



INSTRUCTIONS

Essentially the Same: Eduardo Costa's Minimal Differences and Latin American Conceptualism

Patrick Greaney

From Imitation to Inversion

In *The Critique of Judgment*, Kant writes that 'the foremost property of genius must be originality' and also that the works of a genius 'must ... be models, i.e., they must be exemplary'.¹ There doesn't seem to be any difficulty reconciling these two qualities of genius: geniuses are original, and their works serve as models for others to imitate. But Kant goes on to say that geniuses' originality is not absolute, because they too must somehow 'follow' the works of their predecessors: 'the product of a genius ... is an example that is meant not to be imitated, but to be followed by another genius', who spurs other geniuses on by 'arousing' their originality.² He then attempts to separate good and bad imitation. 'Following' (*Nachfolge*) is permitted the genius, but not 'imitation' (*Nachahmung*) in the sense of 'aping' (*Nachäffung*) or 'copying' (*Nachmachen*).³ 'How that is possible is difficult to explain', Kant writes.⁴ But it's not difficult to maintain that, for Kant, genius and imitation are intimately related. Geniuses must imitate in some carefully circumscribed way, and they must provide a model for future imitations, both ingenious and epigonal. Original works follow rules and examples, and they are the result of being 'aroused' by other works.

Originality and imitation remain complementary concepts, even in art-historical accounts that attempt to dispel the spectre of the bad or derivative copy, as Kant does by separating 'following' from 'copying'. This conflicted relation to the concept of imitation is especially visible in historical accounts of Latin American conceptualism, which have attempted to show its ties to European and North American conceptual art while also insisting on its specificity and originality. The tensions among these concepts can be seen in Mari Carmen Ramírez's essay on Latin American art in the catalogue for the influential 1999 exhibition *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950s–1980s*. She wants to 'recast conceptualism' in such a way that the works of Latin American artists of the 1960s and 1970s do not appear 'as reflections, derivations, or ... replicas of center-based conceptual art but, instead, as local responses to the contradictions posed by the failure of post-World War II modernization projects and the artistic models they fostered in the region'.⁵ She explains that her 'intention is ... to stress the originality and autonomy of the Latin American model' of conceptualism.⁶ In the course of her essay, though, it becomes evident that this autonomy is far from absolute and that, just as in *The Critique of Judgment*, imitation plays an important role even in works of great originality. Ramírez discusses Latin American art's 'dialogic' and 'dialectical' relations with North American and European art, which, she writes, resulted in twentieth-century Latin American artists

Detail from Scott Burton,
untitled work, 1970 (plate 7).

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developing 'an autonomous version – or even inversion – of important tenets of European and North American modernism'.⁷

'Inversion' is the key word here, and Ramírez uses it to resolve the tensions that she creates in her article; it suggests a subversive kind of imitation that allows for dialogue and originality.⁸ Ramírez uses it to refer to art practices, but it can also be understood as a way of presenting how the history of conceptual art has changed. One sign of this can be found in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (1999), a chronologically organized anthology which opens not with a North American or European text, but with 'A Media Art (Manifiesto)', signed by three Argentine artists, Eduardo Costa, Raúl Escari, and Roberto Jacoby.⁹ But that text's inclusion, and the inclusion of many other Latin American texts and works in European and North American canons and markets, may only be one of the first steps in a broader form of inversion that takes place in Latin American

A piece that is essentially the same as a piece made by any of the first conceptual artists, dated two years earlier than the original and signed by somebody else.

EDUARDO COSTA
January 1970

I Eduardo Costa, *A piece that is essentially the same as a piece made by any of the first conceptual artists, dated two years earlier than the original and signed by someone else*, 1970. Page from *Art in the Mind* exhibition catalogue, Oberlin, OH, 1970 (printed text on paper, 28 × 22 cm). © Eduardo Costa.

