



## La rivoluzione siamo noi

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# *La rivoluzione siamo noi*

## Latin American Artists in Critical Dialogue with Joseph Beuys

Katarzyna Cytłak

Joseph Beuys is a key figure in the pantheon of modern artists. He embodies in many ways the artist-producer in the latter half of the twentieth century; Beuys personified the myth of the socially and politically engaged artist, the wounded artist, the artist who survived, who blurred the borders between art and life. He artistically mediated the difficult ongoing dialogue between the East and West, Europe and Asia, and man and nature. He was a social sculptor as well as an anticipatory artist sensible to questions concerning ecology, and an artist in dialogue with animals. He was a Fluxus artist, artist-politician, artist-utopian economist, artist-philosopher, artist-therapist, artist-teacher, artist-prophet, artist-shaman and anti-systemic artist. He was a harsh critic of the Cold War world and an avant-garde utopianist with irreconcilable proposals for a new society. As observed by the Polish art critic Jaromir Jedliński in the catalogue to ‘Polentransport 1981’, an exhibition presenting artwork by Beuys that the artist himself donated to the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, Poland, he was also an artist ‘interested in the peripheries’.<sup>1</sup> Beuys’s artistic activity in Ireland and Scotland, as well as his trip to Poland in August 1981 – four months before the proclamation of martial law – were interpreted by Jedliński as evidence of the artist’s ‘anti-centric attitude’.<sup>2</sup>

Beuys’s anti-centric attitude was also manifested in the contacts he had with art scenes in Latin America. Although his first exhibition in the region dates back to 1972, Beuys’s relationships with Latin American artists have been successively overlooked in monographs, catalogues and critical reviews.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, his personal interests, social engagement and international recognition, and the wide resonance of his art, lead to his work becoming a point of reference for Latin American artists from the 1970s to the 1990s. The place Joseph Beuys’s work occupies in Latin American artistic discourse is also relevant in the context of the contemporary debate over Western canons.

1 Jaromir Jedliński, ‘Biografia’, in *Joseph Beuys: Polentransport 1981*, Galeria Sztuki Współczesnej Zachęta, Warsaw, 1996, pp 14–16, p 16. All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.

2 Ibid

3 In publications on Beuys’s artistic heritage, such as Gene Ray, ed, *Joseph Beuys: Mapping The Legacy*, Distributed Art Publishers and Ringling Museum of Art, New York, 2001, neither information on Beuys’s Polish project nor on his exhibition in Buenos Aires are included, while Beuys’s trip to Africa in January 1975 is usually mentioned in his biographies only because he became seriously ill. Lucrezia de Domizio Durini, ed, *Beuys Voice*, Kunsthau Zürich and Electa, Zürich and Milan, 2011, p 142.

4 The question of canons in narratives of art was raised, among others, at the second International Congress of Theory and History of the Arts that took place in Buenos Aires in September of 2003. See *Discutir el canon: Tradiciones y valores en crisis*, CAIA – Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte, Buenos Aires, 2003.

5 Longoni emphasises that the common source of inspiration for both was El Lissitzky's *The Future of the Book* (1927). Ana Longoni, 'Otros Inicios del Conceptualismo (argentino y latinoamericano)', *Papers d'Art*, vol 93, 2007, pp 65–73, pp 155–158, pp 202–205.

6 Andrea G Giunta, 'Adiós a la periferia. Vanguardias y neovanguardias en el arte de América Latina', in *La invención concreta. Colección Patricia Phelps Cisneros. Reflexiones en torno a la abstracción geométrica latinoamericana y sus legados*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía and Turner, Madrid, 2013, pp 105–117

7 Giunta analyses a complex example of artistic creation by the Cuban painter Wifredo Lam and his connection to Latin American, European and African contexts. Andrea G Giunta, *Escribir las imágenes: Ensayos sobre arte argentino y latinoamericano*, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, Buenos Aires, 2011, pp 299–302.

8 The project was initiated by sociologists, anthropologists, semiologists and philosophers, namely Edgardo Lander, Aníbal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, Catherine Walsh, Javier Sanjinés, Fernando Coronil, Ramón Grosfoguel, Walter Mignolo, Freya Schiwy, Nelson Maldonado and Santiago Castro-Gómez. Santiago Castro-Gómez, *La poscolonialidad explicada a los niños*, Editorial Universidad del Cauca, Popayán, 2005; Santiago Castro-Gómez and Ramón Grosfoguel, *El giro decolonial: Reflexiones para una diversidad epistémica más allá del capitalismo global*, Siglo del Hombre Editores, Bogotá, 2007; Walter D Mignolo and Arturo Escobar, ed, *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, Routledge, London and New York, 2010. See also a recent publication in English that summarises the crucial concepts of Modernidad/Colonialidad/Decolonialidad, Alejandro A Vallega, *Latin American Philosophy from Identity to Radical Exteriority*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 2014.

Redefining the history of transatlantic artistic relations and questioning both the role of (Western) European cultural patterns and the (imaginary) figure of Europe have become major objectives in the debate on culture in Latin America.<sup>4</sup> Latin American art historians have recently criticised arguments about Latin American art commonly raised in Eurocentric narratives on modernism, among them assertions about the belatedness of the region's art, and about its formal and conceptual dependence on (Western) European artistic patterns. Responding to this first reproach, the Argentinian sociologist and art historian Ana Longoni has revealed the precedence of dematerialisation, which was coined by the Argentinian artist and critic Oscar Masotta, over its North American equivalent, theorised by Lucy Lippard and John Chandler.<sup>5</sup> Latin American art continues to be seen as essentially derivative of (Western) European artistic movements and Western canonical masterpieces, as noted by the Argentinian art historian Andrea Giunta.<sup>6</sup> In her recent publications, Giunta emphasises the complexity of transatlantic cultural relations, and stresses the multidirectional character of cross-cultural mixing.<sup>7</sup> Since the 1990s, the relationship with Europe has also been profoundly analysed and discussed by participants of the interdisciplinary project Modernidad/Colonialidad/Decolonialidad (Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality), which was initiated in the same decade by Latin American intellectuals.<sup>8</sup> The thinkers involved in this network developed the concept of the 'colonialidad del poder' ('coloniality of power'), coined initially by Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano in order to expose the matrix of power relations that began during the colonial period and persist until today.<sup>9</sup> Walter Mignolo, one of the founders of the network, raises in his recent texts the question of 'decolonial aesthetics', which aim to develop both decentred and decolonial perspectives on artistic production. While questioning the canons and concepts of (Western) European aesthetics, decolonial aesthetics not only remains open to non-Western art, but also recognises its different genealogies and sensibilities.<sup>10</sup> Mignolo also refers in his writings to the Argentinian philosopher Rodolfo Kusch, who from the 1950s attempted to redefine Latin America's relationship with (the figure of) Europe and (Western) European ways of thinking and being.<sup>11</sup> Kusch also discussed this question on the level of visual culture, as was the case of his text from 1955, *Anotaciones para una estética de lo Americano (Notes for an American Aesthetics)*, in which he emphasised the differences in meaning between Western canonical art in Europe and in Latin America.<sup>12</sup>

This article aims to contribute to this debate by examining the artistic relations between Latin American artists and Joseph Beuys, one of the most influential European artists of the postwar period. The main objective here is not to reveal or inscribe in Beuysian art history his forgotten contacts with Latin American artists, but to propose a reconsideration of Beuys's myth. It therefore re-examines the matrix of transatlantic cultural relations – first those between Europe and its colonised peripheries, and then between the West and its Cold War margins – in which Latin Americans were usually seen as followers of Western art trends. The example of Joseph Beuys's approach towards Latin American art reveals the persistence of hierarchical models of domination and colonial attitudes that, as the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano observed, have endured through

9 Anibal Quijano, 'Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad', *Perú Indígena*, vol 13, no 29, 1992, pp 11–20; Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality', *Cultural Studies*, vol 21, nos 2–3, March–May 2007, pp 168–178

10 Walter D Mignolo, 'Aesthesis decolonial: artículo de reflexión', *Calle 14*, vol 4, no 4, 2010, pp 11–25; Walter D Mignolo, 'Museums in the Colonial Horizon of Modernity. Fred Wilson's Mining the Museum (1992)', in Jonathan Harris, ed, *Globalization and Contemporary Art*, Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken, New Jersey, 2011, pp 71–85; Walter D Mignolo and Pedro Pablo Gómez, *Estéticas decoloniales*, Sección de Publicaciones, Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Bogotá, 2012

colonialism and constitute a hidden face of postmodernity.<sup>13</sup> The critical reading of Beuys's art by the most important Latin American artists and critics – including Clemente Padín, Paulo Herkenhoff, Víctor Grippo and Nicolás García Urriburu – demonstrates how a distanced view, from the perspective of the (former) 'cultural peripheries', offers new openings and new viewpoints with regards to the interpretation of canonical modern art.

