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1965-1976

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May 23, 1968 marked the now-mythic premature end of the *Experiencias '68* exhibition at the Instituto Torcuato di Tella: the decision, by the included artists, to protest a censored work by destroying their own contributions, and dragging their remains into the street. This break with the art institution catalyzed the radicalization of that generation of young artists, many of who would collaborate on *Tucumán Arde* that November and ultimately renounce their artistic careers for years, decades, or the rest of their lives. Reflecting on *Experiencias '68* in 1993, Oscar Bony, an artist who photographed the events as they unfolded at the Di Tella, recalled this moment with ambivalence and perhaps some regret:

We reached this point because there was a strong contradiction between what we were doing and society's reality. There was the question of an elite that bothered me very much, we had lost contact with reality. We undertook a fantastic utopia: unable to change society, we committed suicide.<sup>1</sup>

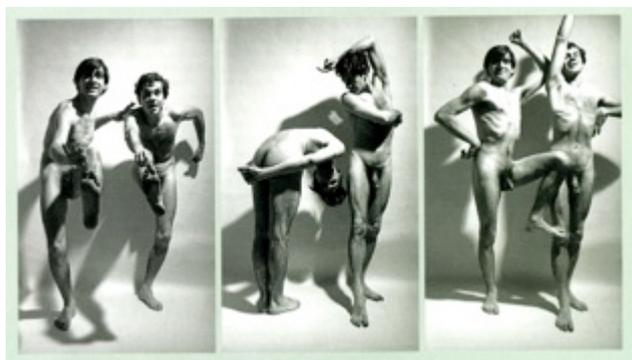
That Bony characterized his experience of 1968 as such is curious, however, given that after *Experiencias '68*'s closure he did not retire completely from cultural production, even if he stopped making art. He continued to produce photographs—indeed, many of them—after the tumultuous events of May. As the official photographer for RCA's affiliate record label in Argentina between 1967 and 1973, he designed promotional imagery and record covers for a new wave of rock n' roll bands and solo popular music acts, including Almendra, Los Gatos, Manal, La Joven Guardia, Arco Iris, and many others.

What are we to make of the fact that in the same moment, Bony was part of an unprecedented collective rejection of the art institution and produced imagery for the international culture industry? The explanation seems to lie in the question of photography, even for an artist who seemingly dabbled in every type of media available—including painting. The stakes of photography in the 1960s were quite high, as it was a moment as absolutely dependent upon documentation as it was one deeply skeptical and increasingly conscious of mediation in all its guises. For Bony, photography did not only become the proverbial artist's "day job." It was also a key component of his collaborative work with his artist peers. Bony photographed experimental art events at the Di Tella as well as the infamous wholesale rejection of the institution by the artists included in the *Experiencias '68* exhibition. If at that moment, Bony indeed found the "question of an elite" problematic, involvement in youth-driven popular music could be viewed as a solution, albeit one quite different from the direct political action of *Tucumán Arde* (he was not involved in this canonical project). At first glance, his rock photography, known as *el estilo* Bony, has little relation to his art, and is perhaps even its political antithesis: "creative" work in the service of a top-down business model. Yet a closer look at both endeavors yields a lasting interplay between flesh and concept—at the grain of the work, a dialectic between incontrovertible index and crafted, calculated image—that was the artist's central preoccupation in the fraught decade between the military coups. As such, Bony provides an opportunity to recover a category often absent from the Argentine art of this moment: the body, factual and libidinal (**Fig.1**).

### Pop Conceptualism, Conceptualist Pop

In the years before 1968, Bony navigated two camps within the Di Tella's circle of young artists that periodically intermingled in institutional and gallery group shows and were both responding to *Nouveau Réalisme* and North American Pop art, albeit in significantly different ways. One was led by the interdisciplinary cultural theorist Oscar Masotta, who lectured on Pop art at the Di Tella in the spring of 1965, taught at Universidad de Buenos Aires, and began to conduct influential

reading groups on structuralism and media theory out of his own apartment in 1966. The other was a loose group of artists that included Delia Cancela, Edgardo Giménez, Pablo Mesejean, Marta Minujín, Dalila Puzzovio, Susana Salgado, Carlos Squirru, Juan Stoppani, and others, who enjoyed the direct support of Jorge Romero Brest, the Di Tella director who placed financial and curatorial support behind artists who embraced international trends.<sup>2</sup> At present, this work has received less art-historical attention, perhaps because of these artists' unabashed embrace of the lexicon of 60s counterculture and advertising in the North. It is worth reconstructing the historical position of these somewhat obfuscated Di Tella artists, at very least because of their presence as part of a larger cultural ecology in the institution and in Buenos Aires culture more generally in this period. Their emphasis on transdisciplinary work, ludic participation and a distinctively parodic treatment of popular culture and, more specifically, mechanisms of publicity and celebrity—an international strain of “Pop” at the border with the “popular”—inflected Bony's work. This version of “Argentine Pop” also served as a counterpoint to the conceptual experiments Bony would undertake soon after.



1- Photographs of Oscar Bony and Pablo Suárez, c. 1966, Oscar Bony archive, courtesy of Carola Bony

By the mid-1960s, North American Pop artists had been exhibited in Buenos Aires on several occasions. James Rosenquist won the Premio Internacional at the Di Tella in 1965, complementing his success with the *F-111* installation at Leo Castelli and the Jewish Museum that year; Warhol showed at Galería Rubbers that July. In September, Masotta gave a series of lectures at the Di Tella on Pop, published two years later as *El “pop-art”*. He begins his discussion of mostly North American and European Neo-Dada, Pop and *Nouveau Réalisme* (all of which were subsumed under

the “Pop” moniker) with a section titled “Imagineros Argentinos,” based on a series of studio visits with Emilio Renart, Minujín, Rubén Santantonín, Squirru, Stoppani, and Luis Wells.<sup>3</sup> Masotta leaves it unresolved whether or not he considered these Argentine artists part of an international “Pop” tendency, and indeed, the book's own placement of the very category “pop-art” in quotation marks suggests a certain suspicion as to the term's efficacy or authenticity in the first place. Instead, he termed them “image-makers” or “imagers,” a surprising designation given all of these artists' preference for sculpture, assemblage and environments over and above straightforward images in the vein of Warhol or Lichtenstein.

