

# Graphic Design as a University Discipline in Argentina, 1958–1985

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This article aims to reconstruct the emergence and consolidation of graphic design as a university discipline in Argentina.<sup>1</sup> It is a process that started in the late 1950s and has intersected with various important historical moments—for instance, the early dialogue between Max Bill and Argentinean avant-garde artists, such as Alfredo Hlito and Tomás Maldonado in the immediate postwar period<sup>2</sup> Also instrumental in the process were the networks between Brazilian modernism—especially from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo—and avant-garde artists from Montevideo and Buenos Aires, as well as the gradual arrival of what is known as the Modern Movement in the practice of architecture and in its teaching in universities.<sup>3</sup>

These facts indicate the particular way in which design was historically conceived and defined in Argentina, with its uniqueness located in its radical differentiation from the arts and crafts. It is a conception of design that belongs to the more rationalistic and regulatory aspects of European modernity and that can also be found in Brazil and Chile, although not in other Latin American countries.<sup>4</sup> This “coincidence” actually is not by chance. What the three countries (Argentina, Brazil, and Chile) have in common is that, earlier than others, they welcomed immigrants who fled Europe for political reason during the interwar time.<sup>5</sup> These immigrants not only were political refugees, but also were primary cultural referents in their homeland. Indeed, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile share an early history of cultural modernization that updated the legacy of the artistic avant-garde, particularly the constructivist one.<sup>6</sup>

In this context, in Argentina during the 1930s and 1940s, an early dialogue between the modern European architecture and the constructivism avant-garde began.<sup>7</sup> Both the architecture group Austral and the avant-garde arts movement, “Arte Concreto,”—at that time led by Tomás Maldonado—are two clear examples of this modernizing trend that sought to fuse the arts and architecture, with the aim of redefining the human environment.<sup>8</sup> Bauhaus as well as the spirit of the Athens Charter were references of this modernization in the artistic and cultural fields.

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1 The process was the object of analysis for obtaining the PhD degree from the University of Buenos Aires. The research included 23 in-depth interviews with key artists of the process following the oral history method. Among others, the following artists were interviewed: Tomás Maldonado, Gastón Breyer, Juan Manuel Borthagaray, Carmen Córdova, Odilia Suárez, Rafael Iglesia, Roberto Doberti, Reinaldo Leiro, Arnoldo Gaité, Carlos Méndez Mosquera, Sonia Ureña de Hlito, Juan Carlos Distéfano, Guillermo González Ruiz, Ronald Shakespear, Rubén Fontana, América Sánchez, Frank Memelsdorff, Hugo Kogan, Eduardo Simonetti, Eduardo Pascal, Rubén Peluso, Eduardo Del Castillo, and Rubén Rizzo. The interviews were supplemented with information from nine issues of the *Nueva Vision* [New Vision] magazine (1951–1957) and with the first ten years of the *Summa* magazine (1963–1993), as well as with the first bulletins issued by the Graphic Designers Association (ADG) and with the founding documents in the creation of the university courses on graphic design at the University of Cuyo, the National University of La Plata, and the University of Buenos Aires.

An extended version of this article is a chapter from the book, *La travesía de la forma. Emergencia y consolidación del Diseño Gráfico (1948–1984)* [The Trajectory of Form. Emergence and Consolidation of Graphic Design 1948–1984] (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2009), which traces the emergence of graphic design in Argentina.

2 María Amalia García, *El arte abstracto. Intercambios culturales entre Argentina y Brasil* [Abstract Arts. Cultural Exchange between Argentina and Brazil] (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2010).