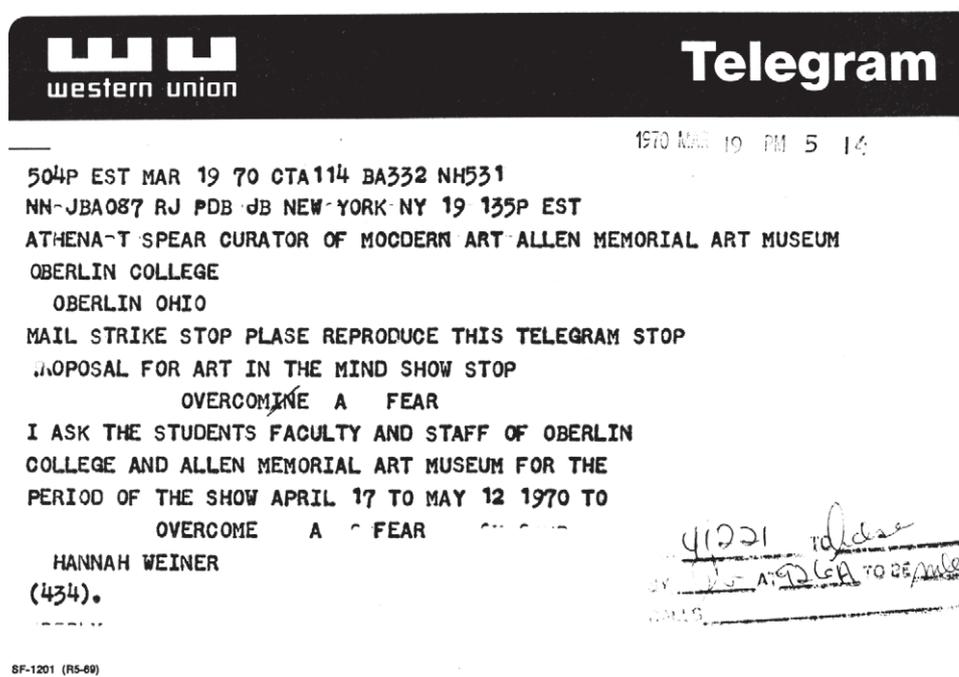
conceptualism that has been theorized by Ramírez and, more recently, Miguel López and Ana Longoni.

López argues that art historians should dedicate themselves not to integrating Latin American conceptualism into already existing histories, but to creating histories that ‘destabilize established modes of thinking the past and future’ and bring to life past conflicts.¹⁰ He writes about such a historical project as ‘revivifying a *nostalgia for the future*’, or reawakening past desires for a future that wasn’t realized.¹¹ This would mean returning to the past not as a series of fixed events but as the site of emergence of contingent histories and as the origin of futures still to be realized. For López, art history should aim to continue projects begun in the past and not just catalogue them; it should be a ‘critical reactivation’ and the ‘reintegration of the subversive component of our historical object’.¹² Longoni also presents her historical work on the Argentine avant-garde as ‘reactivation’.¹³ Her goal is to ‘historicize connections between artistic and nonartistic phenomena’ by paying attention to the full ‘complexity of each specific situation’ and to extend the ‘conflictual nature’ of those connections ‘into the present’.¹⁴ History, in the sense envisioned by Longoni and López, would focus on how past practices allowed for forms of critique and still would allow for them if properly presented by art historians.

To this end, López and Longoni propose new forms of imitation: the revivification of 1960s and 1970s art and its conflicts. As an example of what such a reactivation would look like, López proposes Eduardo Costa’s *A piece that is essentially the same as a piece made by any of the first conceptual artists, dated two years earlier than the original and signed by someone else* (1970) (plate 1). The critical force of Costa’s work could be summed up in this way, at least preliminarily: it would make the original into an imitation, the imitation into an original. Although *A piece that is . . .* doesn’t thematize Latin American art, it implies a critique of how precedence can be used to reinforce the hierarchy of centre and periphery. Since López’s articles focus on theoretical and historiographical questions, he offers only a summary analysis of Costa’s work as ‘challenging “reasonable” consolidations by historical narrative’ and as offering ‘a historiographical practice deliberately formulated around error’. ‘Costa’s work’, López concludes, ‘reminds us that history is never neutral, and if there should be any pending task it is precisely to be unfaithful to it, to betray it.’¹⁵ By ‘treachery’, López means the reawakening of the future in the past, breathing life into practices and hopes. This would denaturalize the present by revealing something within it that would betray it. López calls this ‘stealing history’, appropriating the power of historical action.¹⁶