### 'THE MESS OF BEING SOUTH AMERICAN': BEUYS AND THE CAYC ARTISTS

At the seventh edition of documenta in Kassel in 1982, Joseph Beuys met Jorge Glusberg, an Argentinian entrepreneur and founder of the Centro de Arte y Comunicación (the Centre for Art and Communication, or CAYC), a key institution promoting mail art, conceptual art and experimental film and video art in Argentina. documenta 7 was inaugurated on 19 June 1982, just five days after the end of the Guerra de las



Nicolás García Urriburu and Joseph Beuys, *Colouration of the Rhine*, 1981, colour photograph, 9 × 13 cm, private collection, Buenos Aires, photo credit: Henrique Faria Gallery, New York and Buenos Aires

- 11 Rodolfo Kusch, *Indigenous and Popular Thinking in América*, María Lugones and Joshua M Price, trans, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, and London, 2010
- 12 Rodolfo Kusch, 'Anotaciones para una estética de lo Americano', leaflet, Biblioteca Nacional, Buenos Aires, 1955; re-edited in *Identidad* 1, 1986, pp 6–20
- 13 Quijano, 'Colonialidad y modernidad', op cit
- 14 Matías Glusberg, in discussion with the author in Buenos Aires, 26 October 2016. Beuys referred to his military service as a bomber pilot in the Luftwaffe during World War II and his (probable) plane crash over the Crimean peninsula in 1943, which became a founding myth for his artistic biography.
- 15 Harald Szeemann and Marlis Grüterich, *documenta 5 Befragung Der Realität/ Bildwelten Heute*, documenta-GmbH, Kassel, 1972
- 16 The exhibition included a printed polythene bag *So kann die Parteidiktatur überuunden werden (How the Dictatorship of the Parties can be Overcome)* from 1971, with a diagram presenting the advantages of direct democracy over the party political system, as well as two of Beuys's theoretical texts presenting his political thought.
- 17 *Participantes en la muestra Arte de Sistemas II (Internacional)*. Museo de Arte Moderno, 21 September 1972, CAYC, Buenos Aires, 1972 – an exhibition catalogue comprising two pages of yellow flyers produced by Glusberg. A Spanish translation of Beuys's manifesto, *Organisation for Direct Democracy through Referendums*, was published as part of the catalogue for 'Arte de Sistemas II. Arte e ideología' ('Art Systems II. Art and Ideology'). Joseph Beuys, 'Organización para la democracia directa por medio del plebiscito', in *Arte de Sistemas II: Arte e ideología*, CAYC, Buenos Aires, 1972 – two pages of yellow flyers produced by Glusberg.
- 18 Ana Longoni, *Vanguardia y revolución. Arte e izquierda en la Argentina de los sesenta-setenta*, Atuel, Buenos Aires, 2014, pp 122–124. At p 124 Longoni observes 'alguna sintonía' ('a certain tuning') between Beuys's proposals and *Project for a Democratic Republic (Proyecto*

Malvinas, also known as the Falklands War (2 April – 14 June 1982), a military conflict between Argentina and the United Kingdom that ended with the defeat of the Argentinian army. Referring to this fact, Beuys asked Glusberg, 'Why didn't you call me? Don't you know that I am a pilot?'<sup>14</sup> His auto-ironic proposal to Glusberg – probably one of the rarest cases of him imagining, even if just theoretically, his military engagement – could be seen as evidence not only of his anti-imperialist convictions and apparent solidarity with Argentina in the Falklands conflict, but also of Beuys's confidence in the Argentinian curator, whom he had met for the first time in 1972 at *documenta 5* (30 June – 8 October 1972). For that edition of *documenta*, entitled 'Befragung der Realität – Bildwelten heute' ('Questioning Reality – Pictorial Worlds Today') curated by Harald Szeemann, Beuys had set up an information stand for the Organisation for Direct Democracy through Referendums, founded by the artist one year earlier, in June 1971. With this project, Beuys aimed at initiating a debate concerning free referendums and self-determination. He was also affirming his criticism of capitalism and communism, as well as of the party political system.<sup>15</sup> In September 1972, before the end of *documenta 5*, visual materials previously distributed by Beuys in Kassel were displayed in Buenos Aires as a part of the exhibition 'Arte de sistemas II' ('Art Systems II'), which was also called 'Arte e ideología' ('Art and Ideology').<sup>16</sup> The exhibition was organised by Jorge Glusberg at the CAYC, the Museum of Modern Art and Roberto Arlt Square in the centre of Buenos Aires.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, Beuys's presence did not seem to have much impact on the local art scene. In her analysis of Beuys's participation in 'Arte de sistemas II', Longoni notes the inadequacy of his political thought in the local context, and observes that Beuys's project could have been easily misunderstood: his 'Dritter Weg' ('Third Way'), a system that could be placed between communism and capitalism, was easily associated in Argentina with Peronism, a doctrine and political movement that developed in Argentina in the mid 1940s and which is seen as a right-wing form of socialism.<sup>18</sup> However, Beuys later established artistic relations with the Grupo de los Trece (Group of the Thirteen, also known as the CAYC Group), a collective of artists gathered around the CAYC and supported by Jorge Glusberg. More specifically, Beuys initiated an artistic dialogue with Víctor Grippo and Nicolás García Urriburu. The nature of these contacts departs from the asymmetrical model of transatlantic artistic exchanges, which placed Latin American artists, as Andrea Giunta has observed, in the role of epigones of the European master.<sup>19</sup> It was Beuys who first sought to establish an artistic dialogue with these two artists, and it is thus he who could be perceived as the follower.

### COLLABORATION WITH 'AN UNDERDEVELOPED ARTIST'

The relationship between Nicolás García Urriburu and Beuys can be seen as a rare direct exchange between an already canonical Western artist and his Latin American colleague. In a move uncharacteristic of wider transatlantic cultural relations, Beuys advocated for this exchange despite being an already canonical European artist. García Urriburu recalled in 1993 that the contact was made at Beuys's initiative:

*para una república democrática*), a work by the Argentinian artist Vicente Marotta, on display at the same exhibition. Marotta proposed that every citizen should vote once every ten years on government policies and programmes.

- 19 Giunta, 'Adiós a la periferia', op cit
- 20 In June 1968 García Urriburu realised his first 'coloraciones' ('colourations'). At the Venice Biennale he coloured the water of the Grand Canal green. Without any official permission, he poured fluorescein, an organic compound used in microscopy and by the astronauts parachuting into the sea, into the water. For the fifth edition of documenta in Kassel in 1972, the artist coloured fourteen fountains in the city. During his career, García Urriburu realised twenty-five colourations of rivers and fountains in various cities of the world. In 1981, the Rhine became the most contaminated river in Europe. The aim of García Urriburu's efforts, which took place on 28 September 1981, was to draw attention to the high level of water pollution. Juan Carlos Fontana, 'Nicolás García Urriburu: la ecología en la visión de un artista', *Qué Hacemos. Panorama cultural*, vol 13, no 138, 30 September 1991, pp 48–50; and Pierre Restany, *Urriburu. Utopía del Sur*, Electa, Milan, 2001, pp 61–75.
- 21 García Urriburu started to produce bottles containing coloured water and with a printed label in 1968. Bottles of coloured water labelled 'Rhine Water Polluted H<sub>2</sub>O + 10.000 Poisons; Green Coloration' were signed by both artists and sealed by the Heinz Holtmann Gallery, Cologne, in 1981. Proceeds were donated to ecological advocacy groups.
- 22 Hernán Amejeiras, 'Joseph Beuys, el admirador de Borges', *La Muga*, 10 November 1993, p 40. In an interview from 1991, García Urriburu recalled his strong emotions concerning Beuys's offer ('Casi me caí de espaldas' ('I almost fell backwards')) and spoke about Beuys as 'una especie de Picasso' ('a kind of Picasso') as well as about his own enthusiasm ('Acepté muy complacido su propuesta' ('I accepted his proposal with pleasure')). Fontana, 'Nicolás García Urriburu', op cit, p 50.
- 23 Rubén Pesci, 'Reportaje a Nicolás García Urriburu', *ambiente. Revista de arquitectura*,

When I went to Düsseldorf, Germany in 1981, to colour the Rhine,<sup>20</sup> to my astonishment Joseph Beuys approached me and told me that he wanted to work with me because he was beginning to get into the ecological area... I agreed and together we made some bottles with coloured water,<sup>21</sup> which were exhibited at the Holtmann Gallery.<sup>22</sup>

García Urriburu, who started his projects for planting and protecting trees in the early 1970s and considered them to be an 'escultura natural' ('natural sculpture'),<sup>23</sup> explained that Beuys personally invited him one year later to take part in his *7000 Oaks – City Forestation Instead of City Administration* project. The project, which began at documenta 7 in 1982 and ended in 1987, consisted of planting oak trees in the urban spaces of Kassel. As the Argentinian curator Joaquín Molina noted, García Urriburu was 'the only Latin American artist [to present] at that year's documenta'.<sup>24</sup> Although photos show Beuys and García Urriburu jointly planting oak trees,<sup>25</sup> the Argentinian artist was not mentioned in the catalogue among the participants of documenta 7.<sup>26</sup>

Nicolás García Urriburu maintained an attitude of transcendence with regards to politics. In 1993, he stated, 'I am above politics, the defence of the planet is beyond left and right.'<sup>27</sup> His statement seems to mirror Beuys's perspective. Beuys not only advocated for the Third Way, but also simultaneously started to focus on ecology,<sup>28</sup> which as García Urriburu recalled, became the impetus for their collaboration. The Argentinian artist later recalled: 'I realised that Beuys was looking for me because he saw that I was like an ecology radar, and I believe that he wanted to belatedly get into this area.'<sup>29</sup> In a 1983 interview, García Urriburu spoke about his participation in Beuys's project at documenta 7 as 'an exchange of two ideas, between two countries and two men who want the same thing'.<sup>30</sup> Yet even if he saw his collaboration with Joseph Beuys as a partnership, ten years later the Argentinian artist was clearly conscious of the asymmetrical nature of their relationship. This consciousness was at the same time fairly common among Latin American artists of his generation.

