

INSCRIPCIONES INVISIBLES (INVISIBLE INSCRIPTIONS)

Carlota Beltrame

*What it is really about is putting the
inconclusiveness of the past safe from oblivion.*

Paul Ricoeur

Validity of the “Maestro” Ideologeme

Daniela Jozami said, regarding Ezequiel Linares: *I loved and admired him very much, and he me, which made me feel very strong...*¹

Revisiting the 70s, we are struck by the vigor with which the presence of the *maestro* marked the creative processes of his disciples... and much more. Indeed, the *maestro* was someone whose work was considered of relevant merit among those of his kind and who, therefore, when teaching art (but also a science or trade), was imbued with undisputed authority to do so. However, the previously cited phrase demonstrates that underlying the word “maestro” was the Freudian concept of transference; that is, it was not only a professional influence but a vital one. The identification was complete and could be observed in:

1. What Acha calls “artisticity”: the skills or dexterities put into play at the time of a work's genesis; in other words, the formal treatment given to the content of the expression within it.
2. The content of the expression properly speaking: that is, the dominance of certain themes reflected clearly and didactically in the denotative, in what the work says.
3. The entire communicational scene from which it emerges. This particularity fostered a very direct relationship between the author and their medium, which passionately discussed the connotative aspects of the work.

Such characteristics, articulated logically and cohesively, produced what we recognize as the effect of a style of an era, author, or generation. The *maestros*? Many, fortunately. Some frankly venerated and others much debated, although there is no doubt that their influences still resonate in the workshops of the current Facultad de Artes: Ezequiel Linares, Gerardo Ramos Gucemas, Aurelio Salas, Ernesto Dumit, but also Myriam Holgado, Eugenia Juárez, Enrique Guiot,

¹ CANAKIS, Ana. *Un nombre, una artista*. Catalogue for Daniela Jozami, Retrospective of her work at the Centro Cultural Recoleta of the Municipalidad de Buenos Aires. 2004.

and further in the distance Berni, Bacon, German Expressionism, and Velázquez himself, inherited in the 70s the pantheon of *maestros* that had previously been occupied by Spilimbergo, Domínguez, or Audivert.

Between Disappearance, Illness, and Exile

(...) Lucio will hand you two paintings from the 70s, oils in a state of extreme fragility, held together only by the poetic weave of my life (...). I entrust them to you like two Pompeian ruins. You will see that the one with the little first communion suit, a self-portrait called "Catch the Lamb," is close to becoming a butterfly wing... and the other, another self-portrait in the middle of a chicken coop, is missing a piece of the neighborhood, way back in the distant gray edges of the left side (of the subject). It had several names, I could never pin down a fixed one, but the one I used most was: "Bernardo's First Communion." I suggest they be mounted on other canvases, larger and more resistant to tension, in case they are put on a stretcher, since the fabrics are dry and cracked; one tug and they split (...)

I transcribe this warm email because it takes up the theme of the past being summoned to the present. Indeed, Bernardo Kehoe (but also Ricardo Bustos and other artists with whom I have chatted during this process) melancholically question the efficacy of the attempt to turn the past into a presence, just as I do myself. In any case, we are before the remembrance of what these works were and the context in which they were generated, and we can only appreciate a mark, a trace, the simulacrum of their presence...

If in an artist who self-exiled in full democracy we perceive the impossibility of historical reconstruction of their pieces and their original meaning, much more so in Efraín Villa, an artist disappeared in 1976², of whom only a few works remain, but we no longer hear his voice to accept "*Inscripciones Invisibles*," rebel against it, or question it. He shared, however, an irony with the artists of his generation, and that makes me suspect the hypothesis of a disenchanting acceptance of this idea of rescue. Villa's work is highly atypical and therefore surprising. It reminds us of the song of the "good little wolf," while moving entirely away from the suffering bodies typical of existentialist critical realisms inherited from Francis Bacon. But let us remember that the song of the beautiful witch, the honest pirate, and the bad prince that once accompanied the good little wolf had been prohibited by the genocidists. This is because if every human act perpetrated within

² Efraín Villa was handed over by Bolivian authorities at the border as part of Plan Condor, and his case constitutes one of the most reliable proofs of its existence during the last dictatorship.

a society is always political, and therefore suspicious, in those years even the innocent but biting children's song that hinted at the existence of other values was so.

Let us continue with political acts. Daniela Jozami inaugurated an unprecedented exhibition in Tucumán, anticipating by a decade the advent of *camp* in our artistic milieu, in which portraits of Isabel "Coca" Sarli were inaugurated with her presence. The exhibition lasted only four days before censorship prevented the public from entering.