For López, Costa’s *A piece that is . . .* proposes ‘a counter-history of Latin American Conceptualism’ and serves as an exemplar of a subversive art-historical object.¹⁷ This is a heavy burden for such a modest work: thirty typed words, plus the artist’s name and a date, all printed in black and white. It first appeared in the catalogue of the exhibition *Art in the Mind*, curated at Oberlin College in spring 1970 by Athena Tacha Spear. Sixty-two artists contributed works to the exhibition, which consisted only of the catalogue, whose pages were displayed ‘on the walls of a well frequented corridor in the Art Building’ at Oberlin College, where ‘a number of works in *Art in the Mind* will be executed by students of the . . . Art Department, under the direction of Royce Dendler, Assistant Professor of Sculpture’.¹⁸ Many artists outlined projects to be executed at Oberlin by viewers ‘in their minds’. Hannah Weiner, for example, submitted this request: ‘I ask the students faculty and staff of Oberlin College and Allen Memorial Art Museum for the period of the show April 17 to May 12 1970 to

2 Hannah Weiner, telegram to Athena Tacha Spear, 1970. Reproduced in *Art in the Mind* exhibition catalogue, Oberlin, OH, 1970. © Charles Bernstein for Hannah Weiner in trust.



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overcome a fear' (plate 2). Weiner's contribution appears as a copy of her telegram to Spear; the catalogue includes many typed and handwritten letters addressed to Spear. All are in English, including the works by the few artists, including Costa, not born in the US.¹⁹

Costa's work corresponds to conceptual art's attempt to effect 'a definitive break with the notion of art as a history of styles or progressive formal refinement'.²⁰ This affinity has guaranteed it a place in histories of conceptual art, including Lucy Lippard's *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* from 1966 to 1972 and Luis Camnitzer's *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation*.²¹ Camnitzer discusses Costa's work as an example of the 'rupture produced in Third World conceptualism'.²² But something curious happens in Camnitzer's account: *A piece that is ...* appears not as an artwork, but as a theoretical statement. In an interview, Camnitzer even limits Costa's work to its textual qualities by calling it 'just a title' and an 'essay'.²³ In *Conceptualism in Latin American Art*, he emphasizes the fact that *A piece that is ...* is a work of art, but he quotes Costa's title as a text without including an image and without discussing its aesthetic qualities. Lippard, too, includes it as a quotation but not as an image in *Six Years*, just as she does for many other works that use text. What if *A piece that is ...* were treated not just as a critical text, but as a work of art? What do its aesthetic qualities reveal about its imitative operations? How would its interpretation as an artwork contribute to the understanding of the historiographical debates that it evokes and in which it continues to play a role almost a half century after the work's first publication?

Felicitous Imitations

Costa's *A piece that is ...* follows the visual model provided by other canonical conceptual or protoconceptual works, like Yoko Ono's *Instruction Paintings* (plate 3), Ian Wilson's documentation of his *Discussions*, and Lawrence Weiner's *Statements*.²⁴ Like other works in the *Art in the Mind* catalogue, Costa's adheres to the typewritten and handwritten aesthetic of much of conceptual art, even obeying Ian Wilson's insistence, articulated explicitly in 1984 but followed for decades before that,

that conceptual art should be limited in size to a twelve-point typeface (anything bigger, Wilson claims, 'causes a reference to a place other than the consciousness of the reader').²⁵ And like other conceptual works, *A piece that is . . .* makes secondary information (a catalogue page) into primary information (the work itself); it is mere documentation for a concept or for a future work.²⁶ Even its play with originality and imitation has parallels in previous conceptual works, like Luis Camnitzer's *This is a Mirror, You are a Written Sentence* (plate 4). A mirror is expected to reflect what is, not produce something new. Camnitzer's work plays with this expectation. Viewers who weren't sentences when they started reading Camnitzer's text are supposed to be transformed in the time of reading it. The reflective mirror becomes a productive device that models its viewer after itself.