For instance, the asymmetries of transatlantic artistic relations were discussed by the Brazilian artist and art critic Paulo Herkenhoff, who ironised the stereotypes and prejudgments concerning Latin American culture. For his *Auto-retrato como artista subdesarrollado (Self-Portrait as an Underdeveloped Artist)* from 1975, Herkenhoff used a photograph from a newspaper showing himself standing behind and in the shadow of Joseph Beuys, to which he added the comment: 'I took a photograph next to Joseph Beuys after eating a rose petal from his work *Ohne die Rosen tun wir's nicht*'.<sup>31</sup> Herkenhoff's 'confession' to having committed this destructive act against Beuys's artwork highlighted the veneration enjoyed by Western artists in Brazil. It was also a reference to the colonisation and Christianisation of the American continent – the rose petal can be seen as a holy host whose consumption symbolises the consecration of the 'barbarian' Latin American. Through this communion, Herkenhoff could aspire to enter the world of Western modern art. At the same time, his actions also referred to 'antropofagia' ('anthropophagy'), a paradigm in Brazilian modern culture formulated in the 1920s that aimed to redefine Brazil's relationship with Europe.<sup>32</sup> Based on the metaphor of cannibalism – 'a cornerstone of

*urbanismo y planificación*, vol 17, June 1983, pp 3–7, p 5. The artist recalled that his first tree-planting project took place in 1970. He planted several coniferous trees in mountainous terrain on three hectares in the hills of the Maldonado department located in south-eastern Uruguay. On 30 May 1971, García Urriburu published an open letter in the daily newspaper *La Nación* ('Hay que proteger los árboles', p 8) to protest against the removal of jacaranda trees in Chile Square in Buenos Aires. He protested against the 'asesinato de los árboles' ('murder of trees'), and spoke about the importance of planting new ones. In 1979, he donated his painting depicting an ombu tree to the Museum of Hispanic-American Art in Maldonado, Uruguay. He also planted an ombu tree in front of the museum.

- 24 Joaquín Molina, 'Victims and Victimizers', in *Urriburu*, Daniel Maman Fine Arts and Editorial Nexos, Buenos Aires, 2002, pp 11–12, p 11. García Urriburu exhibited *Mapamundi* – a painting of planet earth that reverses the hegemonic positioning of the hemispheres.
- 25 Beuys and García Urriburu together planted seven oak trees. Photographs of this artistic action from the personal archive of García Urriburu in Buenos Aires were published in, among others, Restany, *Urriburu*, op cit, p 169 and *Joseph Beuys. Obras 1955–1985*, Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires, 2014, p 33.
- 26 *documenta 7*, 2 vols, D + V Paul Dierichs GmbH & Co KG, Kassel, 1982. On the official website of *documenta*, a photo taken by Dieter Schwertdle shows Joseph Beuys planting a tree in front of the Museum Fridericanum in Kassel. This photo shows Beuys and García Urriburu's face and his right hand holding a second shovel. However, the name of the Argentinian artist is not cited. [http://www.documenta.de/es/retrospective/documenta\\_7](http://www.documenta.de/es/retrospective/documenta_7), accessed 20 October 2016.
- 27 Hernán Amejeiras, "Hasta que no demos vuelta el mapa, vamos a seguir abajo", entrevista con Nicolás García Urriburu', *La Maga*, 10 November 1993, p 40
- 28 The exhibition 'The Green Tent (Die Grüne Zelt). Joseph Beuys and the extended concept of ecology', organised between November 2016 and March 2017 at the Parco Arte Vivente in Turin presents Beuys as a protagonist of ecological thought in Europe.

colonialism' of the Americas – anthropophagy in art represents the consumption and digestion of European symbolic goods in order to mould a national culture.<sup>33</sup> By pretending to consume a part of Beuys's work, Herkenhoff not only performed an act of 'cultural cannibalism',<sup>34</sup> but also enacted the ritual of Holy Communion. He thereby ironically recognised both his own 'barbarism' and his need for sanctification; now reinforced and consecrated by direct contact with Beuys and his art, the Latin American artist could gain access to the Western art scene.

In Nicolás García Urriburu's description of his motives for collaborating with Beuys, he adopted an ironic tone that was very similar to that of Herkenhoff. Like Herkenhoff, he was conscious of his own subordinated position in relation to Beuys. For him, Beuys's presence guaranteed access to the Western artworld. García Urriburu allowed Beuys to appropriate his ideas because of the wider resonance that a Western artist could generate, as he explained:

I entered [into an artistic relationship with Beuys] because the publicity of Beuys in Europe has been much larger than mine, even though I was years ahead of him because I have been planting trees since 1970. But this is the mess of being South American.<sup>35</sup>

## BORROWINGS AND DERIVATIONS

While interactions between Beuys and Latin American artists followed the colonial model of artistic relations (in which Latin American artists were subordinated and ignored), they are not free from 'borrowings'. Partha Mitter has coined the term 'Picasso manqué syndrome' to describe the relationship between recognised Western artists and non-Western art scenes in the habitual discourse of canonical art history.<sup>36</sup> He has noted that the production of non-Western artists is always presented as later 'derivative works, based on cultural misunderstanding', or as 'simply bad imitations'.<sup>37</sup> Giunta has observed that this relationship model still functions in relation to Latin American artists, whose works always 'look like' a Western masterpiece.<sup>38</sup> For this reason, the relationship between Beuys and Latin American artists can be taken as a counterexample to this relationship model, which has persisted since the time of colonialism. Not only did Beuys's project to plant trees occur one year after his colouring of the Rhine with García Urriburu; his bottles project also did – bottles filled with coloured water, signed by both Beuys and García Urriburu and strikingly similar to those the Argentinian artist had made during his previous 'colourations', also resemble Beuys's series of bottles with green-coloured olive oil, known as *Oil Bottle*, realised in 1984 during Beuys's recovery from an illness in Italy. Additionally, Beuys's multiple *Capri Battery*, completed in 1985, resembles the artworks of Víctor Grippo, another Argentinian artist belonging to the Grupo de los Trece.

The parallels that can be drawn between Beuys's and Víctor Grippo's works are deeper than the question of formalist resemblances. Like Beuys, Grippo used simple, everyday and easily recognisable objects. He also opted for collaborative and participative actions in public spaces.<sup>39</sup> In his texts, Grippo wrote about awakening consciousness and defined an



Nicolás García Uriburu, *Coloration Uriburu*, 1968, glass bottle of water from the colouration of the Grand Canal in Venice, 33 x 8 x 8 cm, private collection, Buenos Aires, photo credit: Henrique Faria Gallery, New York and Buenos Aires, copyright: Azul García Uriburu



'Joseph Beuys' ecology', *Domus*, 29 October 2016, [http://www.domusweb.it/en/news/2016/10/29/joseph\\_beuys\\_pav\\_turin.html](http://www.domusweb.it/en/news/2016/10/29/joseph_beuys_pav_turin.html), accessed 2 February 2017. In the Bundestag elections of 1980, Beuys was a candidate for the Green Party (Die Grüne). In 1983, García Urriburu characterised himself as sceptical of Beuys's collaboration with Die Grüne and other ecological parties. Pesci, 'Reportaje', op cit, p 7.

29 Amejeiras, 'Joseph Beuys, el admirador de Borges', op cit, p 40

30 Pesci, 'Reportaje', op cit, p 7

31 The photograph was taken during Beuys's meeting with artists from Rio de Janeiro. Herkenhoff's work was published in Mexico in the review *Artes visuales: Artes visuales*, vol 18, June–August 1978, p 26. *Ohne die Rosen tun wir's nicht!* [Da können wir gar nicht mehr denken] (We Won't Do It without the Rose! [Because We Can No Longer Think]) is a lithograph presenting Beuys at the desk of his *Information Office of the Organisation for Direct Democracy* at documenta 5, Kassel, in 1972.

32 Oswald de Andrade, 'Manifesto antropófago', *Revista de Antropofagia*, vol 1, no 1, May 1928

33 Carlos A Jáuregui, 'Anthropophagy', in *Dictionary of Latin American Cultural Studies*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, 2012, pp 22–28; Carlos A Jáuregui, *Canibalia. Canibalismo, calibanismo, antropofagia cultural y consumo en América Latina: Ensayos de Teoría Cultural*, Iberoamericana and Editorial Vervuert, Madrid and Frankfurt am Main, 2008, p 394. Herkenhoff, who in 1998 was the chief curator of 'Cultural Anthropophagy', the 24th Bienal de São Paulo, recognised the cannibalistic metaphor's 'contemporary validity' in order to act 'against the oppressive censorship of civilisation'. Paulo Herkenhoff, 'Incomplete Glossary of Sources of Latin American Art', in *Cultural Anthropophagy: The 24th Bienal de São Paulo 1998, Afterall*, Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts, London, 2015, pp 230–247, p 231.

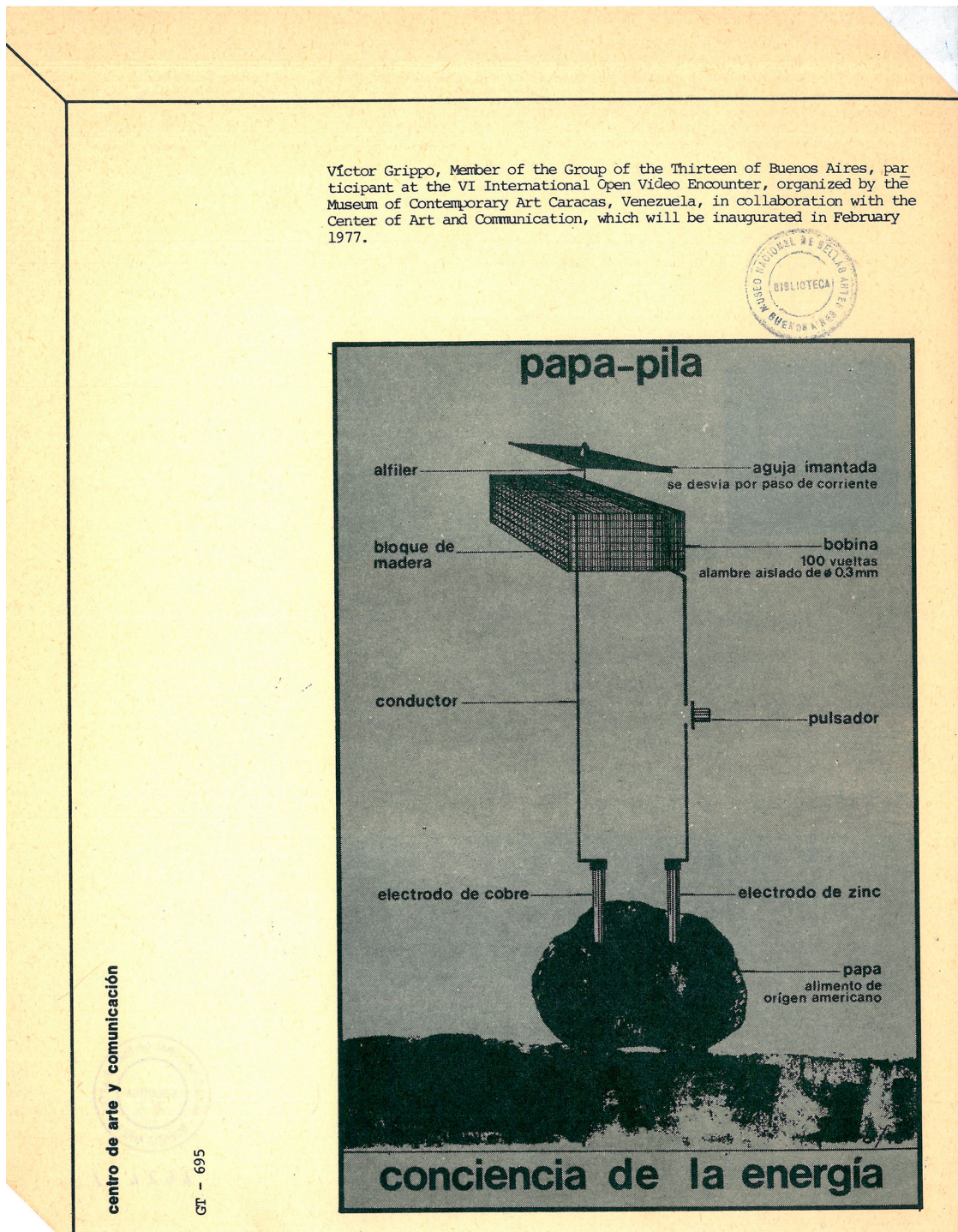
34 Jáuregui, *Canibalia*, op cit, pp 539–604, p 541