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- 3 The modern movement in architecture is a historiographic category built to focus on the particular characteristics of the International Style and its legacy, including its architectural repertoire and social ideology. Historians agree that the movement was created in 1933 out of the Athens charter. The process of the discipline's development was a consequence of certain exchanges: the training of Argentinean architects in the ateliers of postwar Europe and the arrival in Argentina of distinguished visitors. Le Corbusier, for instance, after his visit to Buenos Aires in 1929, developed a master plan for the city in which he worked from 1937 with his Argentinean disciples, Juan Kurchan, Jorge Ferrari Hardoy, and the Catalan architect who had emigrated to Argentina, Antoni Bonet. The plan was never built but resulted in a number of pioneering initiatives, including the creation of Austral, a group of avant-garde architects in 1939.
- 4 Unlike what happens in other Latin American countries.
- 5 Verónica Devalle y Rosa Chalko (Editors), "Introducción," *Anales del Instituto de Arte Americano* [Annals of the American Institute of Art] 43 (2013): 6–18.
- 6 Note that constructivism was an avant-garde movement that proclaimed the dissolution of the artistic language (dominated by style and aesthetic values) into a new visual and experimental practice—a revolutionary practice. According to constructivism, visual art would become a new way of promoting universal literacy, as well as a modern propaganda.
- 7 Ana María Rigotti, "Comoción geográfica y reformulación doctrinaria: Le Corbusier en Buenos Aires" [Geographical Commotion and Doctrine Reformulation: Le Corbusier in Buenos Aires], *Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile* (2006), 105.
- 8 Alejandro Crispiani, *Objetos para transformar el mundo. Trayectorias del arte concreto-invencción. Argentina y Chile 1940–1970* [Objects to Transform the World. Art Trajectories of the Concrete-Invention. Argentina and Chile 1940–1970] (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2011); see also Jorge Francisco Liernur, "La construcción

However, it was an elite phenomenon not related to the traditional ways of conceiving space, matter, shape, and image. The influence of Hochschule für Gestaltung (HfG), of Ulm, Germany (1953–1968), was very different in terms of design teaching. According to Silvia Fernandez, the school played a very relevant role across Latin America, and an especially decisive one in Brazil, Chile and Argentina. It is considered the "first planned center to teach, research, and develop the human environment" as well as "the institution that first declares the autonomy of design apart from art."<sup>9</sup> The school adhered to these characteristics and also to a clear industrializing profile, beginning in 1957 when Aicher, Gugelot, and Maldonado refocused design teaching toward a more social and technological context seeking the articulation of industry, social development, and critical awareness among the designers.<sup>10</sup> The HfG successfully proposed a universal model of design which was embraced and reformulated by Latin American schools. The exchange of professors and students was a clear proof of mutual influences. The HfG design concepts as a technical-social discipline oriented to industry (socially oriented) perfectly matched the Latin American industrial economic models of the time. This novel project and interaction substantially changed the way the discipline was understood.<sup>11</sup> The HfG influenced design teaching in Argentina in different ways through the curricula of the first design courses.

This influence is a significant issue because, conceptually, the argument can be made that the passage from the trade of design to the discipline of design was mediated by the university in general terms and in particular, by an academic discourse that played three roles simultaneously: the baptism of design, the construction of a university teaching system, and, linked to the latter, the demand for a high level of conceptualization that would allow its pedagogy to develop from a theoretical approach.

The actors in this process, which took place between the late 1950s and early 1980s, generally agreed early on with the rationalist and scientific aspects of the design discipline.<sup>12</sup> This agreement partly explains the location of some of Argentina's first design courses in the Schools of Architecture (which had already incorporated the conceptual foundation of Modern Architecture).<sup>13</sup> It also explains the importance of being up to date with the latest developments from Ulm and, later, from the Royal College of Art in London.<sup>14</sup> However, this process of Argentinean development was neither even nor linear. Although the universities that began teaching design followed the rationalist ideas from West Germany and Switzerland, other institutions opted for a more eclectic vision that included ideas developed in the United States, particularly the striking conceptual and visual transformation of mass advertising from the 1960s.

de una vanguardia: el caso del Grupo Austral" [The Creation of an Avant-garde Movement: the Case of the Austral Group], *Jornadas de Teoría e Historia de las Artes. Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte* [Conference of Theory and History of Arts] (1993): 59–68. To explain these two examples, "Austral is considered one of the first manifestations of the modern architecture avant-garde in Argentina. It was founded in 1938 by a group of young architects who were closely bonded to Le Corbusier, to whom they also made some contributions. The group published only three issues of a magazine that bore its name. The Austral designs are considered avant-garde, and the internationally known BKF armchair (called after the artists' names, Bonet, Kurchan, and Ferrary Hardoy) stands out. Meanwhile, concrete art and concretism were a trend in abstract painting, developed in the 1930s as of the works by De Stijl and futurist artists. "Concrete" abstraction wants to do away with any kind of symbolic association with reality. Max Bill spearheaded the movement, and in Latin America he was able to find the grounds to reformulate this art when in 1944 led by Tomas Maldonado the Association of Concrete Art was founded.