Dictatorship, Censorship, and Democracy

There is no doubt that the most remembered collective of those years was Grupo Norte, formed by the young people who made up the pantheon of our artistic promises. It had been constituted on the advice of Ezequiel Linares, Fermín Fèvre, Collazo, and Rafael Squirru and consisted of Sergio Tomatis, Marcos Figueroa, Kelly Romero, Eduardo Joaquín, Vicky Muro, Alicia Peralta, Ricardo Abella, and Víctor Quiroga, although it also had among its sporadic associates Silvia Locascio and Enrique Salvatierra from Catamarca. It was Ernesto Dumit who embodied the figure of the *maestro* upon whose aesthetic advice these artists leaned, and he was also the first victim of censorship, as his withdrawal from the group was posed as a necessary condition for the realization of "Registros" (Records) in the current Sala Spilimbergo of the Museo Provincial de Bellas Artes. This exhibition spread across the entire space and constituted a scenographic proposal that, rather than resignifying it, "made it up," including a promiscuous abundance of pictorial and extra-pictorial elements, among which was even a live rooster. The setting, conceived far from the influences of the artists of the Instituto Di Tella and of "Tucumán Arde," proposed a free or guided visit for spectators who could stop at a detail or turn back, thus influencing the spatio-temporal nature of "Registros." The sound intervention created by Hugo Caram contributed to illustrating the urban pulsations of a San Miguel that no longer exists. The mythical "Registros" still resonates, for whose inauguration we waited anxiously, huddling in front of a door that finally did not open until days later, when preventive censorship was imposed for the second time on the first "environment" (installation) realized in our city. Indeed, in the time elapsed between the failed inauguration attempt on a Friday and its final opening on the following Monday, all allusions to sex and the naked body had to be softened, though not, of course, those of violence, which are historically more tolerated.

Represented nudity is a semiological scandal (Patrice Pavistells us so³) because it goes beyond the representation of the real; because it not only reminds us of the nakedness of the body but summons it, making an ostentation of it. “*El enmascarado no se rinde*” (The Masked Man Does Not Surrender), the installation whose name comes from a poem by Ricardo Gandolfo and which Sergio Tomatis realized in 1985, scandalized Tucumán for its self-referential nudes, generating such resistance and producing such a cruel attack on the figure of the artist that he had to opt for exile in Sweden, where he still resides. The complaints reached the *Ministerio del Interior* with charges of apology for homosexuality and Satanism, in a clearly capricious and illogical relationship that forced Tomatis to defend himself by justifying his work as a metaphorical construction of the book “*Nunca Más*”⁴. As if the celebration of the body and one's own sexuality were not legitimate, repeated, and ancestral themes in art history!

The Beginning of the Journey

The advent of democracy, it is known, had brought the fleeting fresh perfume of the “springtime of the peoples.” In the then Departamento de Artes, we students excitedly celebrated the incorporation of the professors who had filled the institution with absence until then: Lucrecia Rosemberg, Enrique Guiot, Imelda Cuenya, Myriam Holgado, and Ezequiel Linares were reunited after their long nights of nostalgia and exclusion. The story is well known. But if the balance over the years makes the dawn we expected relative, I do not deny that a process of institutional renewal began, whose traces are still visible today. There, talented young people were found, very willing to capitalize on the new winds, among whom were Nicolás Leiva, Roberto Koch, Ricardo Bustos, Ely Cárdenas, Gerardo Medina, and Graciela Ovejero.

Koch, however, took as his model a distant *maestro*: Pompeyo Audivert, who had introduced the linoleum engraving technique to our milieu. I believe that in Roberto Koch the influences were not so much ideological as practical; indeed, by updating the technique known as “*taco perdido*” (lost block), this artist refreshed the image of printmaking in the province, sweeping all the national awards in that field and livingly and definitively influencing the generations that followed him.

In Ricardo Bustos and Graciela Ovejero, on the contrary, it is possible to find, more than technical ancestors from clearly differentiated *maestros*, the influence of their thought. Of course,

³ PAVIS, Patrice. *Diccionario del teatro. Dramaturgia, estética y semiología*. Paidós Comunicación. Argentina. 2005.

⁴ *Nunca más* is the publication on disappearances and torture that the CONADEP had recently published.

they were not exempt from the influence of Expressionism that prevailed in the *talleres* of the Departamento de Artes and which, due to its image and history, was functional to our needs to communicate what was happening to us and what we felt in those years. But in these artists, there buzzed the need to venture into experiences that brought them closer to installation, photography associated with visual arts, or performance. In Ely Cárdenas, who participated actively as a co-author of those experiences, one could instead observe a more vivid presence of certain *maestros*: Lucrecia Rosemberg from the sculptural concept itself, and Linares in the image. However, in this artist there is another presence, perhaps less recognizable but no less real: Bernardo Kehoe, who bequeaths to Ely that habit of taking oneself as an object; that is, a gesture that meant taking a step beyond the mere self-portrait, speaking to us of an obsession that grants the pieces a surplus of meaning. Thus Cárdenas institutes in our milieu the self-referential representation that would deepen in the 90s. But both she and her fellow travelers paid dearly for those practices which, in our environment, were innovative. Censorship also reached them on two occasions, as their multimedia experiences called "*Crónicas del aplastamiento*"⁵ and "*Máquina tragamonedas, reina del terror*"⁶ scandalized once again; and if the first was defended by the then Director of the Museo Provincial de Bellas Artes, Lic. Dedé Chambeaud, the second could never be inaugurated due to the unheard-of argument of the presence of texts by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.