35 Amejeiras, 'Joseph Beuys, el admirador de Borges', op cit, p 40

artwork not as 'a product' but as 'the evidence of the transformation' of a human being.<sup>40</sup> As the German philosopher Volker Harlan remarked, Beuys spoke about his artistic activity at documenta 5 in Kassel in terms of a 'Parallelprozess' ('parallel process'), which 'refers to the connection between his object-based work and actions on the one hand and the discussion-process works on the other'.<sup>41</sup> Grippo evoked the expansion of the human conscience by drawing a parallel between it and the energetic potential hidden in potatoes, a basic food consumed worldwide that originated in Latin America. To illustrate this potential, he constructed a battery that became a leitmotif in his artistic work for several years. Starting with *Analogía I* (1970), a work composed of forty potatoes linked by a wire via electrodes of copper and zinc to a voltmeter, Grippo created numerous electric currents that could 'allude to a broad action in the functions of the vegetable and human consciousness'.<sup>42</sup>

The British art critic Guy Brett remarked that Grippo's artistic approach was close to Beuys's in the way he treated 'materials as energy'.<sup>43</sup> He added that 'Beuys's fat and felt correspond, to a certain extent, to Grippo's potatoes'.<sup>44</sup> Brett noted the resemblance of Grippo's works to Beuys's multiple *Capri Battery*, a yellow light bulb that uses a lemon as a source of energy.<sup>45</sup> Despite Brett's assertion that Beuys was unaware of Grippo's projects,<sup>46</sup> Beuys most likely knew his work fairly well. Although Beuys may never have directly observed one of Grippo's early works in which he used a lemon as a natural source of energy (eg *Untitled*, 1972), Beuys had many opportunities to become familiar with Grippo's potato projects. Throughout the 1970s, Glusberg, who was in touch with Beuys,<sup>47</sup> edited English versions of the CAYC's leaflets, which he regularly sent abroad to colleagues and collaborators. For that reason, Beuys could have received a leaflet for Grippo's exhibition 'Víctor Grippo, conciencia de la energía' ('Victor Grippo, the Consciousness of the Energy'), organised at the CAYC in 1977<sup>48</sup> and featuring a photograph of a potato battery.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, Grippo's installations with potatoes were exhibited in Europe.<sup>50</sup> For instance, his *T.S.F. con papa (T.S.F. with a Potato)*, 1974) was exhibited in 1974 at the Internationaal Cultureel Centrum in Antwerp.<sup>51</sup> This show, titled 'Art Systems in Latin America', also included a work by Beuys.<sup>52</sup> The second version of Grippo's *Analogía I* was presented at the 14th Bienal de São Paulo in 1977. It formed part of a collective installation belonging to the Grupo de los Trece and curated by Glusberg. The installation, titled *Signos en ecosistemas artificiales (Signs in Artificial Ecosystems)*, received the Itamaraty Award. As the Argentinian art historian María José Herrera has noted, thanks to this prize, the Argentinian artists received 'international consecration', as it was the first time (after twenty-seven years) that the Bienal had awarded Latin American artists for their work.<sup>53</sup>

In the last years of his life, Joseph Beuys became interested in Latin American art as he reinforced his discourse on ecology.<sup>54</sup> His collaboration with Nicolás García Urriburu reproduces the schema of the colonial power relationship, as the Argentinian artist is never officially mentioned in documentations of their actions. Beuys's works from the mid 1980s, shortly before his death in 1986, could be described as derivative of Víctor Grippo's and García Urriburu's artworks. In both cases, Beuys avoids assuming the role of the 'European master'; however, his attitude



Víctor Grippo, *Papa - pila* (Potato - Battery), 1976, yellow flyer produced by Jorge Glusberg, CAYC, Buenos Aires, 1976, 21.7 × 26.9 cm. Collection and photo credit: personal archive of Jorge Glusberg, Buenos Aires

36 Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-garde 1922–1947*, Reaktion Books, London, 2007, p 7

37 Ibid

38 Giunta, 'Adiós a la periferia', op cit, p 105

39 Grippo's project *Construcción de un horno popular para hacer pan* (*Construction of a People's Baking Oven*), realised with Jorge Gamarra and the rural worker A Rossi during an emblematic exhibition of the Grupo de los Trece – 'Arte e ideología en CAYC al aire libre' ('Art and Ideology at the CAYC in the Open Air') at the Roberto Arlt Square in Buenos Aires on 32 September 1972, aimed at 'revalorising' the everyday action of baking bread leaves, which were then displayed to the public. *Arte de Sistemas II. Arte e ideología*, op cit, one page of yellow flyers produced by Glusberg.

40 Jorge Di Paola, 'Victor Grippo: cambiar los hábitos, modificar la consciencia', *El Porteño*, vol 4, April 1982, pp 28–31. On several occasions, Beuys discussed the crisis of consciousness and meaning that would be resolved through art, defined as 'a science of freedom'. Volker Harlan, 'Conversation with Joseph Beuys. What is art?', in Volker Harlan, *What is Art? Conversations with Joseph Beuys*, Matthew Barton and Schelley Sacks, trans, Clairview Books, West Hothly, 2004, pp 9–74, p 10.

41 Harlan, *What is Art?*, op cit, p 1

42 Víctor Grippo, 'Modos de Fe', *Artinf*, vol 6, nos 33–34, May–June 1982, pp 13–14

43 Guy Brett, 'Una estadía en St Ives', in *Grippo: Una retrospectiva. Obras 1971–2001*, Malba – Colección Constantini/Fundación Eduardo F. Constantini, Buenos Aires, 2004, pp 51–54, p 53

44 Ibid

45 Reproduced in several copies, *Capri Battery* was a response to Beuys's interest in the circulation of energy and his attempt to redefine the relationship between man and nature.

46 Brett noted that 'In 1984, Beuys made a multiple that consisted of a light bulb that worked thanks to the energy of a lemon, apparently without knowledge of the potato powered radio made by Grippo twelve years before'. Brett, 'Una estadía', op cit, p 53.

remains 'colonial' and authoritarian, as he did not recognise the sources of his borrowings. When Beuys relates to the Latin American art scene, he is not acting as a politically and socially engaged artist, sensible to the cultures of the European peripheries and advocating a new type of artistic dialogue, as in Europe, nor was he perceived as such in Latin America.

### A SMALL IDEOLOGICAL CORRECTION: CLEMENTE PADÍN'S OMAGGIO A BEUYS

In the mid 1970s, Clemente Padín, an Uruguayan poet, artist and one of the most active Latin American networkers, produced a samizdat booklet called *Omaggio a Beuys*. Composed of eight small-format pages (10.5 × 14.8 cm), the booklet was edited in 1976 in West Germany by the Central Office of the International Artists Cooperation (IAC).<sup>55</sup> The main reference for Padín's booklet was Joseph Beuys's life-sized photographic self-portrait titled *La rivoluzione siamo noi* (*We Are the Revolution*).<sup>56</sup> The portrait depicted Beuys as an avant-garde artist; the frontal view presented the whole upright silhouette of the artist wearing the habitual Beuysian uniform (a felt hat, a white shirt, a fishing vest and a pair of jeans), as he stood alone looking straight ahead with his left foot forward. The cover of Padín's booklet featured the title in Italian and a small reproduction of Beuys's portrait. Each page contained one photocollage with Beuys's statement 'La Rivoluzione siamo noi' written below. The booklet included a frontal photograph of a policeman standing, holding a baton in his clenched fists; the silhouette of a man wearing a suit with blurred facial features; a naked couple standing; a man holding an object in his hand; the image of a chair; a smiling Pope giving his blessing; a naked man turning his hunched back to the spectator; the image of Adolf Hitler giving a speech during an assembly of the German Nazi Party; and a photograph of a football player kicking a ball.

