

Encounters and networks in the constellation of video art in the Southern Cone (1981-2001)

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At the end of the sixties, the South of Latin America is embroiled with the beginning of the fascist repression that years later affirmed itself through military dictatorships in Uruguay, Chile and Argentina. This triad of countries and its geopolitical radiations is known as the Southern Cone. Beyond the singularity of the processes that led each country into dictatorship, they were consolidated and coordinated through the creation and application of the Plan Condor¹, a panopticon designed by the local intelligence centres and the CIA that reinforced the feeling of isolation and enclosure.

European cultural centres like the Alliance française and the Goethe Institut were alternative spaces functioning in a general climate of severe governmental censorship. It is in this context where initiatives like the Franco-Chilean Encounters of Video-Art (Santiago de Chile, 1981) were born². These were events aimed to generate collective thinking and action focused on the creation of video art. It was there where the networks that empowered the constellation of video art production in Latin America were founded, understanding “video art” as something more than just the use of electromagnetic tape. Outstanding Chilean artists working in exile contributed to this project. **John Downey**³ was essential in the process of decolonization of the gaze. **Gloria Camiruaga** participated in collective artistic processes connected to conceptualism and engaged with social movements, political resistance and explicit critical contents. **Magali Meneses** added the feminist perspective (which was enriched by Nelly Richard’s theoretical work). Considering Downey’s “metaphor of the reflections”⁴, video art practices then produced a series of reverberations in the art field, contributing that way to rebuild artists’ networks and connections from previous, democratic times.

As it happens in Dick Higgins’ Intermedia Chart, video art surpasses and contaminates different artistic practices, which at the same time enrich it. This is the case with visual poetry, body art and the expanded performing arts scene. The Uruguayan artist **Clemente Padín** is a good example, not only for his work but also for his expansiveness and a capacity for linking his projects with other authors’ contents and ideas. One of them is the Uruguayan video-performance pioneer **Fernando Álvarez Cozzi**, who studies the crossroads between the expanded performing arts and the moving image in order to integrate those contents in his research on the possibilities of the electromagnetic language. These possibilities of video art practices to decisively permeate, absorb and amplify other languages can be also seen in the work of **Javier Sobrino**.

The Argentine Experimental Film Group [Grupo de Cine Experimental Argentino]⁵, based at the Goethe Institut Buenos Aires, was founded (1967) by Marie Louise Alemann and **Narcisa Hirsch**. I consider them a strong influence on the development of visual narratives of video art pioneers such as **Carlos Trilnick** or **Rubén Guzmán**. The G.C.E.A. also contributed to the underground cultural movements of the time through an alternative discotheque called Cemento.

1 <http://www.lac.ox.ac.uk/sites/sias/files/documents/Policy%20Brief%20ENG.pdf>

2 <http://www.ccplm.cl/sitio/encuentros-franco-chileno-de-video-arte/>

3 <http://cadjd.org/>

4 <https://www.eai.org/titles/the-looking-glass>

5 <https://hambrecine.com/2013/06/24/ver-construirse-el-mundo-notas-sobre-el-cine-experimental-argentino/>

The radicalism of the Rio de la Plata's⁶ underground culture in the eighties was arguably related to the overspreading of video art practices and their core discourses. The language of video art had already been freed from the artistic circuit and was present in videoclips of early punk groups such as **Los Estómagos**, and even in television programs that attempted to break the prevailing verticality of any public enunciation.

The genealogy introduced by this exhibition of early video art works from Argentina, Chile and Uruguay tries to face some of these issues, mostly related to the context in which these pioneering works were made. It also pretends to question hegemonic discourses and ready-made art histories of video art, focusing in works which were sometimes displaced, ignored or forgotten.

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River Plate: the delta of the Uruguay River and the natural border between Argentina and Uruguay.