- 9 Silvia Fernández et al., *Diseño. HfG Ulm, Latinoamérica, Argentina, La Plata. 5 documentos* [Design. HfG Ulm, Latin America, Argentina. La Plata. 5 documents] (La Plata: Nodal Ediciones, 2002), 40.
- 10 Gui Bonsiepe, *El diseño de la periferia* [Design of the Periphery] (Barcelona: GG, 1985).
- 11 Silvia Fernández et al., *Diseño. HfG Ulm, Latinoamérica, Argentina, La Plata. 5 documentos* [Design. HfG Ulm, Latin America, Argentina. La Plata. 5 documents] (La Plata: Nodal Ediciones, 2002), 42–47.
- 12 The Helvetica typeface on the urban signage in Buenos Aires is part of the graphic design tradition of Argentina. Indeed, the Visual Plan for Buenos Aires was made by Ronald Shakespear and Guillermo González Ruiz between 1971 and 1972, thoroughly following the guidelines of the Swiss School.
- 13 Silvia Cirvini, *Nosotros los arquitectos* [We, the Architects] (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Zeta, 2004).

Argentina's system of public universities also defines its tradition of design. The distinctive characteristic of its teaching programs comes from the tradition of the University Reform of 1918. The so-called reformist model—interrupted during the conservative and Peronist governments—promotes to this day a university system based on financial independence, academic freedom (which gives students the option of choosing between different programs of the same subject), and co-governance between teachers, graduates, and students. The main outcome of the 1918 reform was the democratization of the higher education system that, together with social transformations promoted by Peronist policies, allowed university access to the sons and daughters of blue-collar workers. The immediate result was a steady growth in university enrollment and the subsequent transformation of public universities into educational institutions for the masses—mostly because all public universities in Argentina were, and still are, entirely free. To better illustrate the current scale of the system, the graphic design course at the University of Buenos Aires today numbers 3,000 students.

Having made these clarifications, I review the institutions—both universities and other higher education bodies—that were pioneers of design education in Argentina. The cases to be addressed are the National University of Cuyo (UNCu), National University of La Plata (UNLP), the Centre for Research in Industrial Design (CIDI), the Centre of Arts and Communication (CAYC), the Pan American School of Art (EPA), and the National University of Buenos Aires (UBA). While the national universities and CIDI are public institutions, the CAYC and EPA were private initiatives.

### National University of Cuyo (Province of Mendoza)

In 1947 the UNCu started planning the School of Architecture and the School of Arts. To join the project, the UNCu summoned architect César Jannello from Buenos Aires. He was responsible in part for the arrival of Moholy-Nagy's concept of "new vision" in the local field of architecture. Planning for the School of Architecture was delayed, and taking advantage of his stay in Mendoza, Jannello started teaching in the School of Visual Arts and the School of Ceramics. There, he linked the concept of "design" to the production of utilitarian objects, but "[b]efore Jannello, design had not been discussed at the School of Fine Arts."<sup>15</sup>

Despite this valuable contribution, differences arose between Jannello's ideas and more traditional conceptions linking architecture with the Fine Arts, and he returned to Buenos Aires in 1955. But Professor Abdulio Giúdice (Spanish translator of Nikolaus Pevsner and Giulio Carlo Argan) took over and continued promoting the link between design and modern architecture.

Giúdice was responsible for the creation of Argentina's first department of design.

In 1958 the department of design and decoration was created within the School of Visual Arts at the UNCu under the direction of Giúdice, who was followed by architect Samuel Sánchez de Bustamante.<sup>16</sup> Given the nationwide absence of design courses and the general public's lack of design knowledge, the first goal was to "create an awareness of the need of design as a local service."<sup>17</sup>

Thus was born Argentina's—and perhaps Latin America's—first university program of industrial design. Years later, the program became the School of Design at the Faculty of Arts of UNCu.<sup>18</sup> Between 1973 and 1974, professor Gui Bonsiepe was appointed to teach in the last year of the course. Bonsiepe, a German designer who studied and then taught design in Ulm, traveled to Latin America in the 1960s and gave seminars in Brazil, Chile, and Argentina. Consequently, he contributed to building the German legacy of design in that region.