Minujín's work in this moment is exemplary in this regard. She had risen to prominence quickly since returning from Paris in 1963, winning the 1964 Premio Nacional Di Tella for the inhabitable mattress sculpture *iRevuélquese y viva!* Her influence on Bony at this time is apparent in his similarly colorful, spacious assemblage *Organismo vivo*, 1964, (Fig. 2), which received Faja de Honor at the 1965 Premio Ver y Estimar at Galería Van Riel.<sup>4</sup> Red and blue tubing spilled out from a large conglomeration of white elements made from polyurethane and rubber that was inflated and deflated by a mechanical bellows; a hidden tape recording provided grunt-like noises from within. The title identifies the gargantuan sculpture as a living thing, a body spilling forth into the viewer's space. This is substantiated by Bony's contemporaneous *anatomías* series, 1964, oil and enamel paintings in which Bony colored in frenzied brushstrokes over anatomical charts, using similar colors to depict blood, bones and guts. If, as Nadja Rottner has recently argued, Minujín's soft enclosures suggest proto-feminist intimations of the womb as much as the ludic participation that the artist openly espoused in this historical moment, Bony's work at this time harks to an abstracted sense of disembowelment, or bodily fragmentation—a shattering of the physical borders of the subject that is as much violence as *jouissance*. With Minujín and Santantonín's *La menesunda*, 1965, ludic participation in Buenos Aires art arguably reached its apex in a quasi-funhouse environment in the Di Tella: multiple rooms for viewers to negotiate, each emphasizing a different sensory faculty. Yet as much as these were works intended to exert a

direct, quite physical or phenomenological effect on the viewer, Masotta was arguing almost the opposite. As an “image-maker” in the age of Pop, Minujín’s participatory projects, however fluid and transitory the experiences they offered were, were ultimately condensed into images to be circulated in the press, simultaneously expanding the audience of the work and mediating it as information. It is perhaps for this reason that Masotta expressed concern about its social value, dismissing its innovative ephemerality: “For Minujín everything changes, everything becomes and transforms, constantly and quickly. But thereby, one suspects, nothing changes for her, nor can society’s development itself be substantially modified.”<sup>5</sup>



2- Oscar Bony, *Organismo vivo*, 1964, Oscar Bony archive, courtesy of Carola Bony

In May 1966, Romero Brest organized *11 Artistas Pop: La nueva imagen* at the Di Tella; it featured Warhol, Lichtenstein, and Rosenquist along with lesser-known artists such as Allen Jones, Robert Laing, and Peter Phillips. The Argentine Pop group was now consistently exhibiting in Buenos Aires in galleries and institutions. If Minujín’s relationship to Pop had been only partial in *La Menesunda*, there little doubt about these other artists’ affirmative stance toward commercial culture. Giménez, Puzzovio and Squirru, for example, appeared on a public advertising billboard produced by an advertising agency in 1965. With the three artists grinning alongside examples of their works, the billboard mused “¿Por qué son tan geniales?” Depending on one’s perspective, this was either a celebration of the mindless logic of advertising (they are great because we tell you so) or a winking critique, an insider’s joke on the circumscribed, hip intelligentsia of *la manzana loca*, the cultural district of Florida and the Di

Tella. Argentine Pop certainly recalls the “camp” sensibility that was then being identified by Susan Sontag—although the term did not circulate in Buenos Aires at this time. Ana Kamien, who performed in some of the dance pieces that the Pop artists were involved with as costume designers, perhaps summed up the attitude: “We wanted to be serious, but not solemn.”<sup>6</sup> 1966 was a moment of legitimacy for the group as a whole. Susana Salgado won the Di Tella prize for *Girasoles*, a series of Plexiglas and papier-mâché sunflowers illuminated internally—an arguably superficial adaptation of Warholian seriality. That August, lifestyle magazine *Primera Plana* announced the existence of an “Argentine Pop” group featuring many of the aforementioned artists—with the intriguing exception of Minujín, who began to show in New York that year and was by far the most successful of the Di Tella’s young talent.<sup>7</sup>

Bony was not included on this cover of *Primera Plana*, but he does appear in another iconic image produced for a show at Ronald Lambert Gallery, also in this year, that mixes the Pop group with artists linked to Masotta, such as Roberto Jacoby and Pablo Suárez. Both examples treat the artists as emergent celebrities, focusing on their looks and clothes. In a series of nudes taken with Suárez, Bony offers another side to this self-imaging, suggesting both a playful and an erotic charge to the act of turning oneself into an image. This extended to his four experiments with 16mm film in this year, filmed in Villa Gesell in the summer of 1965 but not completed and screened at the Di Tella until November 1966. The Centro de Experimentación Audiovisual at the Di Tella had organized the film series *Nuevo cine americano* from New York in August 1965, predating Oscar Masotta’s lectures on Pop as one of the first receptions of Warhol in Argentina, and Bony had seen and been intrigued by the possibilities of experimental film.<sup>8</sup> Each of his “erotic short films,” as they were condescendingly described by *Primera Plana*, feature nude figures engaged in simple actions or filmic disjunctions (a woman putting on makeup, a couple walking, another couple making out to an out-of-sync soundtrack). In a fourth example, *Submarino amarillo*, a group of younger men playing soccer and frolicking is edited into a series of stuttered jump cuts, none longer than two frames.<sup>9</sup> Far from peep-show shock theatrics, Bony was clearly experimenting

with this new medium. Film's presence in his conceptualist installations and his continued imaging of bodies in his rock photographs suggest that what might appear to be a momentary dabbling did pay lasting dividends.