A visual interpretation of Costa's work might simply confirm its conformity to the reigning conceptual aesthetic. Even as it proposes a future imitative art, Costa's work seems to imitate works made by some of the first conceptual artists. The very fact that it proposes the creation of a work is already an imitative act, since this is what so many conceptual works do, and what allows Costa's work to be intelligible among the other proposals-as-artworks in *Art in the Mind*. But *A piece that is . . .* differs from its conceptual models (and from all the other contributions to *Art in the Mind*) in that the instructions include the explicitly stated imperative to imitate other artists and falsify information. The future piece created in response to Costa's work would not be exactly the same as the original conceptual work; the new piece would be 'essentially

VOICE PIECE FOR SOPRANO

Scream.

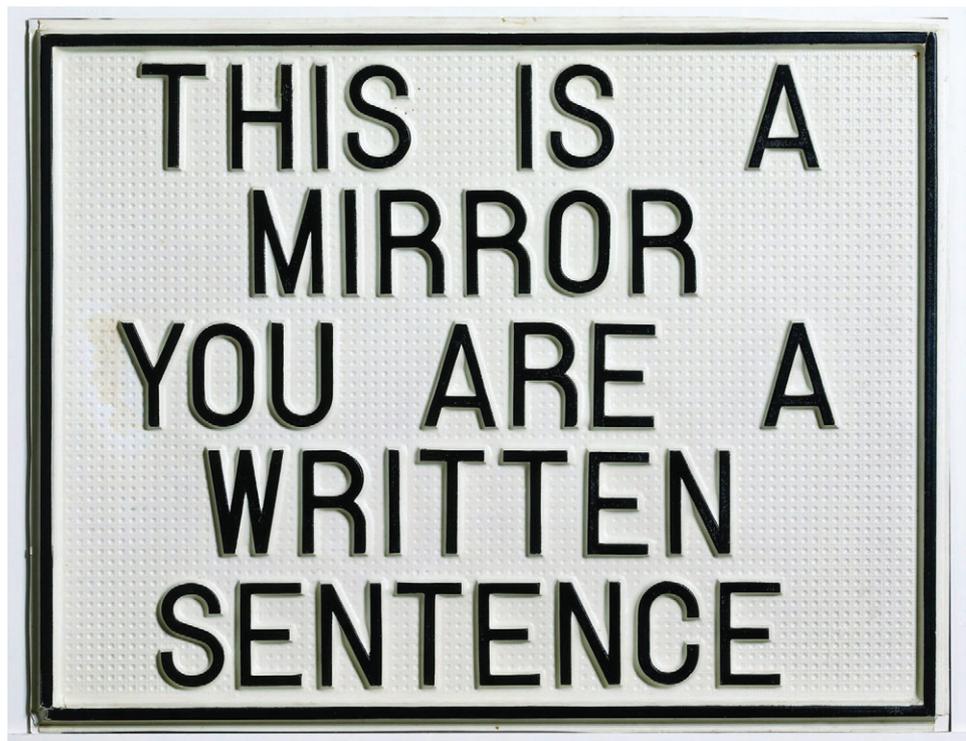
1. against the wind
2. against the wall
3. against the sky

1961 autumn

3 Yoko Ono, *Voice Piece for Soprano*, 1961. First published in *Grapefruit*, Tokyo: Wunternaum Press, 1964. © Yoko Ono.

the same'. An absolutely identical work would transform the conceptual model (the original work that would be imitated) into an exact replica. But if Costa aims to create an art-historical disturbance, the proposal of a strictly identical piece wouldn't do the trick. Debates about precedence are usually not conducted about identical works, but about similar works, like Ricardo Carreira's *Soga y texto* and Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs*.²⁷ The preliminary interpretation offered above – Costa's work makes the original into an imitation, the imitation into an original – would thus have to be slightly modified. It remains true only if 'imitation' is understood as 'variation'. By proposing variation as an aesthetic strategy, Costa's work leaves some leeway for artists who respond to his work. They would have to decide exactly what would be 'essentially the same' as the work they copy.

