermo Kuitca (1991), Félix González-Torres (1992), and Gabriel Orozco (1993). Other exhibitions included the work of modern and contemporary Latin American artists and architects, including Roberto’s *Burle Marx: The Unnatural Art of the Garden* (1991), and *Art of the Forties* (1991), which included the work of José Clemente Orozco, Wifredo Lam, Frida Kahlo, Matta, Siqueiros, Tamayo, and Joaquin Torres-García. Other shows that included Latin American artists and architects were *Preview: The Tokyo Forum by Rafael Viñoly* (1992), *New Photography 10: Shimon Attie, Abelardo Morell, Jorge Ribalt, Michal Rovner* (1995), and *Manuel Álvarez Bravo* (1997). See MoMA’s exhibition history. Available at http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/archives_exhibition_history_list
epitomized by the groundbreaking 1993 exhibition *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century* that integrated Latin American artists not as an isolated geographical group, but as participants in the construction of modern art.\(^2\) This exhibition is an important benchmark also because the museum incorporated curatorial advice and scholarship of experts such as Susana Torruella Leval and Fatima Bercht, and invited art historians and critics from the region to publish essays in the catalogue, including Aracy Amaral, Paulo Herkenhoff, and Mari Carmen Ramírez. This institutional openness to collaborate with Latin American professionals was reinforced with Herkenhoff’s appointment (1999-2002) as adjunct curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture. This position, offered while he was the chief curator of the 24\(^{th}\) São Paulo Biennial, initiated the position of Latin American curator in the institution, a position currently occupied by Luis Pérez Oramas. In addition to writing an essay in the catalogue of the 1993 show, Herkenhoff also had worked as a consultant for Venezuelan collector and MoMA trustee Patricia Phelps Cisneros, helping her to amass a collection centered on geometric abstraction. MoMA’s reopening in 2004, after the construction of a new building and a period of institutional critique that architect Brian Aamoth called “self-psychoanalysis,” cemented the new focus of MoMA’s Latin American collection on abstraction.\(^3\) On that

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\(^2\) See Edward Leffingwell, “Latin Soliloquies,” *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century: Museum of Modern Art, New York; Traveling Exhibit* 81 (December 1993): 72–83. The exhibition tried to avoid the most common errors of the so-called Latin American Boom of the 1980s. The show also avoided the geographic circumscription of Latin American art as a category. Patricia Phelps de Cisneros was a major sponsor of the show.

occasion, Cisneros donated nine major postwar Latin American paintings and sculptures from her collection, which included works by artists not represented in the museum’s collection, including Reverón, Clark, and Kosice.

The C-Map initiative, established in 2009, was also part of the changes implemented by the institutional remodeling. As stated on MoMA’s website, the program “emerges from a long history of international outreach at MoMA,” placing “increased attention on art produced outside North America and Western Europe.” As the goal of the program is to investigate how these “other geographies” have informed and constructed modernism, it is unsurprising that C-Map investigates the reverberations around the Gutai group in Japan, the Fluxus movement in Central and East Europe, and the avant-garde art in Latin America. This strategy has allowed MoMA to maintain its institutional identity and agenda while expanding its geographical focus.

In the case of Latin America, in addition to research for the monographic show on Lygia Clark—the most complete retrospective on the artist to date—the bulk of the theoretical efforts have concentrated on investigating conceptual art. On the C-Map site, *post: notes on modern and contemporary art around the globe*, all of the articles on Latin America examine experimental art practices—including interviews with Anna Bella Geiger, Antonio Dias, Cildo Meireles, and Luis Camnitzer, and a lengthy reconsideration of the groundbreaking exhibition *Global Conceptualisms*. This

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4 See https://www.moma.org/learn/momarnd/index.
5 Therefore, MoMA focuses on hegemonic constructions of Latin America, giving a prominent place to Brazil and Mexico—as exemplified by their curatorial trips to Mexico City, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro—
investment can also be seen in the upcoming show, *Transmissions: Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America, 1960–1980* (September 5, 2015–January 3, 2016), which presents horizontal exchanges and poetic affinities between these areas. The show will present works from MoMA’s collection by Eastern European artists including Geta Brătescu, Ion Grigorescu, and the anti-art collectives OHO, side-by-side with Latin American artists, in particular the Argentine artists affiliated with the influential Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, including Oscar Bony, David Lamelas, and Marta Minujín. The exhibition spotlights artworks that confronted the aesthetic and political implications of mass media communication during a period of modernization projects and political tension in these areas. The guiding principle to unite the two distant geographical areas is their turbulent context: how Eastern European and Latin American artists reacted to modernization and authoritarian governments—a trope that was also used by Latin American intellectuals in the 1970s to conceive of a unified idea of Latin America.

Differently from MoMA, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum has not had a consistent history of engagement with Latin America. The Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative was also born out of a movement of self-institutional critique and aims to expand the museum’s geographical engagement by surveying and collecting art outside U.S.-Europe. This project focuses on South and Southeast Asia, Latin America,
and the Middle East and North Africa. As part of the program, three curators were hired, one from each region, to work for overlapping 24-month residencies. For the Latin American region, the program enlisted UK-trained Mexican curator Pablo León de la Barra in 2013, who organized *Under the Same Sun.* This exhibition, which presented the pieces that de la Barra purchased for the museum collection, built upon the trope of a unified Latin America via a precarious context:

*Under the Same Sun: Art from Latin America Today* reconsidered the state of contemporary art in Latin America, investigating the creative responses of artists to complex, shared realities that have been influenced by colonial and modern histories, repressive governments, economic crises, and social inequality, as well as by concurrent periods of regional economic wealth, development, and progress. The exhibition presented contemporary artistic responses to the past and present that are inscribed within this highly nuanced situation, exploring the assertions of alternative futures.