In his sculptural work at this moment, Bony likewise began to treat the libidinal body as a sign. There was little precedent for this sort of work, even in the Di Tella group; the closest example might be Puzovio's self-portraits as a bronzed Amazon in a bathing suit, but again, these are so parodic as to dispel any erotic emphasis in favor of humor. In the fall of 1966, Bony included a polyester sculpture of a giant phallus with a toilet jutting out at its base in the group exhibition *El Objeto* at the newly inaugurated Vignes Gallery (**Fig.3**). Possibly titled *Pene*, the work was spurned at the last minute by Julio Llinás, the gallery's artistic adviser, who feared negative press.<sup>10</sup> In a foreshadowing of *Experiencias '68*, the other artists pulled their works in protest, shutting the entire show down on its first day. An absurdist monument to male desire that makes reference to Duchamp's *Fountain*, *Pene's* provocation, and censorship, was founded in part on its exaggerated scale, its sculptural assertiveness as simultaneously image and obstinate thing. It is fascinating to consider, however, the implications of *representing* a Duchampian readymade rather than actually employing one. Jasper Johns had pioneered an "assisted readymade" in works such as *Painted Bronze*, 1960, in which beer cans were cast in bronze and then painted to look like beer cans. Bony's gesture in *Pene*, completely missed by the debate around the work's invocation of sexuality, was to treat Duchamp as yet another mobile sign that could be re-presented and conjoined with another familiar sign, out of scale and below taste. This was only appropriate in a country where actual contact with such canonical avant-garde works was rare.

With *Ejercicio semántico*, also known as *Erótico*, less than a year later, in November 1966, and at the same gallery, Bony condensed his previous reference to desire into the written word; simply the text "EROTICO" printed as an industrially printed sign, 100 by 300 centimeters (**Fig.4**). We should be careful, however, in jumping to the conclusion that this embodies Bony's decisive, teleological move from physical sculpture to "dematerialization."

Given that the Onganía military coup occurred between the *Pene* controversy and *Ejercicio semántico*, this shift from visceral representation to text may literalize the effects of censorship—the linguistic register as a possible refuge from authoritarian monitoring. What is true is that the tactile surfaces of works like *Organismo vivo* and *Pene* do ebb following this contribution, in line with a larger abandonment of *Nouveau Réaliste*-style assemblage and valorization of refuse by advanced artists in Argentina.



3- Oscar Bony, *Untitled* (possibly *Pene*), 1966, Oscar Bony archive, courtesy of Carola Bony



4- Oscar Bony, *Ejercicio semántico*, 1966, Oscar Bony archive, courtesy of Carola Bony

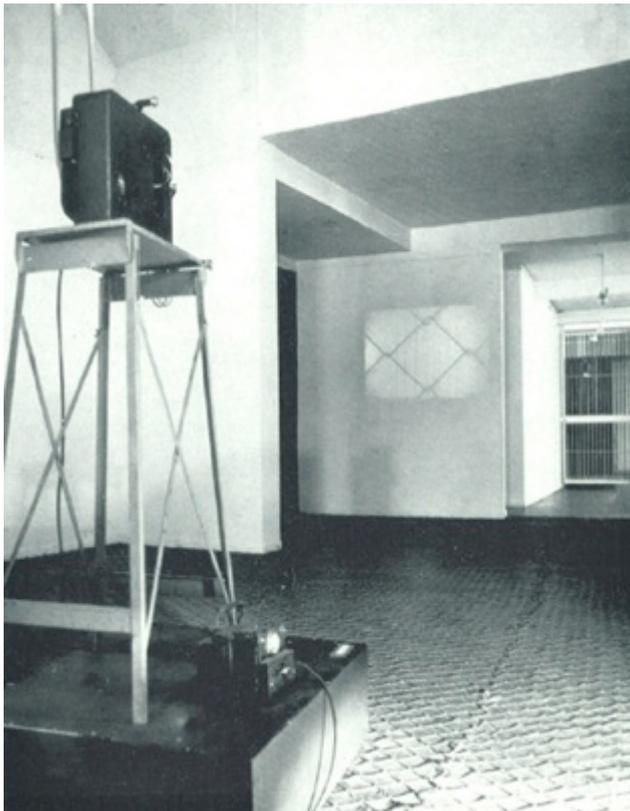
The title *Ejercicio semántico* speaks to Bony's interactions, at this time, with artists in Masotta's orbit (Ricardo Carreira and Pablo Suárez, among others) despite the fact that they were not directly part of the short-lived "arte de los medios de comunicación" group (Eduardo Costa, Raúl Escari, and Roberto Jacoby). It was Masotta who described Pop art as fundamentally about "semantics," and who throughout 1966 led a series of experiments designed to expose the power of newspapers, magazines, advertising and television as sources of mediation for works of art that could also be used to deliver artworks in and of themselves. His influence in Buenos Aires can be registered in the shifts of many artists, Minujín included, to a focus on journalism, the entertainment industry, telecommunication, and devices for relaying information, from record players to telex machines. In a sense, the body represents an important crux that Masotta rarely addressed in his writings, something, that was effectively bracketed by mass media art's fascination with information flows and their channels. For as easily as the body is converted into image, in the action-based works of the 1960s it would return again and again as an insistent fact—both signifying and desirous. In the same month that *Ejercicio semántico* was shown, Bony collaborated on *Sobre happenings* with Costa, Jacoby, Leopoldo Maler, and Miguel Ángel Telechea, in which U.S. happenings were reperformed as the final event in a cycle of lectures and works related to happenings organized by Masotta. Bony can be seen in photographs of the restaging of Carolee Schneemann's Dionysian *Meat Joy*, in which participants cover themselves in fish and meat and roll around, crushing the materials between one another's bodies. The implication was that the very immediacy and bodily presence of these happenings could be treated as a repeatable script, converting the unique event into mere information. Yet perhaps we can read Bony's participation in this happening as a signal that this tension between body and text was dialectical, not a supersession of the former by the latter. Bony was not yet the photographer, in this case. Santantonín, with whom he frequently spoke and who had taken the images used for the *Happening para un jabalí difunto* hoax, documented the event—Bony can be seen speaking to performers, possibly giving them directions (**fig.5**). Already at play within the competitive camps of the Di Tella, the body

remained an interest for Argentine conceptualists, even if only as indexical trace, as in Margarita Paksa's *Comunicaciones*, 1968, in which a recording of the artist having sex with her partner was converted into a cybernetic chart of stimuli and responses relating to the viewer and the environments in which the piece was created and exhibited.