Even if Padín's booklet, previously distributed via mail art, was reproduced as the only Latin American contribution in the album *Ohne die Rose tun wir's nicht. Für Joseph Beuys* (*Without the Rose We Can Not Do It. For Joseph Beuys*), edited by Klaus Staeck after Beuys's death in 1986,<sup>57</sup> it is evident that the word 'homage' in the title expressed his ambivalent – if not critical, or even ironical – attitude towards the German artist. Beuys's works were not only known, at least in part, by Padín; they also constituted a point of reference for his early performances. The title of his first action, *La poesía debe ser hecha por todos* (*Poetry Must Be Made By All*) from September 1970,<sup>58</sup> referred to the Uruguayan-born French poet Isidore Lucien Ducasse, also known as the Comte de Lautréamont, who said, 'La poésie doit être faite par tous. Non par un' ('Poetry must be made by all. Not by one').<sup>59</sup> Padín's performance could also be seen as reminiscent of Beuys's idea regarding non-elitist art, expressed in one of his most famous and most misunderstood sentences: 'Everyone is an artist'.<sup>60</sup> Another of Padín's actions, titled *El artista está al servicio de la comunidad* (*The Artist is at the Service of the Community*), performed in 1974 by actor Francisco Iñarra during the exhibition 'Prospectiva 74' at the Museum of Contemporary Art at the University of São Paulo,<sup>61</sup> shares affinities with Beuys's concept of an artist being 'at the Service of Society'.<sup>62</sup> Padín's criticism of



Clemente Padín, *Omaggio a Beuys*, 1976, samizdat booklet, eight pages of 10.5 x 14.8 cm, collection and photo: Clemente Padín Archive at the General Archive of the University of the Republic, Area of Historical Research, Montevideo

47 Beuys's work was presented at the 'Festival para formatos no comerciales' ('Festival for Non-commercial Formats'), organised at the CAYC in Buenos Aires in 1973. Glusberg and Beuys met in 1974 at the 'Workshop for Experimental Art' organised in West Berlin. *Taller Berlín para arte experimental*, CAYC, Buenos Aires, 1974, yellow flyer produced by Glusberg.

48 Jorge Glusberg, *Victor Grippo: Arte, naturaleza y cultura*, CAYC, Buenos Aires, 1977, yellow flyer produced by Glusberg, three unnumbered pages

49 *Victor Grippo: Conciencia de la energía*, CAYC, Buenos Aires, 1977, yellow flyer produced by Glusberg

50 Grippo took part in the exhibition 'Art Systems in Latin America' curated by Glusberg and shown in 1974 and 1975 at the Internationaal Cultureel Centrum, Antwerp; the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels; the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), London; Espace Pierre Cardin, Paris; and the Palazzo del Diamanti in Ferrara.

51 Jorge Glusberg, *Del Pop-art a la nueva imagen*, Ediciones de Arte Gaglianone, Buenos Aires, 1985, p 168; and Jorge Glusberg, *Victor Grippo*, Sección Argentina de la Asociación Internacional de Críticos de Arte, Buenos Aires, 1980, p 20. *T.S.F. with a Potato* consisted of a coil, a ferrite rod, a diode and a variable capacitor connected to a potato and equipped with headphones, which allowed one to listen to radio signals.

52 *Arte de sistemas en Latinoamérica*, CAYC, Buenos Aires, 1974, yellow flyer produced by Glusberg

53 María José Herrera, 'Hacia un perfil del arte de sistemas', in María José Herrera and Mariana Marchesi, eds, *Arte de sistemas: El CAYC y el proyecto de un nuevo arte regional*, Fundación Osde, Buenos Aires, 2013, pp 11–53, p 44

54 In 1978, he was one of the artists invited by the Mexican review *Artes visuales* to create an artwork about the Panama Canal controversy (under the Torrijos–Carter treaties signed in 1977 the Canal ceased to be under the legal jurisdiction of the United States). 'Cosa Facciamo a Panama?', *Artes visuales*, vol 18, June–August 1978, p 10. Beuys did not respond to the open call issued by *Artes visuales*.

Beuys expressed in *Omaggio* resulted primarily from the fact that the concept of the avant-garde (and the neo-avant-garde), with all its 'problems', as identified by American art historian Hal Foster – 'the ideology of progress, the presumption of originality, the elitist hermeticism, the historical exclusivity, and the appropriation by the culture industry'<sup>63</sup> – was inadequate in the context of Latin America. The position of the Western European artist, his objectives and strategies, and Western European categories in general were largely untranslatable, and in some sense deficient, especially when confronted with Uruguayan artistic production during the 1970s.

### CRITICISM OF THE POSITION OF THE AVANT-GARDE ARTIST

Padín's *Omaggio* encompasses, above all, a criticism of the clichéd position of the avant-garde artist, seen as an isolated and heroic figure, a visionary and constructor of new societies, and an 'engineer of the world'.<sup>64</sup> As Boris Groys has suggested, the avant-garde artist was 'a secularised apostle, a messenger of time who brings to the world the message that time is contracting',<sup>65</sup> or even one who 'laid claim to the vacant place of the total creator'.<sup>66</sup> These definitions coincide with some of Beuys's statements focused on the privileged position and leading role of the artist in society. For instance, he once stated: 'The artist is he who creates art so that it plays a central role in our lives, so that its role is first and foremost to change our way of living, thinking, seeing.'<sup>67</sup> For Padín, Beuys, who was commonly associated with political and ecological engagement, and with social and spiritual consciousness, incarnated the figure of the (West) European as a solitary and passive utopianist, an image from which Padín wanted to distance himself. Beuys's auto-mythologisation and his beliefs regarding the singular role of the artist in society, which had the potential to foster a cult of personality,<sup>68</sup> were foreign to Padín. Additionally, Padín's critical interpretation of Beuys's posture was paradoxically quite close to the accusations of the 'post-avant-guard' formulated in 1971 by the German theorist Peter Bürger, who blamed it for reviving the avant-garde project as 'a farce', and for contributing to the aestheticisation and institutionalisation of the historical avant-garde's artistic production.<sup>69</sup> Padín's booklet, which juxtaposed Beuys's self-portrait with, among other things, an image of Hitler, preceded Benjamin Buchloh's and Eric Michaud's critical essays from the 1980s. These articles explained the origin of Beuys's public myth and understanding of politics as an aesthetic activity derived from the aesthetics of German fascism.<sup>70</sup> Responding to Beuys's retrospective at the Solomon R Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1979, Buchloh referred to Walter Benjamin's dialectical thinking about the relationship between aesthetics and politics and his identification of the process of the 'aestheticization of politics' with fascism in order to denounce Beuys's 'totalised concept of art'.<sup>71</sup> Buchloh described Beuys's attempt to 'make politics into art'<sup>72</sup> as 'esthetic conservatism' and 'politically retrograde, not to say reactionary, attitudes'.<sup>73</sup> Beuys's construction of the artist as a decontextualised and atemporal heroic



Clemente Padín, *Omaggio a Beuys*, 1976, samizdat booklet, eight pages of 10.5 x 14.8 cm, collection and photo: Clemente Padín Archive at the General Archive of the University of the Republic, Area of Historical Research, Montevideo

55 Clemente Padín, *Omaggio a Beuys*, International Artists Cooperation Central Office, Klaus Groh, Steinweg, 1976; second edition Clemente Padín, Montevideo, 1994. The IAC was an association founded in 1969 by West German artist Klaus Groh.

56 The photograph was shot in Capri in 1971 by the Italian collector Giancarlo Pancaldi. It was presented for the first time in April 1972 at the Incontri Internazionali d'Arte in Rome.

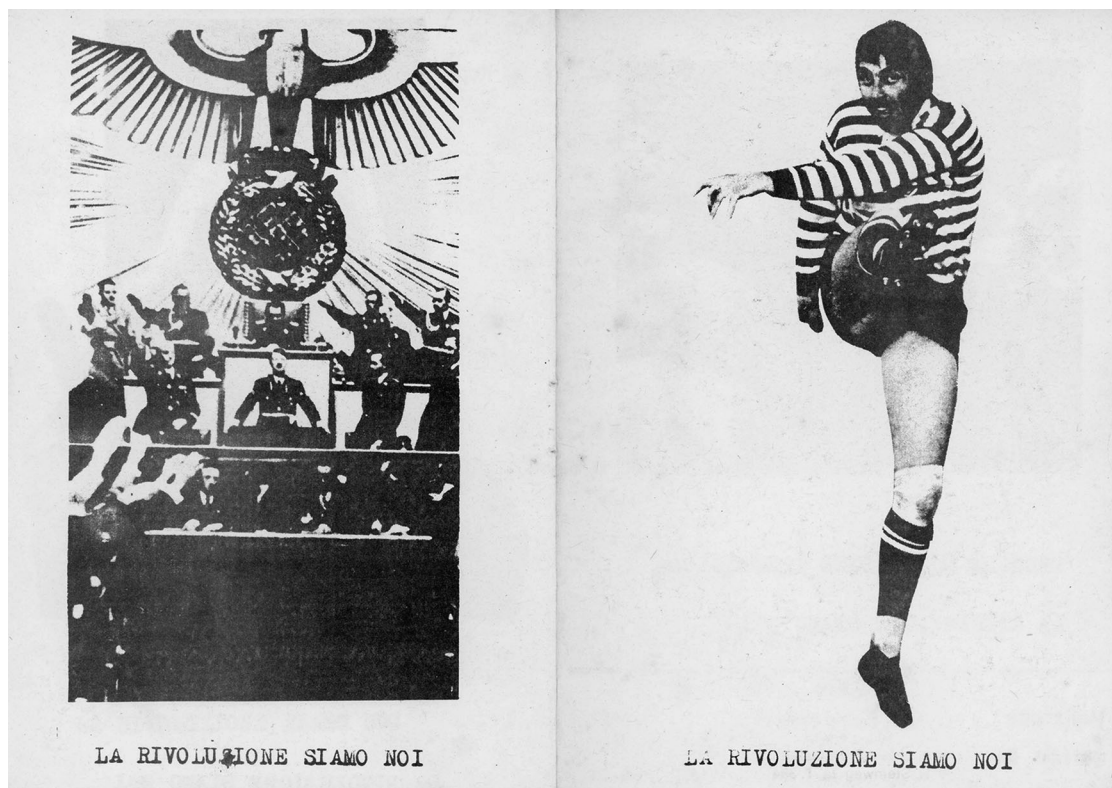
57 Klaus Staeck, ed, *Ohne die Rose tun wir's nicht. Für Joseph Beuys*, Edition Staeck, Heidelberg, 1986, pp 289–291

58 Clemente Padín invited spectators to actively participate in the creation of an artwork by asking them to write down a verb that expressed the necessity for action at that moment. Clemente Padín, ed, *Clemente Padín. 40 años de performances e intervenciones urbanas*, Yaugurú, Montevideo, 2009, p 31.

figure, whose ahistoricity, as Buchloh justly stated, became ‘the functional basis on which [Beuysian] public and personal mythologies can be erected’,<sup>74</sup> may have been irrelevant to Padín;<sup>75</sup> after all, the sociopolitical situation that Padín faced – namely, the Uruguayan civic–military dictatorship of 1973–1985 – was diametrically opposed to Beuys’s experience of Western capitalism. Padín also advocated for a clearer inscription of artistic practices within these contexts.