Also in 1974, the department of design became independent from the School of Arts. Finally, in 1980 the Faculty of Arts and Design was created, with a name that, besides giving an early academic entity to design, also proposed a distinction between art and design.

### CIDI and Other Centers of Design

The CIDI was created in 1960 within the National Institute of Industrial Technology (INTI) in Buenos Aires. The CIDI's mission was the promotion of actions for the linking and coordination between government, universities, and businesses. Besides strengthening design awareness, it sought to support the development of products from Argentina's expanding industries. At CIDI the theories of "Good Design" found a place of testing and execution.<sup>19</sup>

CIDI was the first Argentinean institution to become a member of the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID) and the International Council of Graphic Design Associations (ICOGRADA). In 1963 it organized the First International Exhibition of Industrial Design, and a year later it granted the first two industrial design awards, the criteria of which openly resorted to "Good Design" parameters. Also in 1964, Tomás Maldonado taught a seminar at CIDI on the history of industrial design.<sup>20</sup> Gui Bonsiepe, on his first visit to Argentina, lectured there on product analysis. By 1966 the idea of a small School of Design had emerged. Bonsiepe was asked to develop a curriculum, advised by Tomás Maldonado and Basilio Uribe. The project was presented at the International Conference of Design Education in Latin America, also organized by CIDI, in 1968. A

- 14 For more on how they heard about the Ulm courses, see Silvia Fernández, "The Origins of Design Education in Latin America: From the HfG in Ulm to Globalization," *Design Issues* Vol. 22, No. 1 (Winter 2006): 3–19.
- 15 Silvia Fernández et al., *Diseño. Hfg ulm, América Latina, Argentina, La Plata. 5 documentos* [Design. HfG Ulm, Latin America, Argentina. La Plata. 5 documents] (La Plata: Nodal Ediciones, 2002), 52.
- 16 Despite the previous attempts to implement design teaching in academic education, these trials failed to be carried out because of a lack of state support and a lack of financing.
- 17 Cecilia Iuvano, "La carrera de diseño en Cuyo," [Design University Course in Cuyo] *Tipográfica* 3 (1987): 4.
- 18 Ricardo Blanco, *Crónicas del Diseño Industrial en la Argentina* [Industrial Design Chronicles in Argentina] (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Facultad Arquitectura, Diseño y Urbanismo, UBA, 2005), 142.
- 19 "Good Design" is another name for the Good Form movement (*Gute Form* in German), characterized by its functionalist and scientific conception of design. According to Maldonado, it started as a reaction against the styling that dominated the main products in the United States after the 1929 crisis. Tomás Maldonado, *El diseño industrial reconsiderado* [The Reconsidered Industrial Design] (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1991).
- 20 Maldonado is an Argentinean who founded the Concrete Art Movement in Argentina in the 1940s and introduced the idea of design in Latin America in 1949 when he first published "Design in social life" into the *Centro de Estudiantes de Arquitectura Magazine*. After his first trip to Europe, he returned to Argentina and released the magazine called *Nueva Visión* [New Vision], in which the German tradition was spread. After that, because of his relationship with Max Bill, he was invited to teach in Ulm in 1954. He became the director and worked there until 1969, when he moved to Milan where he contributed to opening the Doctorate on Design in the Polytechnic of Milan.

small school of design was never opened, but the project spurred discussion on the feasibility and necessity of design teaching in higher education.