5- Oscar Bony with participants, *Sobre Happenings*, reperformance of Carolee Schneemann's *Meat Joy*, part of *Sobre happenings*, Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, 1966, Oscar Bony archive, courtesy of Carola Bony

Between 1967 and 1968, it is as though Bony parses body and information from work to work.<sup>11</sup> His submission for *Experiencias '67, Sesenta metros cuadrados y su información*, consisted of sixty meters of wire mesh laid out on the floor of the gallery (**Fig.6**). A camera in the center of the room projected footage of the wire, transposing horizontal floor onto vertical wall. In this "closed circuit," every element supports another. The projector rests, like a sculpture on a flat pedestal, on the very material that it converts into reproduced information, which in turn abuts the institutional context in order to be visible. This notion of a closed circuit had great attraction for the Masotta circle in this moment, as it suggests a radical exclusion of the viewer input, and by extension the viewer's body. The only task is to observe—to stitch the elements together mentally, to access the concept—unless, in a conceivable scenario, the viewer walks onto the wire and perhaps blocks the projection with his or her shadow. The viewer's self-awareness—his or her consciousness of his act of being in institutional space, and looking—would be central to Bony's final phase before the "collective suicide" of *Experiencias '68*.



6- Oscar Bony, *60 metros cuadrados y su información*, 1967, Oscar Bony archive, courtesy of Carola Bony

### Working-Class Art

A source of inspiration for Bony's subsequent work may have come from outside Argentina. In August 1966, he exhibited at the *Opinião '66* group exhibition at the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro, and it is likely that he learned of Hélio Oiticica's incorporation of *Parangolé*-clad samba dancers from the Mangueira favela into the opening festivities at *Opinião '65*.<sup>12</sup> Oiticica's dancers were not allowed into the space of the museum, creating an opposition between the institutional version of the show and the genuine intervention that could not be assimilated (at least not then) into the official function. On the one hand, Oiticica devised works of art made for the body, designed to interact with it—the true “art” of the *parangolé* was the phenomenological experience of interacting with it, wear it, dancing in it. It was perhaps this highly accessible aspect that drew the *parangolés* into the territory of Brazilian popular culture, as rock musicians such as Caetano Veloso and others were photographed wearing the capes in addition to samba dancers. On the other hand, the provocation instantiated by a class of people not normally seen in the museum demonstrated a useful way to force the

institution to reveal the limits of its tolerance. Yet there were two components to this appearance of excluded bodies: the privileged instance of the intervention and the documentation thereof—its dissemination as a series of images.

Bony's contribution to *Experiencias '68*, *La familia obrera* (1968), is famously said to have consisted of a die-caster, his wife, and his son, the three of whom sat on a pedestal for the duration of the opening of the show (**Fig. 7**). A recording of ambient sounds from their home was broadcast in the gallery to accompany their physical presence.<sup>13</sup> On the wall there was a text indicating that the artist had agreed to pay the family the wage the father would have received had he been working.<sup>14</sup> The project was not the original one that Bony had proposed for *Experiencias '68*, but his first plan—an empty room with a hidden microphone and speaker would amplify the sound of the viewer walking around the space—proved too expensive.<sup>15</sup> This unrealized project would have explored *Sesenta metros'* opening for participation, deriving informational content from the indexical sounds of viewers' bodies. Instead, Bony used class distinction as such a deictic device. The proletarian family—and indeed, for this context, the *Peronist* family, that working-class unit that could not even vote for the party that best represented its interests—was positioned as an interloper in a bourgeois context. Their arrangement conjures a range of associations: class oppression, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, even the “Western Christian Civilization” celebrated by the dictatorship. Yet these effects of the image result from our retrospective experience of this work as a photograph. In fact, these actual bodies were present. *La familia obrera* stands in an artistic lineage of the incorporation of “real things” into avant-garde art that stems from collage to the readymade to the happening. The artist was not seeking a synthesis of art and life, however, so much as sheer opposition. The proletariat supplants the work of art on the pedestal. The move was not to widen the scope of art to include life, but to replace the work of art with a social reality that could not be assimilated.<sup>16</sup> It is not that the viewer cannot process the working class family through metaphor or reference—the viewer, in this case, is not the only viewer. There are new viewers, and bodies, where the work used to be.



7- Oscar Bony, *La familia obrera*, 1968, Oscar Bony archive, courtesy of Carola Bony

In recent years, *La familia obrera* has received increased international art-historical attention, in particular from Claire Bishop, who positions it as an anticipatory version of what she has at times called “antagonistic relational aesthetics” and at others “outsourced authenticity.”<sup>17</sup> Reiterating previous art-historical accounts, Bishop reports that this was the family of a die-caster, Luis Ricardo Rodríguez, and that he was paid for his family’s participation and time at double the wage of what he normally earned in his day job. “This double presentation of the family,” Bishop writes, “—on display both symbolically (as representatives of the working class) and literally (as the singular Rodríguez family)—was conceptually reinforced in the father’s double pay.”<sup>18</sup> Yet a closer look at a contact sheet of documentary photographs for the exhibition, included in John King’s exhaustive book on the Di Tella, raises an interesting question. Given that the “family” in these images is missing the child and clearly consists of a different man and woman than the one pictured in the canonical photographs of *La familia obrera*, is it possible that the artist hired more than one “family” to participate in the work in the few days before *Experiencias’68* was destroyed?<sup>19</sup> Was it, in fact, necessary for specifically Rodríguez and his family to stand in

for the “working-class family” of the title, or would any grouping of adult man and woman and child be able to stand in, constituting the requisite image for the caption to match?

The very possibility of this being true suggests that there may be a closer connection between *La familia obrera* and *arte de los medios de comunicación* than previously thought. Like Santantonín’s generic images of youthful artistic decadence that publicized a happening that never happened for *Happening para un jabalí difunto*, Bony’s images of the “working class family” simulate confrontational political art in the context of an exhibition that became notorious for collapsing amidst political protest. Indeed, this gambit, if that is what it was, clearly worked. These photographs (although, as is clear above, only certain them) have become iconic images that repeatedly feature in larger histories of the period, which tend to generalize Latin American conceptualism as “political” or “ideological” in nature. Other works by Bony are rarely considered; *La familia obrera* is his most frequently discussed and reproduced work by far.<sup>20</sup> In his survey of Latin American conceptualism, Luis Camnitzer echoes a frequent refrain on Bony and *La familia obrera*, one that makes Bony’s intentions seemingly ideological, in the vein of the subsequent *Tucumán Arde* project.