### A SMALL IDEOLOGICAL CORRECTION: WE ARE THE REVOLUTION

Padín’s *Omaggio a Beuys* draws attention to the polysemy of the concept of revolution. The human figures adopting Beuys’s declaration represent various social classes and professions. Padín emphasises that all the people depicted in his photographs are revolutionary to a certain extent. For him, revolution as a concept can be subject to appropriation and can be understood and, above all, instrumentalised in many different ways. His juxtaposition of images evoking an ‘artistic revolution’ (incarnated by the image of Beuys), a ‘sexual revolution’ (the young naked couple), a ‘conservative revolution’ (depicted by the man without facial traits), and even fascism (the photograph of



Clemente Padín, *Omaggio a Beuys*, 1976, samizdat booklet, eight pages of 10.5 x 14.8 cm, collection and photo: Clemente Padín Archive at the General Archive of the University of the Republic, Area of Historical Research, Montevideo

59 Isidore Ducasse, *Poésies II. Journaux politiques et littéraires*, Librairie Gabrie, Paris, 1870. The twelfth issue of the literary review *Los Huevos del Plata*, edited by Padín in 1968, was dedicated to Lautréamont.

60 On the subject of the paradoxical conciliation in Beuysian thought of the modernist and humanist conviction of the uniqueness of the figure of the artist and his individual creative potential, with the avant-gardist blurring of the distinctiveness of an artist from the non-artist, see Timothy O'Leary, 'Fat, Felt, and Fascism: The Case of Joseph Beuys', *Literature & Aesthetics*, vol 6, 1996, pp 91–105.

61 As Padín stated, the performance aimed at 'reconsidering the ethical attitude of the artist facing society', thanks to the creation of a personal link with the spectator. Iñarra pushed a wheeled platform around the exhibition. A spectator sat on top of the platform, while Iñarra gave him an explanation on the conception of this exhibition and of the displayed artworks. Clemente Padín, ed, *Clemente Padín. 40 años*, op cit, p 33.

62 Beuys affirmed that 'the artist today must be at the Service of Society to make a better life for humankind'. Joseph Beuys, 'Present Time: Between Past and Future. Notes', in De Domizio Durini, *Beuys*, op cit, pp 30–93, p 33. Padín's performance could also be seen to evoke Beuys's famous action *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965).

63 Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996, p 5

64 Boris Groys, 'The Birth of Socialist Realism. From the Spirit of the Russian Avant-Garde', in John E Bowlt and Olga Matich, eds, *Laboratory of Dreams: The Russian Avant-garde and Cultural Experiment*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1996, pp 193–218, p 202

65 Boris Groys, 'The Weak Universalism', *Journal*, vol 15, April 2010, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/15/61294/the-weak-universalism/>, accessed 20 October 2016

66 Groys, 'The Birth of Socialist Realism', op cit, p 209

67 Beuys, 'Present Time', op cit, p 33

68 As Peter Nisbet has justly stated, Beuys, who at the beginning of the 1970s was experiencing

Hitler's speech) coincide with statements formulated at that time by the French philosopher Jean-Pierre Faye.<sup>76</sup> In an extensive analysis on the mechanisms of ideological discourse, Faye stressed their dependency on previously existing and multiple 'récits d'actions' ('narratives of actions'), which he saw as particularly 'dangerous' as they not only prepared and defined the social acceptability of those discourses, but could also transform real history.<sup>77</sup> Padín's emphasis on the ambivalences of ideological discourse on revolution is diametrically opposed to the rather naïve embodiment of the idea of revolution proposed by Beuys, at least for the 1970s.

In their own understandings of the concept of revolution, Beuys and Padín coincided above all on the recognition of the urgent need for a revolutionary struggle in order to effect social change. Both gave art a special place in this struggle. However, while Beuys focused on art's transformatory capacities and spoke about its contribution to changes in how the world is perceived, Padín's approach could be described as visual militancy. Padín opted for the practical usage of artistic language in order to spread revolutionary ideas. Beuys, who in 1971 – the year the photograph for *La Rivoluzione siamo noi* was taken – celebrated his fiftieth birthday, believed in a 'non-violent transformation' and advocated a 'revolution of ideas' that would be 'based on an openness towards the future'.<sup>78</sup> Beuys thought that the aforementioned elements were the only possible way to create change in contemporary societies. His concept of revolution was based on many ideas, such as self-reliance, communication, co-operation, solidarity and cultural and spiritual rebirth through nature, among others.<sup>79</sup>

Beuys's idealist position and his more mythical than revolutionary *langage*, as understood by Roland Barthes,<sup>80</sup> differed from that of Padín, whose vision of art over the course of the 1970s had become considerably close to political activism. Padín's direct engagement with social and political questions began to appear in his artistic theory and practice at the beginning of the 1970s<sup>81</sup> and reached its culmination in his text *De la représentation à l'action* (*From Representation to Action*), which was published in 1975 in Marseille by the French artist and poet Julien Blaine.<sup>82</sup> In this publication, which referenced De Saussure's theory of sign, Padín abandoned the idea of the aesthetic or mimetic function of art, as well as that of the art object. The latter, in his view, should be replaced by 'arte inobjetal' – art without artistic objects and without artwork – which 'operates directly and immediately on reality, and not only on the mediating and indirect level of ideology, as other languages do'.<sup>83</sup> Padín believed there was no point in abandoning art and its formal experiments. Art would still 'act as language', even if it 'transferred' its 'acting capacity' within a society.<sup>84</sup> In 1972, he stated:

Art must come from art; it should come out of the representative systems of reality in order to turn itself over to reality, but not by transferring its vices (the artwork itself, the authorship, the consumption, the conceptual reflection of itself, the symbolic representation of the movement of the spirit) but its capacity for action, its patterns of active behaviour before the medium, its inexhaustible imagination, its never-denying purpose of improving the living conditions of all men.<sup>85</sup>





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increased attention from the international public, initiated at that time a process of auto-mythologisation in relation to his life story and plane crash over Crimea. Peter Nisbet, 'Crash Course: Remarks on a Beuys Story', in Ray, ed, *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, op cit, pp 5–17.

69 Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1974

70 Benjamin H D Buchloh, 'Beuys: The Twilight of The Idol. Preliminary Notes for a Critique', *Artforum*, vol 5, no 18, January 1980, pp 35–43; and Eric Michaud, 'The Ends of Art According to Beuys', *October*, no 45, 1988, pp 37–46. For a critical revision of both articles, see O'Leary, 'Fat, Felt, and Fascism', op cit. Buchloh rediscusses this article in 'Reconsidering Joseph Beuys. Once Again', in Ray, ed, *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, op cit, pp 75–89.

71 Benjamin was opposed to politics as an aesthetic activity, based on the ritualisation of political life characteristic of totalitarian doctrines, and to politicised art, and resisted the imposition of an aura and ritualisation, which could also be associated with communism. Walter Benjamin, 'L'œuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproduction mécanisée', *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, vol 5, no 1, 1936, pp 40–68.

72 Beuys stated: 'I do not want to carry art into politics, but make politics into art.' Götz Adriani et al, *Joseph Beuys: Life and Works*, Barron's Educational Series, New York, 1979, p 227.

73 Buchloh, 'Beuys: The Twilight', op cit, quoted from Ray, ed, *Joseph Beuys*, op cit, pp 199–211, p 210

74 Ibid, p 200

75 Padín's desire to distance himself from Beuys could be compared to Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers's *Open Letter* from 1972, in which he criticised the German artist's attitude and motivations and compared his magical (fictitious) approach to politics to that of Richard Wagner. Marcel Broodthaers, *Open Letter*, 25 September 1972, published as Marcel Broodthaers, 'Politik der Magie?', *Rheinische Post*, 3 October 1972. See Deborah Schultz, *Marcel Broodthaers: Strategy and Dialogue*, Peter Lang, Bern, 2007, pp 249–256.

Padín understood artistic activity as 'acontecimientos artistico-sociales' ('artistic and social events'), whose aim was not art itself, not a solution to an aesthetic question, but a critical contestation of the current political system and mobilisation for the struggle for democracy and human rights.<sup>86</sup> His instrumental understanding of art's role within society is comparable to the argument for the social utility of art (the placement of art's aim outside of art itself), or more exactly, for the mobilisation of artistic production in the practice of political agitation. Padín referred to the concept of the artist as a non-individualised, collective producer, an idea that had appeared in the productivist branch of Soviet Constructivism in the 1920s after the success of the October Revolution. Similarly to the productivists, he stressed the need for the artist's active participation in social life.<sup>87</sup> However, when Padín referred to revolution, he focused on how it was practised in the Latin American context. On the last page of the booklet is a reproduction of a photograph of several land workers bent over, gathering the harvest. The photograph was captioned: 'piccola correzione ideologica: la rivoluzione siamo noi' ('a small ideological correction: we are the revolution').<sup>88</sup> With this image, Padín distances himself from Beuys's idea of revolution guided by a visionary artist. He recalled: 'My answer to Beuys was as follows: the revolution is not in the hands of an individual who steps forward and is looking away, but it is put in practice by the people working as a team, bending their backs.'<sup>89</sup> Padín's revolution is anonymous, and it is organised collectively from the bottom up by the workers. It needs neither a far-sighted and idealistic visionary, nor his artistic projects. It is anchored in an everyday reality that exceeds art.