In retrospect, the importance of CIDI should be analyzed beyond the pioneering nature of its activities in Latin America. Somehow, it was the voice of the Argentinean government, evaluating and encouraging the development of design in the country. From the moment of its creation, CIDI promoted the principles of Good Design and supported a regulation of industrial production that would include functionality, quality, price, durability, and form. But the initiative fell into obscurity with the arrival of the military dictatorship, 1976–1983, and with the end of the industrialist economic model that was the CIDI's horizon. Thus, from 1976 the institution lost its power and managing capability, eventually closing its doors in the early 1980s.<sup>21</sup>

### The UNLP

To understand the development of design in La Plata requires going back to events in 1950s Argentina and Brazil—a point of reference for Latin America's modernist ideas. In 1951 Max Bill won the Grand Prize of Architecture at the São Paulo Biennial, and in 1953 he was appointed to the jury for the same award. At that time, Bill met the Brazilian architect, Affonso Reidy, who was designing the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro. Around 1952, Tomás Maldonado started teaching summer seminars at Brazil's schools of art. From these exchanges, and once the first phase of the HfG Ulm was developed, the project for Rio de Janeiro's Higher School of Industrial Design (ESDI) emerged in 1958, and Bill and Maldonado were appointed as advisors.

Meanwhile, around 1955, the UNLP, a few miles from the city of Buenos Aires, started a series of reforms promoted by, among others, the visual artist Héctor Cartier and the architect Daniel Almeida Curth, who also supported the views of the visual avant-garde and modern architecture.

In this context, an experimental plan was developed in 1960 for the creation of the Department of Design at the UNLP with two specialist pathways: industrial design and visual communication design.<sup>22</sup> Two years later, in 1962, the UNLP approved the definitive creation of both design courses. That same year, Daniel Almeida resigned over political issues: He was accused of being a "reactionary Catholic" at a time when leftist movements were emerging at UNLP and other higher education institutions.<sup>23</sup> The design program was a bit shaken, but almost simultaneously Roberto Rollié took over the project, and in 1963 a team of professors was appointed to start the courses. The UNLP looked up to Buenos Aires, but ultimately its point of reference was the HfG

21 In 2007 CIDI reopened and actively works to link designers with industry.

22 "Graphic design," "visual communication design," "design," and "visual communication" indicate various ways to name the activity, as well as various conceptions of it. The names trace the conception of the discipline. This article assigns the term "graphic design" to the activity that guides these reflections because it is a name achieving international agreement.

23 Gui Bonsiepe et al., *Diseño 2004. Investigación, Industria, País, Utopías, Historia* [Design 2004. Research, Industry, Country, Utopias, History] (La Plata: Nodal Ediciones, 2004), 100.



Ulm. Although the influence of the Bauhaus on the UNLP's program was evident, the connection with Ulm was even stronger, especially because of the presence in La Plata of Maldonado and Bill, whose influence continues even to today. Teachers and students from UNLP traveled to Germany between 1956 and 1963, and from then on, Maldonado's ideas were at the core of the UNLP's design teaching.<sup>24</sup> In 1964 Maldonado was welcomed as an official guest of the UNLP, and for the occasion he gave the lecture, "The Training of Designers," in which he strongly criticized the teaching of design within a "School of the Arts."<sup>25</sup>

Maldonado, always controversial, opened two discussions with his critique. The first and most visible one proposed the need to differentiate design and art; the second was related to the possibilities of design education in universities with a massive scale of attendance.<sup>26</sup> Maldonado thought that design should be taught on a smaller scale than the one reached by national universities in Argentina at the time.<sup>27</sup> He subscribed to the Bauhaus model of education, which was also the one promoted by the HfG Ulm's paradigm, as in the case of ESDI, which followed HfG's educational model.

However, Argentina's higher education system for the elite was already transformed, which was evident when the universities reopened after the fall of Peronism in 1955. As a result of the re-establishment of the so-called "reformist principles" (e.g., the principle of free education), universities began to include not only the children of the middle classes but also the children of the industrial proletariat. A university for the masses and the working classes was not necessarily the place imagined by Maldonado for the teaching of design.

The emerging challenges of the public universities, and particularly of the design courses at the UNLP, were linked mainly to the following questions: How is design done for the industrial sector in a country with an agro-exporting profile? Was a system of import substitution possible? What were the scope and limits of economic growth, based on neo-Keynesian ideas that would combine owned and external resources while avoiding social inequalities? These questions were raised in an institution that had just a few admission restrictions and that was oriented to the middle sectors and not the productive/technical elite. It was definitely a different model from the one proposed by institutions like the HfG in Ulm, and even ESDI in Rio de Janeiro.