Costa's work seems to be a variation on earlier conceptual works, and it seems to value play, imitation, and variation, none of which exclude originality or authorship. A piece that is ... relies on, and exacerbates, many of the tensions that characterize classic notions of originality. Costa's phrase 'essentially the same' crystallizes many of the difficulties inherent in Kant's concept of genius. The ingenious work of art must follow the example given by the products of other geniuses but must do more than only follow them. Costa's work is thus not a critique of originality and genius, but a demonstration of their structure. His work imitates other conceptual works, and it proposes imitation as form of creation. A piece created in response to *A piece that is ...* would even highlight the originality of the conceptual work by presenting it as an exemplary work. Camnitzer realizes this in limiting his interpretation of Costa's work: it 'addresses' originality, Camnitzer writes, eschewing hyperbolic assertions about the destruction of originality and the death of the author.²⁸ Although such claims are common in accounts of conceptual and postconceptual art, not even Roland Barthes seems to subscribe fully to the fatal diagnosis in the title of his 1968 essay 'The Death of the Author'. Authorship, it turns out, doesn't disappear in the wake of structuralism, the epic theatre, and the nouveau roman. For Barthes, the



4 Luis Camnitzer, *This is a Mirror, You are a Written Sentence*, 1966–68. Vacuum formed polystyrene, 48.1 cm × 62.51 cm × 1.5cm. Photo: Courtesy of Alexander Gray Gallery.

author just shrinks, ‘diminishing like a figurine at the far end of the literary stage’.²⁹ One of the effects of this would be temporal:

The Author is thought to nourish the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing . . . ; there is no other time than that of the enunciation, and every text is eternally written *here and now*. The fact is . . . that writing can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation . . . ; rather, it designates exactly what linguists . . . call a performative.³⁰

In this description of a new kind of writing (or a new kind of interpretation) that supplants representation with performativity, Barthes obeys many of the avant-garde’s ‘antimimetic imperatives’.³¹ The new writing and the new writer do not come after a reality that they describe, but emerge simultaneously with a new reality. It might seem strange to claim that Costa’s work creates a ‘permanent here and now’, since *A piece that is . . .* aims to produce a temporal disorientation. But that phrase in Barthes may just describe artworks’ performative aspect, their ability to function and have effects again and again. Every reader of Costa’s words is affected by them in a kind of present.

In *How To Do Things With Words*, J. L. Austin makes the performative aspect of utterances explicit by reformulating them in the first person singular indicative active.³² Costa’s work, thus rephrased, would read ‘I propose the creation of a piece . . .’. This speech act’s illocutionary effect (the object of the performative, that which is performed ‘in’ uttering it) would be the creation of ‘a piece’; its perlocutionary effect (that which is achieved ‘by’ uttering it, without being the stated performative’s goal) would be the disorientation effected in the viewer or reader about origins, originality, and imitation.³³ This perlocutionary effect might be nothing more than a question that viewers imagine would be asked if the completed piece were to be produced and then presented with its faked date. Which comes first: Costa’s performative utterance, the backdated piece created in response to it, or the conceptual work that the backdated piece copies? Each originality claim could be successful in a particular context: Costa’s work in its catalogue; the created piece in another, future exhibition or catalogue; and the original conceptual work in existing art-historical accounts. The first two claims might be easily disqualified, but they call attention to the importance usually given to decisions between originality and imitativeness, not to dismiss them but to propose that they be self-consciously used in the creation or interpretation of artworks.

A piece that is . . . brings about these effects only because it is what Austin would call a ‘felicitous’, or successful, speech act, uttered by the appropriate person (an artist) in an appropriate context (an exhibition and catalogue).³⁴ Costa’s work must have been felicitous, otherwise it wouldn’t have become a historical example for Lippard, Camnitzer, and López. It has effects only because it is recognizable as an artwork and because it offers a variation on earlier conceptual works. It does this not only as a critical quip or theoretical claim but as a work of art, even if it is often quoted only as a text. Its aesthetic qualities give it a force and resonance that a mere statement wouldn’t have; it offers an aesthetic and not only a theoretical experience.

Costa’s performativity relies on the force of pre-existing models, and, for this reason, Barthes’s claim of the performative artwork as existing in a ‘permanent here

and now' must be revised. Since it imitates other works and relies on the authority of the catalogue and the exhibition, the 'here and now' of *A piece that is ...* is run through with the past.³⁵ Since it proposes the creation of another artwork, it is also tied to the future. By multiplying origins and projecting them into a future and a created past, *A piece that is ...* proposes a form of imitation similar to that subversive, inventive imitation posited as a desideratum by Longoni, López, and Ramírez. Costa's work rescues imitation; it shows how it can be used to undo – momentarily, hypothetically – the opposition of origin and imitation. Costa's imitation is 'essentially the same' as that other hierarchizing form of imitation that would be subordinate to originality, but also essentially different. Imitation is no longer slavish and derivative, but ludic and subversive. *A piece that is ...* proposes that artists imitate imitation, but also make imitation itself a little bit different.