Here, as in the 1970s, Latin American hybridity and contextual contradictions operated as a regional connector. The 50 artworks presented were displayed according to six themes: “Abstraction,” “Conceptualism,” “Modernities,” “Participation/Emancipation,”

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6 In the program’s website, a 2012 curatorial statement explains the program: “The Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative evolved out of an intense institutional self-analysis in which we asked ourselves what it meant to be a global museum today. The museum recognized that because of unprecedented mobility, the expansive reach of cable and satellite television, and the interactive nature of today’s primary medium, the Internet, a new understanding of world culture has emerged that is transnational and simultaneous—sometimes even instantaneous: one can experience the immediacy of current events and cultural expressions in a constant stream of information. Ours is a networked society in which separate cultures overlap and commingle in provocative and meaningful ways, and the impulse toward homogenization has been eclipsed by connected and conjoined localities. We asked ourselves, ‘How can the Guggenheim, with its own early history steeped in European Modernism, become meaningfully transnational? How can we recalibrate what we do—from collecting to exhibition making to educational programming—so that it reflects the multiplicity of cultural practices and their histories around the globe?’” See http://www.guggenheim.org/guggenheim-foundation/collaborations/map/curatorial-statement.

7 Available at http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/exhibitions/past/exhibit/5740.

“Political Activism,” and “The Tropical.” The categories—patently built on previous constructions of Latin American art delineated by local artists and critics—were updated to include more recent categories, namely “activism” and “participation.” Moreover, as with Morais’ vectors, these were non-mutually-exclusive categories that aimed to provide a historical and contextual framework from which to situate the artworks. For instance, conceptualism and political activism were very much interchangeable—in the video that explained the latter category, the curator referred to the works as conceptual. Of note is that by including a category named “The Tropical,” the show did not dismiss the fantastic but presented an updated vision of it, focusing on artists that present a critical vision of Latin America seen through the lenses of landscape and ethnography. For instance, the section included Mexican artist Mariana Castillo Deball’s *Stelae Storage* (2013), a work composed of plaster casts copied from monolithic Mayan stone sculptures called stelae, which are displayed on metal racks similar to those found in a museum’s storage area. Overall, all the six categories are embodied by experimental and avant-garde works of art.

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9 The participating artists were: Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, Carlos Amorales, Armando Andrade Tudela, Alexander Apóstol, Tania Bruguera, Paulo Bruscky, Luis Camnitzer, Mariana Castillo Deball, Alejandro Cesarco, Raimond Chaves and Gilda Mantilla, Donna Conlon and Jonathan Harker, Adriano Costa, Minerva Cuevas, Jonathas de Andrade, Wilson Díaz, Juan Downey, Rafael Ferrer, Regina José Galindo, Mario García Torres, Dominique González-Foerster, Tamar Guimarães, Federico Herrero, Alfredo Jaar, Claudia Joskowicz, Runo Lagomarsino, David Lamelas, Marta Minujín, Carlos Motta, Iván Navarro, Rivane Neuenschwander, Gabriel Orozco, Damián Ortega, Amalia Pica, Wilfredo Prieto, Paul Ramírez Jonas, Beatriz Santiago Muñoz, Gabriel Sierra, Javier Téllez, Erika Verzutti, and Carla Zaccagnini. Different from the MoMA, the geographical area covered by the program is more generous, including Central America and the Caribbean. This focus is also present in the curatorial trips, which included Ecuador, Panama, and the Dominican Republic.


Both initiatives, C-Map and USB, suppose an expansion from previous institutional exchanges concentrated mainly across the so-called centers (i.e. Europe and U.S.) to a more systematic incorporation of the so-called peripheries as active players in canonical construction. Seen with optimism, these programs represent an opportunity to integrate new works and modes of thinking into collections as well as into the narrative discourses of art history. Perceived with cynicism, they can be considered a necessary accretion that enables these institutions to maintain their status at the forefront of modernism and, most importantly, to continue dictating the parameters of modernity. I hope that this study clarifies the interconnectedness of regional intellectual production and the very idea of global art, culture, and knowledge production. The rise of a global contemporary art narrative was enabled by regional articulations that no longer could be dismissed as artifacts and placed “behind” in the timeline of art history, but demanded to be part and parcel of its contemporaneous narrative.
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Ephemera

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Biography

My interest in contemporary art grew out of my participation in Rio de Janeiro’s art scene in the 1990s as a curator and theoretician in artist-run spaces. Working closely with young artists, I helped to organize exhibitions in artist’s studios and other non-institutionalized spaces and to start study groups and conferences. At this time I realized how important and difficult it was (and continues to be) to display and explain the contemporary art scene for a broader public. Later, I wrote my master’s thesis on the work of Robert Morris. My research in Italy, where Morris built one of his site-specific labyrinths, enabled me to interact first-hand with works of art while reflecting on the reception of Minimalism in Europe. I was also able to consider the similarities between phenomenological and kinetic issues explored by the North American minimalists, like Morris himself, and the Brazilian Neoconcretists, including Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica. After becoming acquainted with the South American and European traditions of art history, I decided to pursue my Ph.D. in the United States, where I completed this dissertation.
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