Those who shaped the academic discipline of design at UNLP and at the UNCu were heading, perhaps unknowingly, toward a core idea that would later be picked up and projected into the Latin American context by Bonsiepe.<sup>28</sup> This idea considers the crisis of a model that responded to the production contexts of Northern Hemisphere countries:

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24 Ibid., 92. Among the Argentinean teachers who went to Ulm was Mario Casas; students who traveled included María Luz Agriano, Francisco Bullrich, Horacio Denot, Andrés Dimitreu, Mario Forné, María Fraxedas, Alicia Hamm, Robert Hamm, and Jeanine Meerapfel. See Fernández et al., *Diseño. HfG Ulm, América Latina, Argentina, La Plata. 5 documentos* [Design. HfG Ulm, Latin America, Argentina. La Plata. 5 documents], 67.

25 Verónica Devalle, *La travesía de la forma. Emergencia y consolidación del Diseño Gráfico (1948–1984)* [The Trajectory of Form. Emergence and Consolidation of Graphic Design 1948–1984] (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2009).

26 These schools include the universities listed previously in the article.

27 Universities by then were public, free, and massively attended.

28 Bonsiepe's early relationship with Latin America allowed him to be part of the project of strategic design promoted by Chile's socialist president, Salvador Allende, in the early 1970s. This experience granted him the possibility of making objects for social needs in a context that was detached from the logic of capitalism.

This plan proposes the education of industrial designers and visual communication designers whose specific function will be to set up, design, and verify the performance of technology products that make up the social equipment of our country.... The Argentinean designer must adapt to the work methodologies dictated by the nation's current production levels.... Therefore, the designer must have a set of skills similar to that of designers from developed countries but also distinct as it emerges from different structural conditions. The mechanical transplant of foreign knowledge and methods, which would only serve as a guide to the extent that our local characteristics are similar to the external ones, should be avoided. Our idiosyncrasy must be acknowledged and designers will have to adapt to it wisely, always imbued with a dynamic conception of history in order not to isolate themselves from our reality.<sup>29</sup>

Such a text is a clear consequence of the industrialist experience of governments that had promoted Keynesian policies, particularly those of Perón and Arturo Frondizi, who was President of Argentina from 1958 to 1962. Considering higher education in design—at least in terms of the model of design then in force—would have been virtually impossible if Argentina had continued promoting agro-export production as the only variable of its economy. Perhaps this need for economic industrializing expansion partly explains the reasons for the early drive for design higher education and set the complete picture of its emergence as a university discipline in Argentina.

### Networks of Design

By the early 1970s Buenos Aires still lacked higher education institutions for graphic design, but the absence was covered by two private initiatives: the Centre of Arts and Communication (CAYC) and the Pan American School of Art (EPA).

In the beginning, the CAYC's aim was to support and promote artistic production. It was established in 1968 under the direction of Jorge Glusberg (who served as Architect and Director of the Fine Arts Museum of Buenos Aires during the 1990). Early on, the CAYC managed to link architects, artists, and intellectuals. Soon, seminars were offered in the so-called "school," and a group was formed for theory training. In 1975, the Department of Design was created and led by Carlos Sallaberry, an architect who worked in advertising. Then, a committee of designers was appointed to organize education activities and the annual *Contemporánea* awards from 1976 to 1978. By 1982, the CAYC was already established and it recognized the work of designers with the Silver Pencil award.

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29 "Reasons for the amendment to the curricula of Visual Communication Design and Industrial Design courses approved by the La Plata University, November 25, 1965." Official document of the creation of the Degree on Design, La Plata University.

30 Ricardo Blanco, *Crónicas del Diseño Industrial en la Argentina*, 139. One of the most important industrial designers in Argentina, Blanco established more than four degrees programs across the country.