After the Happening

A piece that is ... is not the only work by Costa that aims to displace and deploy origins. As a member of artists' collectives in the mid-1960s, he created a number of works that are especially attuned to imitation's aesthetic potential. In 1966, a group of artists that included Costa planned to present a 'cycle of Happenings' in Buenos Aires, but they were aware of the risk of appearing to be mere epigones of those artists creating Happenings in Europe and North America.³⁶ In a text by Costa and Oscar Masotta that appeared in Masotta's 1967 edited collection *Happenings*, they express their misgivings: 'we were not certain we would not repeat, in a watered-down fashion, something that had already been done.'³⁷ Their hesitation was also due to their sense that the Happening as a genre was 'exhausted'. To resolve this tension between a desire to present a Happening and an awareness of the genre's limits, they produced a 'commentary on the history of Happenings' by re-enacting happenings by Michael Kirby, Claes Oldenburg, and Carolee Schneemann. They hoped to 'produce for the audience a situation similar to that experienced by archaeologists and psychoanalysts', and they deliberately presented their work as a belated reflection on Happenings, even including a film that declared that 'the genre was dead or out of date'.³⁸ Although they don't say so, it seems to have been precisely this decadent aspect of the Happening that attracted them, since it allowed for the emergence of new aesthetic and critical techniques.³⁹ They deliberately assumed the roles of commentators, mediators, excavators, and producers of 'signs', and it seems that they understood this as the true innovation in their practice.⁴⁰

Together with Roberto Jacoby and Raúl Escari, Costa created another work in 1966 about the Happening. It was an 'anti-happening', a false Happening (known under a number of titles: *Non-happening*, *The Happening that Did Not Exist*, and *Happening for a Dead Boar*) that never occurred but that was presented, in the form of documentary photographs and faked accounts, to magazines and newspapers as a Happening that actually took place. At least five periodicals published articles about the anti-happening, with photographs depicting exactly what an Argentine reader in 1966 would have expected to see in an article about a Happening (plate 5).⁴¹ This is how the three artists presented the work in their collectively authored 'Media Art (Manifesto)':

Our plan is to send the press a written and photographic report about a Happening that did not occur. This false report will include the names of the participants, an indication of the time and place of the event, and a description of the performance that we are pretending occurred. The photos of the supposed participants will be taken from other situations.⁴²

5 Rubén Santantonín, photograph of the actress and dancer Marilú Marini and the actor Antonio Gasalla, false documentation produced for *The Happening for a Dead Boar*, 1966. © Estate of Rubén Santantonín.



The manifesto documents the creation of work that, despite involving false documentation, would be an actual work, a work of ‘mass media art’. The media coverage is the work. The origin of the work is displaced, just as in *A piece that is . . .*, where there is no object or event that is to be documented, but, instead, a work that exists only as documentation of a possible future work.

The anti-happening may not have taken place, but it generated a great deal of writing. It produced media coverage, and it also provided an opportunity for the composition of a number of critical texts. The artists published a dossier in Masotta’s *Happenings* that includes ‘Media Art (Manifesto)’; Costa and Jacoby’s description of the work; Jacoby’s text ‘Against the Happening’; an analysis of the anti-happening by the sociologist Eliseo Verón; and a letter from Octavio Paz to Costa.⁴³ The three artists also planned to publish a book in 1967 about media art and the anti-happening, but this project was never realized.⁴⁴