...Bony tried to shock the public into an awareness of the great disconnection that existed between high elite art and social reality. To do this, he brought a representative of the neglected, oppressed, and repressed (it was a time of military dictatorship) into an arena where this individual would be seen, noticed, and registered by those in power. By bringing a family from the outside world into the gallery system to serve as the subject for aesthetic enjoyment to those who were “in,” he hoped to shock the art power elite into a reexamination of the purpose of art and the circuits of distribution.<sup>21</sup>

For Camnitzer, Bony’s ideological tenor—his social critique of the institution and by extension the larger society—is conveyed by the physical presence of his actual participants. Just as closer examination of *La familia obrera* reveals complex issues around documentation and authenticity, however, Bony’s photographs of *Experiencias ’68* should also be considered as

what they are: consciously arranged images of the “historical event” (Fig.8).



8- Photographs of destruction of *Experiencias '68*, Oscar Bony archive, courtesy of Carola Bony

One consistency in Bony's *Experiencias '68* photographs is collectivity.<sup>22</sup> As the artists destroy their works and drag them into Calle Florida, they are quite visibly working together. To extend Camnitzer's analogical reading of *La familia obrera*, this concerted action of removing the works from institutional into public space not only reexamines “the purpose of art and the circuits of distribution,” it literally reroutes those circuits. If the excluded category of the classes outside the museum were inserted there by Bony's work, this would be a reverse movement, in which the pluralistic styles that featured in *Experiencias '68* were literally broken down and inserted in that “outside world.” This, however, would be to regard the street as metaphor for an open discursive and political terrain—a site of radically democratic access in contradistinction to the gallery—which would of course be a rather naïve way to understand any specific stretch of urban space. Bony's images are not without a sense of drama, either; at top left, the artists walk toward the camera like movie protagonists, light illuminating them from behind as they carry the

first of their materials out of the Centro de Artes Visuales. As the fragmented materials accumulate on the sidewalk outside the Di Tella, Bony clearly frames the “Instituto Torcuato di Tella” sign above their heads (bottom left), splitting the photograph into perfect horizontal halves: institutional façade and avant-garde artists working to extricate themselves. When the police arrive (bottom right), Bony similarly halves the picture along a diagonal rising from left to right formed by the trunk and roof of a police car, the lettering “Policia Federal Argentina” functioning like a caption for the arrival of would-be authoritarian clampdown; here the righteous crowd is seen from a distance, and we have power's perspective. Bony clearly understood the import of the events he was recording, and commented upon them even as he tracked their unfolding.

### Construiré una balsa

The next phase of Bony's career is hard to confine solely to the 1960's. Beginning in 1968 soon after his departure from the art world, his rock n' roll photography would bridge the broader cultural trends and exigencies of the 1960s and 1970s. There is an important argument to be made here regarding periodization and the Argentine “long 1960s.” Obviously, the period can be framed in different ways. Oscar Terán, in one of the paradigmatic intellectual histories of the period, sets his “sesentas” between 1956 and 1966, arguing that the military coups of the era defined culture to the point that the 1960s, in its guise as a time of experimentation and change, were effectively cut short by Onganía.<sup>23</sup> A more recent study by Valeria Manzano traces youth culture in Buenos Aires from the final years of the Perón era to Videla's presidency, arguing that the restless energy of young people remained a concern for successive regimes; in this account, the 1960s persists as a kind of uncontrollable subcultural force that is repeatedly met with violent repression.<sup>24</sup> Certainly, in the field of art, the progression of rupture leading from *Experiencias '68* to the renunciation of art by so many artists in the wake of *Tucumán Arde* creates a neat endpoint for one art-historical narrative of the “1960s.” Here, the decade is defined by participatory art, media art's critique of authenticity and event-based work, and rising political tensions between artists and institutions. Ana Longoni and Mariano

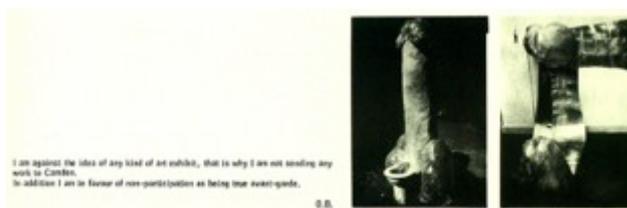
Mestman term this the “Itinerary of ’68,” likening the progression from the first avant-garde gestures of the late 1950s to the rejection of art to a travel schedule, predetermined and teleological.<sup>25</sup>

A definitive statement from Bony that testifies to his having reached a point of no return, as far as art was concerned, dates to his declining to be included in *From Figuration to Systems Art in Argentina*, a Centro de Arte y Comunicación exhibition at the Camden Arts Centre in London organized by Jorge Glusberg in 1971. For the “exhibition catalogue,” a series of long rectangular index cards were produced for each artist, with a mixture of information and images, and one was made for Bony that featured an image of *Ejercicio semántico* (**Fig.9**). *From Figuration to Systems Art in Argentina* was one of the rare occasions in the 1970s in which Glusberg would craft a prehistory to CAYC’s “systems art,” going out of his way to include significant conceptual artists from the 1960s.<sup>26</sup> For Juan Pablo Renzi’s card, for example, Glusberg included a headshot as well as a schema for Renzi’s “The Work of Art as Product of the Relation: Ethical Conscience-Esthetical Conscience,” his presentation for the Primer Encuentro Nacional de Arte de Vanguardia in August 1968 at which *Tucumán Arde* was devised and strategized. If Renzi presumably allowed Glusberg to include him in an avant-garde Argentine tradition that did not die out in 1968, Bony offered the following text on the reverse side of his card (technically, this was his catalogue contribution): “I am against the idea of any kind of art exhibit, that is why I am not sending any work to Camden. In addition I am in favour of non-participation as being true avant-garde” (**Fig.10**). This sentiment is accompanied by a photographs of *Pene* and *Untitled*, a similar work from the same moment, meaning that Glusberg positioned Bony’s 1966 play between body and language as literal “flipsides” of one another, rather than drawing attention to more recognizably conceptualist experiments such as *Sesenta metros cuadrados y su información* or *La familia obrera*.