As Ricardo Blanco recalled, “[t]hanks to the CAYC, Argentina was present with its design at the ICSID exhibitions. It participated in Mexico in 1979, Helsinki in 1981, and Milan in 1983.”<sup>30</sup>

Beyond the task of training designers and promoting design, both nationally and internationally, the CAYC became some kind of shelter and place of preservation for the non-institutionalized profession of graphic designer during Argentina’s last dictatorship, 1976–1983, when universities were in a place of stagnation.<sup>31</sup>

The EPA, another important institution, was originally founded in 1955 by Enrique Lipszyc as a training school for cartoonists and illustrators who followed the American style. Around 1960 the EPA offered an advertising course, and by the early 1970s, graphic design was established at the EPA as a profession in its own right. The EPA soon became an interdisciplinary center at the forefront of the visual and audiovisual fields, with design’s being one of the EPA’s core areas, together with advertising. Jorge Frascara recalls his experience working at EPA between 1963 and 1976:

Nicolás Jiménez’s work on the rhetoric of the image was definitely ground-breaking. Only in recent years, and at few institutions, such work can be seen in North America. At that time, only Luc Vanmalderen in Brussels, Jacques Monnier in Lausanne, and a few other professors in France and Germany were working on communication theory, semiotics, and rhetoric. Another few continued Maldonado’s work on information theory.<sup>32</sup>

The possibility of being in contact with other disciplines, such as film, visual arts, and photography, brought into question design’s “natural” belonging to a universe marked by the legacy of modern architecture and rationalism, as at the HfG Ulm. At EPA, the legacy of U.S. conceptual advertising was evident. Between 1974 and 1976, the first series of field research for design development was conducted. The field research for the ISO Sub-Committee on Graphic Symbols for Public Information was one of these series. By the early 1980s, the EPA was the only institution in Buenos Aires that taught design. Some of its members later took this experience to the University of Buenos Aires when design courses were created at the School of Architecture and Urbanism.

The key role played by the Graphic Designers Association of Buenos Aires (ADG) should also be taken into account. ADG was the first registered association in Argentina serving professional graphic designers. Although not technically a school but a professional association, its role is worthy of further analysis because of its relationship to the processes of the professionalization and development of the discipline.<sup>33</sup> The extent to which it contributed to course content and professors in the implementation of graphic design courses at the University of Buenos Aires was considerable.

31 The interference with public universities and the persecution of professors and students by the army largely explain the delay in the creation of design courses at the University of Buenos Aires. Before 1985, when design schools eventually opened, two projects had failed as authorities and professors were removed after each military coup.

32 Jorge Frascara, “La EPA: enseñar y aprender diseño gráfico,” [EPA: Teaching and Learning Graphic Design], *Tipográfica* 7, (1989): 20. Frascara moved to Canada in 1976 to take the post of Professor at the University of Alberta.

33 Mariano Plotkin y Federico Neiburg, *Intelectuales y expertos* [Intellectuals and Experts] (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2008).



### The University of Buenos Aires School of Architecture

The military dictatorship of 1976–1983 was a time of deep decline for universities. Then, with the return to democracy in 1983, debates over the political scenario surfaced as never before, bringing with them general assessments, new topics of discussion, and the review of old projects—among them, the creation of a design course at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA). Because of the tradition that had linked design with modern architecture, the decision was made to create the course within the School of Architecture and Urbanism.

The new course counted on the experiences of design program from UNLP and UNCu, and on the career paths of appointed professors and professionals who had been involved in the most significant institutions and events of graphic and industrial design. In 1984 guidelines for both graphic design and industrial design courses were prepared. The same year, Maldonado traveled especially to Argentina to continue his task of promoting design, this time linking it to democracy and the need for a free and equal society. In September 1984, he delivered a landmark lecture for the future of the design courses, titled “The Modern Project.”<sup>34</sup> At this time, in an event full of performativity, design became associated with the concepts of project, modernity, and democracy (in the sense of egalitarianism)—an extremely powerful triad in the context of the return of democracy in Argentina. Indeed, in Maldonado’s view, the concept of project (which he called “projectuality”) was inseparable and reciprocally linked to Modernity because both had been modeled under a rationality whose horizon was humanism. Hence, design was a discipline responsible for innovation, and thus ethics and freedom were inherent to it, in the sense of being intrinsic professional conditions. Ethics and freedom served as a sort of starting point for design’s problem-solving task for humanity and its environment.

Maldonado’s lecture revealed the mechanisms that had operated at UBA’s School of Architecture so that design would emerge “naturally” there and not elsewhere. He provided a unifying story by proclaiming the relation of architecture and design to the “projectuality” realm. True, the idea of project had already been discussed, but the word lacked strength, and it was too associated with architecture. However, Maldonado was not an architect, but was already known internationally as an eminent design theorist.