Padín's booklet was produced in the context of the Uruguayan civic-military dictatorship and the rise of the urban guerrilla movement known as the National Liberation Movement-Tupamaros (MLN-T). Inspired by the Cuban 'huracán revolucionario' ('revolutionary hurricane'), the movement was born of the frustration of young Uruguayans like Padín who, as Uruguayan political scientist Alfonso Lessa has stated, '[were] disenchanted by the successive failures of their political sectors and decided to take up arms in the name of a people who remained, by an overwhelming majority, oblivious to their choice'.<sup>90</sup> In this context, Padín's attitude was not that of a utopian dreamer – as Padín believed to be the case with Beuys<sup>91</sup> – but that of an urban guerrilla fighter in his anonymous and collective revolutionary practice.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, Padín referred to the vision of revolution in a different way to that of the orthodox Marxist (European) tradition, rooting it instead in the Latin American context. Marx did not consider rural workers as revolutionary subjects. In 1881, he considered agricultural communitarianism as the last stage of the primitive organisation of society; it was a prelude to a social system based on slavery.<sup>93</sup> As he stated, agrarian workers were incapable of revolutionary action. For Marx, Latin America could not generate social and economic processes that would allow for its integration into the revolutionary struggle.<sup>94</sup> However, in the history of Latin America, revolutionary impulses generally sprang from rural workers, as in the case of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920). This was not only the first revolution of the twentieth century, but it also involved the peasant classes. Moreover, the Revolución Agraria (Agrarian Revolution) (1910–1940), mobilised by the agrarian movement for

76 Clemente Padín, interview with the author, Montevideo, 10 October 2016. Padín recognised that his *Omaggio a Beuys* contained an image of institutional power; an image of a common and anonymous citizen who is not committed to anything except his welfare; a representation of a misconception between love and nature (sex and exhibitionism); a picture of a contemptuous consumer; an image of false spiritual power embodied by the figure of the Pope; an image of fascism; and the representation of a sportsman evoking the sentence 'bread and circuses' – an immediate satisfaction of the low requirements of a society.

77 Jean-Pierre Faye, *Théorie du récit, Introduction aux 'langages totalitaires', La raison critique de l'économie narrative*, Hermann, Paris, 1972; Jean-Pierre Faye, *Langages totalitaires, Critique della raison/ l'économie/narrative*, Paris, Hermann, 1972

78 Beuys, 'Present Time', op cit, p 41

79 See Harlan, *What is Art?*, op cit

80 As Barthes stated, *la parole* (speech) of the myth is situated 'à droite' ('at right'). It is 'intransitive, gestuelle, théâtrale' ('intransitive, gestural, theatrical') and 'vise à éterniser' ('aims at immortalising') and not at transforming reality. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1957, quoted from the 1970 edition, p 223.

81 In the 1970s, Padín started to spread his politically engaged art via mail art networks, which at that time were often used for political or activist purposes. In 1973, he designed a series of stamps in reaction to the military coup d'état, which transformed Uruguay into a military zone, and drew comparisons between the dictatorship and fascism. The stamps were sent to international mail art participants in order to denounce the violent character of the Uruguayan coup. Clemente Padín, interview with the author, Montevideo, 22 July 2015.

82 Clemente Padín, *De la représentation à l'action*, Nouvelles Éditions Polaires, Marseille, 1975. The text was also published by Blaine in the first issue of his poetry review *Doc(k)s*: 'Chapire 1: Padín', *Doc(k)s*, vol 1, June 1976, pp 5–96; Spanish translation, Clemente Padín, *De la representación a la acción*,

national liberation inspired by Emiliano Zapata and his ideology (known as 'Zapatismo'), played a crucial role in the Mexican revolutionary struggle.<sup>95</sup> In this sense, Padín's art not only resisted the Beuysian model of aestheticisation of politics,<sup>96</sup> but, above all, aimed to redefine his relationship with Europe and with Western canons, and to emphasise the local framework.

## MESTIZO CONSCIOUSNESS

In the 1950s, the Argentinian philosopher Rodolfo Kusch raised questions about how Latin Americans perceived Europe. In his analysis of these complex processes, he coined the concept of 'conciencia mestiza' ('mestizo consciousness' or 'immigrant consciousness'), which allowed him to describe a particular impression of simultaneous proximity and distance provoked in Latin American contexts by the figure of Europe and its history, culture and system of values.<sup>97</sup> As Kusch stressed, the (Latin) American subject experiences in his or her everyday life the paradox of being both in and out of Europe, in and out of Modernity.<sup>98</sup> Kusch also discussed Latin Americans' bicultural identity and how modern imperial designs and, in particular, European cultural patterns functioned on the Latin American continent. In 1955, in one of his first texts on aesthetics and culture, *Anotaciones para una estética de lo Americano (Notes for an American Aesthetics)*,<sup>99</sup> Kusch analysed the way Western artistic canons had provided a model structure for Latin American artwork for centuries. As he stressed, Western canons were inadequate in a non-Western context because they did not allow for expression of the existence of 'lo indio' ('the indigenous') as a 'estructura oculta' ('hidden structure') of Argentinian culture.<sup>100</sup> Kusch noted that Western culture was perceived in the Latin American context as 'a culture without commitment to the outside world'.<sup>101</sup> The reception of Western art, paradoxically associated with the perfect and the complete, provoked a dissonance in Latin America: Michelangelo's statue of Moses relocated outside its original context becomes 'monstrous' – a 'socially incomprehensible' artwork that loses its original signification as well as its status of a masterpiece.<sup>102</sup>

Some Latin American artists of Kusch's generation tried to redefine their relation to Europe in a similar way, and their attempts can be seen as coinciding with Kusch's writings. The shift from a claim to universality and inscription in modern/colonial Western artistic canons, to the self-recognition of a cultural 'particularity' resulting from local contexts was characteristic of Latin American art in the late 1960s and 1970s. The position adopted by artists such as Clemente Padín and Paulo Herkenhoff reveals Kusch's 'mestizo consciousness': the awareness of belonging to European culture, and of being out of it at the same time. Their artistic language expressed what Walter Mignolo called 'border thinking' – a particular form of critical reasoning resulting from being simultaneously in dialogue and in tension with the European system of values.<sup>103</sup> Using the language of modern art, they discussed their exclusions, or at least marginalisation, within its systems. Additionally, the artists ironised their own peripheral role in

Ediciones Al Margen, La Plata, 2010.

83 Ibid

84 Ibid

85 Clemente Padín, 'Inobjetal 4', in *Arte de Sistemas II*, op cit, one unnumbered page

86 Padín, interview with the author, Montevideo, 22 July 2015. See also Fernando Davis and Fernanda Nogueira, 'La Nueva Poesía y las redes alternativas. Entrevista a Clemente Padín por Fernando Davis y Fernanda Nogueira', *Errata*, vol 2, August 2010, <http://revistaerrata.com/ediciones/errata-2-la-escritura-del-arte/la-nueva-poesia-y-las-redes-alternativas/>, accessed 20 October 2016.

87 Such parallels between the Russian historical avant-gardes and Latin American artistic theory and practice from the 1960s and 1970s have been highlighted by theoreticians including Ana Longoni and Jaime Vindel. Ana Longoni, 'Avant-garde Argentinian Visual Artists Group, *Tucumán Burns* (1968)', *Mousse*, vol 43, no 2, April 2014, pp 3–18; and Jaime Vindel, 'Tretyakov in Argentina. Factography and Operativity in the Artistic Avant-Garde and the Political Vanguard of the Sixties', *EIPCP, Transversal Texts*, August 2010, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0910/vindel/en>, accessed 20 October 2016. Furthermore, Padín's term, 'arte inobjetal', could be associated with Kazimir Malevich's 'non-objective' system of non-representational art, generating 'projects for a new organization of the cosmos': Groys, 'The Birth of Socialist Realism', op cit, p 198. Padín, interview with the author, Montevideo, 22 July 2015.

88 Padín, *Omaggio*, op cit

89 Padín, interview with the author, Montevideo, 10 October 2016

90 Alfonso Lessa, *La revolución imposible Los tupamaros y el fracaso de la vía armada en el Uruguay del Siglo XX*, Fin de Siglo, Montevideo, 2001, p 323

91 Padín, interview with the author, Montevideo, 10 October 2016

92 On the specificity of the relationship between art and politics in Latin America, see Ana Longoni, *Vanguardia y revolución. Arte e izquierda en la Argentina de los sesenta-setenta*, Ariel, Buenos Aires, 2014, pp 21–54.

93 Karl Marx's letter to Vera Zasulich, 8 March 1881, quoted in Adolfo Gilly, *La revolución*

order to criticise the stereotypes about Latin Americans established during colonialism, and to reveal colonial underpinnings and attitudes within the contemporary artworld, as in the case of Herkenhoff's *Self-Portrait as an Underdeveloped Artist*. Herkenhoff's work not only activates the metaphor of anthropophagy, but it can also be linked to Kusch's concept of 'fagocitación cultural' ('cultural phagocytosis') – a means of cultural incorporation that responds to the incompatibility between the transitory conception of the world as it developed in Latin America, and the universalist, essentialist and absolutist vision of the world offered by European modernity.<sup>104</sup> In biology, the term 'phagocytosis' describes the processes of absorption of foreign elements, often as a form of self-defence. In a cultural sense, Nicolás García Urriburu was similarly 'digesting' Beuys's conditions for their collaboration in order to defend his art and gain more visibility in Europe.<sup>105</sup> Published in Germany and distributed worldwide via mail art networks, Padín's *Omaggio a Beuys* aimed to offer an alternative view of Beuys's art. Padín's artistic dialogue with Beuys's work articulated a Latin American perspective, whereas like Michelangelo's sculptures, Beuys's art could not enjoy there the same recognition as in Europe. Cultural distance, in turn, allowed Padín to perceive clearly the deficiency of Joseph Beuys's utopian approach. His 'mestizo consciousness' – his capacity for seeing European culture from the outside – allowed him not only to criticise Beuys's artistic discourse as constructed and generated from a Western (Eurocentric) position, but also to raise questions about the possibilities for art in the Latin American context.