If Bony was not participating in art, he was still contributing to culture at this time—but for a different audience than the international conceptualist circles that Glusberg was courting in Europe. *La familia obrera* was one attempt



9- Oscar Bony artist catalogue entry, *From Figuration to Systems Art in Argentina*, cur. Jorge Glusberg, 1971, Camden Arts Centre, London, Oscar Bony archive, courtesy of Carola Bony



10- Oscar Bony catalogue entry (back), *From Figuration to Systems Art in Argentina*, 1971, Oscar Bony archive, courtesy of Carola Bony

to solve the “question of an elite” that so concerned Bony in 1968, yet rock’s popular appeal was another path, even if the artist explored this genre of music through a “day job” that was ostensibly separate from his artistic practice. The significance of this first wave of Argentine rock, known as *rock nacional* from 1965 onwards, was profound. Gabriel Correa has discussed how from its origins, Argentine rock provided what he calls a “space of resistance” in a culture that was restricted not only by the dictatorship but by a highly traditional Catholic culture that was only seeing the first glimmers of Westernization and modernization.<sup>27</sup> Lorena Guillén observes that there were actually divergent styles contained within *rock nacional*, from direct appropriations of Northern blues or psychedelic genres to hybrids incorporating folk elements.<sup>28</sup> Correa argues that both the form and content of late-60s rock n’ roll in Argentina took the form of “exploration” and experimentation, lending it common ground with the avant-garde art scene’s interest in *experiencias* (in its dual sense of experience and experiment).<sup>29</sup> It was also largely a corporate-funded endeavor with links to the United States. Short for Radio Corporation of America, RCA originally sought inroads into the Latin American market in 1959 through a partnership with the television show “El Club del Clan,” a show on Buenos Aires’ Canal 13 devised by the Ecuadorian producer Ricardo Mejía.<sup>30</sup> The show promoted young artists contracted on RCA as part of a “new wave” of Beatlesque pop. By 1968, a “young

guard” of a number of different “beat” bands and solo acts had been fully established, chief among them Los Gatos, whose hit “La balsa” sold 250,000 copies. Bony produced covers for a number of the group’s singles and albums between 1968 and 1970 (**Fig.11**). The tension in his art between mind and flesh has a parallel in Los Gatos’ range of subject matter. “La balsa” narrates a voyage into the refuge of the mind that seems to turn catastrophic:

Estoy muy solo y triste acá en este mundo  
abandonado  
Tengo una idea, es la de irme al lugar que yo más  
quiera  
Me falta algo para ir pues caminando yo no  
puedo  
Construiré una balsa y me iré a naufragar

Tengo que conseguir mucha madera  
Tengo que conseguir de donde pueda  
Y cuando mi balsa esté lista partiré hacia la  
locura  
Con mi balsa yo me iré a naufragar

Tengo que conseguir mucha madera  
Tengo que conseguir de donde pueda  
Y cuando mi balsa esté lista partiré hacia la  
locura  
Con mi balsa yo me iré a naufragar



11- Los Gatos, *Los Gatos*, 1970, Oscar Bony archive, courtesy of Carola Bony

Miguel García interprets “La balsa” as “a utopian flight toward other worlds,” and certainly its ambiguous lyrics provoke different associations—could “drowning” be a veiled reference drugs, “the abandoned world” to life under the dictatorship?<sup>31</sup> The same group’s

“Chica del paraguas,” however, is boilerplate 1960s pop:

Caminando calle abajo en un día de sol  
a la chica del paraguas todos mirándola  
ella mira las vidrieras sin pensar  
que toda la gente mirándola está.

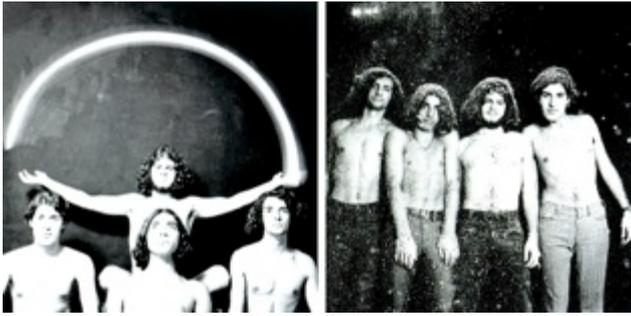
Es muy linda y su cabello es el más suave que vi  
ya son muchos los que de ella enamorados están,  
están todos esperándola pasar  
y ella bajo su paraguas nada ve.

Chica del paraguas  
cierra tu paraguas  
guíame los ojos al amor.

Caminando calle abajo en un día de sol  
a la chica del paraguas todos mirándola  
están todos esperándola pasar  
y ella bajo el paraguas nada ve.

As sweetly innocent as these lyrics may seem, within the context of the Onganía dictatorship, even the tamest signifiers of youth or sexuality were highly visible targets of authorities. Manzano has discussed how by the late 1960s, blue jeans were standard attire not only of a younger generation obsessed with rock and looking to show off their bodies in public, but of far-left labor activists and guerrillas.<sup>32</sup> Bony’s contribution to the visual culture of *rock nacional* at this time, then, amounted to the active production of a rebellious lexicon with political undertones, however capitalist its backing and bottom line.