Teachers and students were excited: 1984 was time to celebrate and open the doors of the university to all. A foundation course for architecture, graphic design, and industrial design was created, which included two compulsory subjects labeled “projective” because they would represent the core of the project.

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34 The lecture was subsequently published in Spanish by Ediciones Infinito in a compilation titled, *¿Es la Arquitectura un texto?* [Is architecture a text?]. Tomás Maldonado, *¿Es la Arquitectura un texto? y otros escritos*. [Is Architecture a Text? And Other Writings] (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Infinito, 2004), 61–74.

Thereafter, the profile of UBA's graphic design course was the one given by its creator, architect Guillermo González Ruiz, a key player in the founding of the discipline of graphic design in Argentina, alongside distinguished figures such as Maldonado, Jannello, Gastón Breyer, Carlos A. Méndez Mosquera, Daniel Almeida Curth, and Rollié.<sup>35</sup>

González Ruiz is an interesting character in that he prompted the articulation of two aspects of graphic design that appeared in the 1960s: the academic tradition and the perspective of visual artists, typographers, technical school graduates, and advertisers. Somehow, this two-sided condition shaped the profile of graphic design in Buenos Aires and influenced how most design courses subsequently were created in Argentina.

By 1985 the courses of industrial and graphic design were created within the UBA. Graphic design, under the direction of González Ruiz, started with an enrollment of about 120 students, an experimental seminar of typography, and the "novelties" brought in by new technologies. In the following five years, the number of students grew exponentially, reaching more than 1,000 per year. New subjects were opened: a two-year typography program with an optional third year, under Rubén Fontana, and editorial design, taught by Sergio Manela. Students started to gain access to design literature that had been translated into Spanish via two extremely important publishers for the Spanish-speaking market: Editorial Infinito and Gustavo Gili.<sup>36</sup> In these years, the so-called intermediate generation of designers graduated. They would have as their predecessors' international projection.

Soon, graphic design and visual communication design courses were created at other public and private universities. The design discipline notably expanded in Rosario, and years later, courses were offered at the Northeastern University and the University of Mar del Plata.

By the late 1980s a series of remarkable events had established the field of design within the cultural world. In 1987, Rubén Fontana launched the first issue of the magazine, *TipoGráfica*, which for 20 years was a privileged channel for the discussion and development of design theory, both graphic and industrial.<sup>37</sup> International figures from the design world visited Buenos Aires, including Jean Michel Folon, Milton Glaser, and Alan Fletcher, who were usually invited by universities, public museums, or the press. Design was starting to be perceived as a discipline in its own right by the general public. The period was nothing less than the popularization of design. With a new public status, design had hit the street and was recognized as a profession in its own right. It was a journey that had begun before the creation of

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35 Jannello, Breyer, and Mendez Mosquera were great architects who theoretically contributed to developing the connection between design and modern architecture in Argentina. As a result, they are main referents, along with Maldonado, in the teaching of design in Argentina.

36 After Yves Zimmermann joined the publishing house in 1972, the firm began to translate and publish definitive design books for the Hispanic market.

37 In 2007 the magazine published its last issue. Unfortunately there is no design publication in Argentina that fills the gap left by *Tipográfica*.

design courses and before any formal education in design, but in those events were located the turning point for the formalization of the discipline.

In this article, I have addressed in part a process that exceeds the issue of university teaching of a certain knowledge. Indeed, when thinking in terms of what constitutes a discipline, the processes and material available for analysis are as diverse as they are valuable. We can analyze trajectories of design professionals, or the development of certain practices (i.e., workshops, competitions, modeling, the legacy of other disciplines). We can analyze design production, and even the discourses that accompany the production—or the production itself as a discourse that dialogues with other discourses and other disciplines. The possibilities for interrogating are as broad as the range of questions raised. This work specifically sought to answer the question of the emergence of the discipline of graphic design in Argentina, from its institutionalization through formal education. Only pioneering institutions have been considered, although numerous design courses in other universities were subsequently created. The opportunities for future research in this area are clearly abundant and enrich this field of academic knowledge.

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