## THE COYOTE BITES

On 22 April 1993, Clemente Padín – who in 1984 had met Beuys in the atelier of the German Fluxus artist Wolf Vostell, which he frequented during his stay in West Berlin<sup>106</sup> – realised a performance entitled *Kunst=Kapital* at the National Museum of Visual Arts (MNAV) in Montevideo, Uruguay.<sup>107</sup> Padín, for whom it was the first collaboration with the MNAV,<sup>108</sup> was asked to prepare an artistic intervention in homage to Beuys at the opening of the exhibition 'Joseph Beuys: Dibujos, Objetos, Grabados' ('Joseph Beuys: Drawings, Objects, Engravings') organised by the Goethe-Institut. Padín's action consisted of restaging one of Beuys's most emblematic and most commented-on performances – *I Like America and America Likes Me*, also known as *Coyote* – which was completed in 1974 at the New York branch of the René Block Gallery. During the three-day performance, Beuys was enclosed with a savage coyote, which had been captured earlier in the Texas desert. A coyote, 'a totemic animal for the Native Americans',<sup>109</sup> entered into a relationship with the white man. Beuys's performance was interpreted as an encounter, or even a reconciliation, between nature and culture, 'the settled and the nomadic', or the 'white man and redskin'.<sup>110</sup> Holding a walking stick and covered with a felt blanket very similar to the one used previously by Beuys, Clemente Padín restaged the German artist's gestures towards the animal in front of the museum's public. The audience, without being officially informed by the artist himself or the organisers of the exhibition, was put in the role of the coyote.<sup>111</sup>

*interrumpida*, Ediciones Era, Mexico DF, 2007, pp 71–77; first edition, El Caballote, 1971.

94 Santiago Castro-Gómez, *La poscolonialidad explicada a los niños*, Editorial Universidad del Cauca, Popayán, 2005, pp 13–20

95 *Ibid*

96 Benjamin, 'L'œuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproduction', *op cit*

97 Rodolfo Kusch, *La seducción de la barbarie: Análisis herético de un continente mestizo*, Editorial Raigal, Buenos Aires, 1953. See Walter D Mignolo, 'Introduction. Immigrant Consciousness', in Rodolfo Kusch, *Indigenous and Popular Thinking in América*, María Lugones and Joshua M Price, trans, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, and London, 2010, pp xiii–lxxiv; and Walter D Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2000, pp 84–88, pp 152–154.

On the one hand, Padín's attempt to force the museum's (Latin American) public into this process of animalisation could be compared to the practices of Indigenous peoples to identify themselves with animals, by which they recognise the human features of animals, and animals' 'fundamentally human form'.<sup>112</sup> However, from the perspective of colonialism and the hegemonic cultural relations between Europe and Latin America, Padín restaged a performance of Beuys incarnating the figure of a European white man; his performance was an ironic statement about discrimination. Padín evoked the racist consideration of a Latin American as an animal or as a cannibal – a subhuman that one can capture and enslave.<sup>113</sup> While discussing the colonial subconscious of Latin Americans (the public was unaware of its role in Padín's performance), he also referred to the colonial practice of organising 'human exhibitions' of indigenous peoples, who were displayed in cages to satisfy the curiosity of the European public.<sup>114</sup>

Analogous to Benjamin Buchloh's considerations of Beuys's attitude as 'infantile',<sup>115</sup> Padín's performance stressed the German artist's naivety in establishing a decontextualised 'friendship' with a savage animal that was captured and imprisoned in the New York gallery; the coyote had been introduced into the artworld against its will, and placed in the role of the exotic Other. It is rather doubtful that the coyote lived with Beuys for three days in an enclosed space with the intent to reconcile differences with the artist. In his symbolic dialogue



Clemente Padín, *Kunst=Kapital*, 1993, coloured photograph, 9 x 13 cm, collection and photo credit: Clemente Padín Archive at the General Archive of the University of the Republic, Area of Historical Research, Montevideo

- 98 Ibid
- 99 Kusch, 'Anotaciones', op cit
- 100 Ibid, p 4
- 101 Ibid, p 6
- 102 Ibid, p 2
- 103 Mignolo, *Local Histories*, op cit, pp xv–xviii
- 104 Rodolfo Kusch, *América profunda*, Editorial Biblos, Buenos Aires, 1999, pp 146–155. See Alejandro Viveros Espinosa, 'Enfoques sobre la filosofía de Rodolfo Kusch: El método, lo popular y el indígena como horizontes de pregunta en la filosofía americana', *Alpha*, vol 42, July 2016, pp 215–232.
- 105 See Amejeras, 'Joseph Beuys, el admirador de Borges', op cit, p 40
- 106 Padín travelled to West Germany in 1984 on a DAAD scholarship. During his three-month stay he staged, among other things, the performance *Por el Arte y por la Paz (For Art and Peace)* denouncing the Latin American military dictatorship's crimes. He also organised an exhibition of Latin American mail art artists called 'Latin America Today' at the DAAD Gallery in West Berlin. Padín recalled that during his stay in West Berlin, Vostell invited him every Sunday for lunch at his workshop, and the meals became an occasion to meet German artists, including Joseph Beuys. Padín, interview with the author, Montevideo, 10 October 2016.
- 107 Padín, *Clemente Padín. 40 años de performances*, op cit, p 56
- 108 The lack of collaboration between Padín and the Museo Nacional de Artes Visuales (MNAV), the most prestigious art institution in Montevideo, was the result of a ban on Padín's artistic activity leading to his imprisonment during the Uruguayan civic–military dictatorship (he was arrested by the State Security Forces in 1977 and regained his freedom only in 1984, with the decline of the dictatorship).
- 109 Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, *Joseph Beuys: Is It About a Bicycle?*, Marval Galerie Beaubourg and Sarenco-Strazzer, Paris and Verona, 1985, p 49
- 110 Ibid. See also Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys – Coyote*,

with (Indigenous) America, Beuys was unable to avoid assuming the role of Western man. He acted, even unwittingly, from a position of power and colonial authority. This dialogue took place according to Beuys's principles. Unfortunately, the German artist adopted the same attitude in his relations with his Argentinian colleagues. For them, he was acting neither as a canonical artist, nor as a partner. He acted more as a coloniser by usurping Latin American creativity and selling it in Europe, rather than as a protagonist playing a model role within the cultural peripheries, as could be supposed from the perspective of Europe, where Beuys's position within the pantheon of twentieth-century artists is indisputable and his artistic myth still alive.<sup>116</sup> To add to the list of epithets describing Beuys, that of a 'follower of Latin American artistic trends' is controversial, though justified. However, the point is not to depreciate Beuys's art or to judge his moral stance, even if Beuys's conversation with Latin America (or with Native America, due to the asymmetrical character of the relationship established with the coyote) missed the mark completely. His case serves, above all, to exemplify the relativity of the Western canon itself. In the (Western) European context, Beuys's art unquestionably raised important questions and issues concerning social and political engagement, the perspectives for a new society and a dialogue between the European East and West. In Latin America, however, his work lost its sociopolitical efficacy. Additionally, Beuys's 'antientric attitude' and interests in non-Western contexts, as discussed by Jaromir Jedliński,<sup>117</sup> do not guarantee any symmetry in those relations. His relationship with Latin American artists is not free from colonial habits and can exemplify Aníbal Quijano's thesis on the persistence of imperialist and hegemonic models of transatlantic relations.<sup>118</sup> Beuys's case also serves well to demonstrate the deficiency of the decentralised approach. As Mignolo stresses, decentralisation should not be seen as an objective in itself, but only as a first step, indispensable but also insufficient to break with hegemonic, universal, unilateral and mono-perspectivist Eurocentric patterns and narrations.<sup>119</sup>

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- Schirmer/Mosel, Munich, 1976.
- 111 Padín, ed, *Clemente Padín. 40 años*, op cit
- 112 Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, 'Si todo es humano, entonces todo es peligroso', in *La Mirada del Jaguar: Introducción al perspectivismo amerindio. Entrevistas*, Lucía Tennina, Andrés Bracony and Santiago Sbulatti, trans, Tinta Limón, Buenos Aires, 2013, pp 49–78, p 57
- 113 Jáuregui, *Canibalia*, op cit, pp 48–63
- 114 Padín's version of *Coyote* was contemporary with a series of 'intercultural performances' entitled *Year of the White Bear: Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* (1992–1994) staged by Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Coco Fusco – the artists embodied a couple from the fictional 'undiscovered' tribe of 'Guatinai Indians', from an island in the Gulf of Mexico, and were exhibited to the Western public in a cage (the performance took place in Spain, the UK and the USA, among other countries). *Year of the White Bear* was close to Padín's *Kunst=Kapital* in the way it ironically discussed the colonial past and practices towards Latin American indigenous people. Coco Fusco, *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas*, New Press, New York, 1995, pp 37–63.
- 115 Buchloh, 'Beuys: The Twilight', op cit
- 116 See recent publications such as De Domizio Durini, *Beuys*, op cit
- 117 Jedliński, 'Biografía', op cit
- 118 Quijano, 'Colonialidad', op cit
- 119 Walter D Mignolo, 'Re: Emerging, Decentering and Delinking. Shifting the Geographies of Sensing, Believing and Knowing', IBRAAZ Contemporary Visual Culture in North Africa and the Middle East, 2013, <http://www.ibraaz.org/essays/59>, accessed 5 June 2017