Bony used a Hasselblad camera and sometimes experimented with a Vaseline-coated lens for optical effects when shooting his would-be pop star sitters. His photographs of the band Arco Iris, for example, luxuriate in the male bodies before his camera: shirts off, long hair flowing down their shoulders, grouped closely together, the musicians are clearly being presented as sex symbols (**Fig.12**). But such images are also just as much about the notion of the rock *group*—a micro-collective of young men (in this case). Fernando García argues that while Bony photographed a number of solo performers, that he was most able to “establish a vertiginous spiritual bridge” between the members of rock bands. “The photographer’s search for the essence of these groups,” García writes, “is outstanding in all three cases, groups that in the long run, projected a shadow of an alternative way of joining to form a nucleus (non-families



12- Oscar Bony, *Arco Iris*, 1969, Oscar Bony archive, courtesy of Carola Bony



13- Oscar Bony, *Manal*, 1971, Oscar Bony archive, courtesy of Carola Bony



14- Oscar Bony, *Pintura or Untitled*, from *Cielos* series, 1976, Oscar Bony archive, courtesy of Carola Bony



15- Oscar Bony, *Forma*, 1976, Oscar Bony archive, courtesy of Carola Bony



16- Oscar Bony, *Untitled*, 1976, Oscar Bony archive, courtesy of Carola Bony

post-*La familia obrera*).<sup>33</sup> Bony emphasized not only the charisma of his sitters and their attire, but other effects specific to the camera: swirls of light created by a small flashlight or lyrical blurs produced via long exposures (**Fig.13**). Given the commercial nature of this work, a certain dialectic persists: utopian collectivity, one the one hand, that is for sale, on the other. After all, the photographs are functional—created for promotional support and designed to craft particular images of the bands and their members—in contrast to the open-ended confrontation of *La familia obrera*. If the class struggle invoked by *La familia obrera* requires the actual presence of participants, the desire so crucial to the relationship between fan and star in popular music is instantiated through the trace of reality—of, as Barthes puts it, the “this-has-been”—of the photograph.<sup>34</sup> Bony’s rock images rely on the index—evidence of physical presence—to simulate a moment of communion between rock fan and rock stars. Rather than setting up a confrontation to provoke reflection on the social divisions lurking within the art institution—what might be linked to the larger 1960s tendency now called “institution critique”—the photographs operate within the preexisting language of desire that was, and remains, so important to popular music’s commercial success, political possibilities, and far greater audience.

## Coda

In 1975, Bony returned to painting, producing a series of images of skies inspired by a camping trip to El Bolsón, south of Bariloche at the foot of the Andes (**Fig.14**). Slightly later but overlapping with this was a series from 1976, the year of the military coup and the beginning of the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional, in which Bony returned to the erotic subject matter that he had engaged a decade earlier (**Fig.15**). Given that conditions in Argentina had been clearly worsening well before the junta’s complete consolidation of power, both series must be read in some sort of relationship to catastrophe—but of what nature? We might first consider how these works raise the question of the differences between photography and painting as modes of representation; the former containing the partial presence of the object, the latter wholly re-presenting it in an image severed from its source. What, exactly, is

represented in *Los cielos*? Knowing that Bony was basing the images on photographs taken in a depopulated site, they might be read as something like unadulterated nature, completely absent of people. Our heads are literally “in the clouds”: we are dreaming, opiate-like, free of the exigencies of the social (Bony has even edited out the bird that appeared in his photographic study). Yet one example from the series brings reality back with a vengeance, making it clear that the sky-blue and white colors of many of these paintings match the colors of the Argentine flag (**Fig.16**). Could we be looking, even, at the horror of the very neo-fascist ideal for the country that the dictatorship had in mind, so pure that bodies themselves had to be purged from sight?<sup>35</sup> At very least, this is something like the realm of the concept: the simple emphasis on idea over material that had triumphed prior to 1968.

If a certain menace can be extracted from these tranquil works with a bit of semantic effort, in the photographs, violence is front and center. An element from Bony’s RCA work—motion captured through a long exposure, creating a blur around bodies—is repeated here, but to disturbing, rather than hallucinatory, effect. The naked female body seems to come apart before us, multiplying grotesquely, mid-seizure. The liberatory sheen of Argentina’s counterculture has been peeled away, exposing animality and disappearance as sides of the same coin.

## Notas

<sup>1</sup> Oscar Bony as quoted by Julio Sánchez: “Oscar Bony cree que en la plástica actual ‘hay una especie de humanismo abandonado que debe recuperarse,” *La Maga*, Buenos Aires, 16 de junio de 1993. This quotation is translated in Victoria Giraud, “Biographic Chronology,” in *Oscar Bony, El mago: Obras 1965-2001* [Catalog], Buenos Aires, MALBA-Fundación Costantini, 2007, p. 296. In 1998, Bony made his regret more explicit: “In the course of your life, has a drastic situation ever brought you to the brink of death? Yes. One time was after the Di Tella closed. I had decided to quit, to never again show in a gallery or museum. I felt that I had come into contact with a deathly cold. It made me very afraid and I lived more than five years thinking that my life had ended. It had been a way of committing suicide and I later realized that it had been a horrendous mistake. I would never do such a thing again.” Francisco Ali-Brouchoud, “Oscar Bony. El gran

provocador,” *Contexto*, 6 de diciembre de 1998, excerpted and translated in Victoria Giraudó, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

<sup>2</sup> For the paradigmatic account of how the Di Tella and other institutions sought to internationalize Argentine art in the 1960s, see See Andrea Giunta, *Vanguardia, internacionalismo y política: Arte argentino en los años sesenta*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Oscar Masotta, *El “pop-art”*, Buenos Aires, Columba, 1967, pp. 21-28.

<sup>4</sup> Victoria Giraudó, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

<sup>5</sup> Oscar Masotta, *op. cit.*, p. 28, my translation. The text reads “...ni el desarrollo de las sociedades puede ser modificado sustancialmente,” which would literally mean “the development of *societies*,” plural. Thus I take a slight liberty with the text.

<sup>6</sup> AA. VV., *Jorge Romero Brest, La cultura como provocación*, Buenos Aires, Edgardo Miguel Giménez, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> The photograph features Squirru, Miguel Ángel Rondano (who was involved in some of Masotta’s projects, including *El helicóptero*, 1966), Puzovio, Giménez, Mesejean, Cancela, Stoppani, Salgado, and Alfredo Rodríguez Arias, who produced avant-garde theater at the Di Tella’s Centro de Experimentación Audiovisual in addition to some art.

<sup>8</sup> John King, *El Di Tella y el desarrollo cultural argentino en la década del sesenta*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones de Arte Gaglianone, 1985, p. 73.

<sup>9</sup> Victoria Giraudó, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 292.