Perhaps Ely Cárdenas shared with Gerardo Medina, Roly Bon-Bon, Octavio Amado, and Daniel Rivadeo a lack of institutional anchoring that sometimes prevented them from maturing a discourse that grounded the relevance of their artistic practices and their innovative value in our milieu. It was not a matter of having completed the Licenciatura (whose outdated curricula still endure) but of a lack of identification with the profile it offered. Roly Bon-Bon, for example, was mostly a craftsman, a talented jewelry maker who opened the door to the postmodern pastiche in our environment, introducing into the construction of volumes that resource inherited from his fondness for recycling. Pastiche, it should be clarified, is not just a piling up of pieces, but these must be in function of an imitation of something intended to pass as authentic in a strategy shared with *kitsch*; and we know that, although *kitsch* in its aesthetic dimension constituted a strategy of the 80s in hegemonic art circuits, in our city it only took hold in the 90s. For his part, Gerardo Medina's incursions into the Transvanguardia, a movement of which there was barely any news,

⁵ With the participation of Bustos, Cárdenas, Ovejero, Fernando Robles Almirón, and Hugo Heredia.

⁶ With the participation of Bustos, Cárdenas, and Ovejero.

were barely tolerated. Not to mention *Iceberg*, the first performance realized in Tucumán, which had him as author and protagonist. There was no time for censorship, but the animal protection society raised its scandalized voice at the slaughter of a chicken. Octavio Amado, in the most complete lack of interest in being institutionally accepted or not, produced in all directions, among which the "party" as an artistic event, design, and graffiti were not disdained. Rivadeo, for his part, suffered from what Lupe Álvarez calls the "distracted artist syndrome" or "the eventual work"; that is, his production was meager but of a clearly recognizable talent manifested in paintings that combined Pop with an urban narrative saturated with the acidic humor typical of those who have early self-condemned themselves to inhabit the margins.

Of "Transparent" Artists or "The Unbearable Lightness of Being"

But inhabiting the margins is not always posed as an act of rebellion, of voluntary condemnation. Sometimes it is something that is with one, that accompanies us muted until the self-imposed transparency becomes unbearable, not for the protagonist of that invisibility, but for others. Daniel Duchén and Carlos Alcalde are two cases. The first, with very sporadic appearances⁷ throughout these decades, proposed a painting without anecdote in which he accounted for a gaze that rested on the geographical accidents of his neighborhood house. The second, also in the shadows, with a recent exhibition in which the atmosphere of renewed intimism did not hide, to the relief of those who see the already extinct figure of the "maestro" threatened, the display of technical skills with which it is intended to establish a single statute of truth in the work of art. However, since the distant 80s, one could foresee in Alcalde's work a world of mythologies, no longer urban but personal and intimist, which, profusely displayed through baroque textures, is much more interesting than the elemental reduction of the work to a game of technical articulations of excellence, thus eliminating what Juan José Hernández calls "the radiant pulp of life."

Definitive Establishment of New Subjectivities

Nothing is new. Ideas with their logic have always known of "invasions, struggles, robberies, disguises, and traps," Foucault tells us. It is thus that, at the definitive (but not founding) moment of the establishment of new subjectivities, the previous path was plagued with

⁷ Including an important first prize awarded to him at the Salón Nacional de Pintura of 1989, which displeased the sponsoring entity, so much so that they almost returned the work.

precedents: Rodolfo Bulacio's self-referentiality was enabled, in my view, by that of Ely Cárdenas and before that perhaps by Bernardo Kehoe; the perverse and contained eroticism of Jorge Lobato Coronel by that of Guillermo Storni and that of Ezequiel Linares...

Conclusion

All the enunciated particularities were shared with some sub-scenes of national art⁸; therefore, they cannot be defined by themselves as unequivocal traits of Tucuman art from past decades. Such identity traits never occur with the clarity that would leave us more at ease or that would appease those who still need clear and unequivocal definitions that account for their exclusivities. We have witnessed, however, the enunciation of more or less autonomous aesthetic proposals that are subject to links and crosses which, on the one hand, particularize each experience and, on the other, enrich it.

Thus, "Inscripciones Invisibles" does not pretend to offer the last word, for we understand, like Flaubert, that the frenzy to reach a conclusion is the most fatal and sterile of manias.

Carlota Beltrame

⁸ Grupo "Norte" had its counterpart in Grupo "Centro", composed mostly of artists from Córdoba and San Luis.