<sup>11</sup> One phase of Bony’s work that this paper neglects are his quasi-minimalist, “primary structures”-type sculptures, part of a trend that swept Buenos Aires and Rosario after Robert Morris received a prize at the Premio Internacional Di Tella in 1967, at which Jorge Glusberg curated *Estructuras primarias II* at Sociedad Hebraica Argentina. The works constitute a third category, one that lies between Bony’s priorities of body and concept. On the one hand, the large-scale, serial sculpture forces the viewer to engage with it in space and time, with his or her body. On the other, serial repetition is fundamentally informational; the structural principle of the work can be intuited as a sort of a script.

<sup>12</sup> See: AA. VV., *Opinião 66* [Catalog], Rio de Janeiro, Museu de Arte Moderna, 1966, as well as Wilson Coutinho and Cristina Aragão, *Opinião 65, 30 anos*, [Catalog], Rio de Janeiro, Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> The father was Luis Ricardo Rodríguez, a machinist or die-maker, the mother his wife Elena Quiroga, and the child their son, Máximo Rodríguez Quiroga. See María José Herrera, “Arte y realidad: ‘La Familia Obrera’ como ready-made,” in *Arte y poder: Jornadas de teoría e historia de las artes 5*, Buenos Aires, Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte-Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1993, pp. 174-182. Herrera notes that the initial reviews of the show, prior to its destruction at the hands of the artists, were extremely negative (p. 178).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 180. Herrera notes that Bony himself later claimed that his payment was double the normal wage, but

a number of critical sources from the period claim that it was equivalent.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 178. The theme of the empty gallery that is instead “filled” with a sound component recurs in the work of a number of artists of this moment, including that of Renzi and Carnevale.

<sup>16</sup> See Patricia Rizzo, “La Pasión Segun Oscar Bony” [unpublished text], Buenos Aires, Fundación Espigas archives, 1994.

<sup>17</sup> Claire Bishop, “Outsourcing Authenticity? Delegated Performance in Contemporary Art,” in *Double Agent* [Catalog], London, ICA, 2009, pp. 110-125.

<sup>18</sup> Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London, Verso Books, 2012, p. 114.

<sup>19</sup> This observation is credited to Niko Vicario, who gave an excellent presentation on *La familia obrera* at the 2012 LASA conference in San Francisco. The contact sheet can be seen in the second edition of John King, *El Di Tella y el desarrollo cultural argentino en la década del sesenta*, Buenos Aires, Asunto Impreso Ediciones, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> It has also been restaged, in 1998 at Fundación Proa in Buenos Aires, in 2000 at the Bienal de Habana in Cuba, and in 2004 in Houston and Slovenia. Polish artist Goshka Macuga’s *Model for a Sculpture (Family)*, 2011, constitutes another sort of reproduction of *La familia obrera*: the artist created a monumental concrete rendering of Bony’s work based on the original photographs. The artist deliberately rearranged the figures, so that the child is turned toward one of the parents, and all the figures are rendered as bulky, near-abstract lumps of material. In addition, the pedestal is massively enlarged so that it is several feet high, creating vast physical distance between the viewer and these literally larger-than-life figures—we are, as it were, at a dramatic distance from the historical work of “political art.”

<sup>21</sup> Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 2007, p. 177.

<sup>22</sup> This stands in contrast to the Di Tella’s official photography department, directed by Humberto Rivas, which specialized in portraits of individual sitters. See John King, *El Di Tella y el desarrollo cultural argentino en la década del sesenta*, Buenos Aires, Asunto Impreso Ediciones, pp. 453-474.

<sup>23</sup> Oscar Terán, *Nuestras años sesentas: La formación de la nueva izquierda intelectual en la Argentina 1956-1966*, Buenos Aires, Puntosur, 1991.

<sup>24</sup> Valeria Manzano, *The Age of Youth in Argentina: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality from Peron to Videla*, Durham, University of North Carolina Press, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Ana Longoni y Mariano Mestman, *Del Di Tella a “Tucumán Arde”: Vanguardia artística y política en el ‘68 argentino*, Buenos Aires, El Cielo por Asalto, 2000, pp. 254-266.

<sup>26</sup> Jorge Glusberg (ed.), *From Figuration to Systems Art in Argentina* [Catalog], London, Camden Arts Centre; Buenos Aires, CAYC, 1971. Given that especially during the early 1970s he was using the Center to promote a new group of

artists, Glusberg did not frequently draw attention to the Di Tella generation (he was aided by this by so many of that group abstaining from art-making at that time). As the 1970s continued, however, Glusberg did begin to include former Di Tella regulars with more frequency and in some cases gave them retrospectives, as in the cases of David Lamelas and Marta Minujín.

<sup>27</sup>Gabriel Correa, “El rock argentino como generador de espacios de resistencia,” in *Huellas: Búsquedas en Artes y Diseño*, Mendoza, 2002, no. 2, pp. 40-54. See also Valeria Manzano, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-157.

<sup>28</sup>Lorena Guillén, “Analizando la hibridación en la música popular latinoamericana: una exploración de clasificaciones de occidente/no occidente,” in *Actas del IV Congreso Latinoamericano de la Asociación Internacional para el Estudio de la Música Popular*, <http://www.iaspmal.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Guillen.pdf>, pp. 9-10, Access July 24, 2014.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>30</sup> See Fernando García, “Rock: O. Bony’s Lucid Dreams,” in *Oscar Bony, El mago: Obras 1965-2001* [Catalog], Buenos Aires, MALBA-Fundación Costantini, 2007, pp. 275-278.

<sup>31</sup> Miguel García, “El rock argentino en clave académica,” in *I Congreso Latinoamericano de Formación Académica en Música Popular*, Córdoba, Universidad Nacional de Villa María, 2007, p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> Valeria Manzano, “The Blue Jean Generation: Youth, Gender, and Sexuality in Buenos Aires, 1958-1975,” *Journal of Social History*, Fairfax, George Mason University Press, Vol. 42, No. 3, Spring 2009, p. 666.

<sup>33</sup> Fernando García, *op. cit.* pp. 276-277.

<sup>34</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1981.

<sup>35</sup> Here my interpretation differs from that of Andrea Giunta, who argues that “Bony’s skies go beyond being simply representative painting to become intense metaphors for freedom.” See Giunta, “An aesthetic of discontinuity,” in *Oscar Bony: El mago: Obras 1965-2001* [Catalog], Buenos Aires, MALBA-Fundación Costantini, 2007, p. 272.

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