In ‘Against the Happening’, Jacoby insists that the easiest reading of the work – as a critique of mediatic manipulation of reality – misses the essence of their

project. Instead, the anti-happening criticizes what he calls, following Barthes, the 'myth' associated with happenings: the myth of immediacy and direct communication. Happenings, Jacoby writes, are supposedly 'about achieving unmediated communication, or communication with as little mediation as possible'.⁴⁵ He points out two problems that arise from this emphasis on immediacy. First, it makes a Happening 'into an exclusive and elite show: Rauschenberg and Oldenburg themselves are onstage to perform a Happening two or three times for two hundred friends, and all this in a city of twelve million inhabitants.'⁴⁶ And second, it also ignores the essential role played by the media in the dissemination of images and texts about Happenings; in Buenos Aires in 1966, Karen Benezra writes, 'happenings ... were increasingly the product, rather than the source of pop culture news'.⁴⁷

The anti-happening was intended to communicate the tensions between the claims made for the Happening and the forms of mediated existence that characterized 1960s society and that shaped the development of the Happening in Buenos Aires.⁴⁸ The artists don't try to combat the homogenizing effects of the media, and they don't try to insist on a lost immediacy. Instead, they feed the media exactly what it has been feeding the public, and they imitate as best they can the putatively anti-mediatic presentation of the Happening. 'We homogenized', Jacoby writes, by integrating 'an event that existed solely in language into a series of events that were real but mythologized by language (the language of the press)'.⁴⁹ This is 'homogenization' because it eliminates the heterogeneity that once separated art from its mediatic documentation; they repeat the media's homogenization in a pure state, with nothing heterogeneous or immediate that would counter it. The three artists take as their model Barthes's *Mythologies*, whose concluding chapter Jacoby quotes in 'Against the Happening':

The best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and to produce an artificial myth: and this reconstituted myth will in fact be a mythology. Since myth robs language of something, why not rob myth? All that is needed is to use it as the departure point for a third semiological chain, to take its signification as the first term of a second myth It is what could be called an experimental myth, a second-order myth.⁵⁰

Artificial myths undo actual myths by repeating their operations and showing how they are historical and not natural. In their manifesto, Costa, Escari, and Jacoby describe this operation:

[W]e are taking a key characteristic of the media to its logical conclusion: the derealization [*desrealización*] of objects. In this way the moment of the work's transmission is privileged over the moment of its constitution. Creation consists of subordinating constitution to transmission We are proposing an 'artwork' in which the moment of realization disappears, and in this way a commentary can be made on the fact that these works are really a pretext to set in motion the medium of communication.⁵¹

In other words, the anti-happening emphasizes the role of mediation in Happenings. It focuses on the power of artworks to encourage actions by others, including the writing and transmission of texts. Jacoby presents this emphasis in linguistic terms: the anti-happening presages a future media art that will no

longer focus on the expressive content of a message, but on the 'conative' function, or how it acts on receivers whose actions it aims to shape.⁵² This 'predominance of the conative function will move art closer to propaganda and to the study of the structures of persuasion', Jacoby writes, 'just as at the turn of the century art moved closer to mathematics and industrial techniques'.⁵³ By imitating mass media and advertising, the work of art becomes a transmitter of signs that drives the production of press articles and critical texts (including the present article), all of which reflect on an inexistent work. The anti-happening is thus inherently social and, Jacoby argues, inherently political: 'perhaps, the old conflict between art and politics . . . , which people have tried to transcend by introducing a political content into art, will be settled by the artistic use of a medium as political as mass communication.'⁵⁴

The work seems to be political for Jacoby because of its critical use of an existing means of communication, along with all its work methods. To ensure the coverage of the anti-happening, they mimic the behind-the-scenes labour of journalists and public relations experts:

To put an idea into practice, we resorted to certain techniques used in 'public relations' and not to 'artistic techniques'. We had to interview people who are newsworthy, be polite to them, earn the support of journalists: in short, move inside these groups with the strategy of robbing the group of its dynamic, freezing it.⁵⁵

For Verón, this is the most important aspect of the anti-happening: it 'produces a rupture within the information structure by using the internal mechanisms of that same structure'.⁵⁶ The artists not only create a work that imitates existing media coverage; they also transform journalistic and public relations techniques into art practices.

All these engagements with the Happening depend on complex forms of imitation and inversion. The anti-happening and the cycle of Happenings were created in response to art from elsewhere, but not as a naïve imitation or attempt to do better than the original. Instead, these works constitute critical repetitions that reflect on art from North America and Europe; react to local conditions; and create and theorize new genres of art. A self-conscious form of imitation takes place within the works and the artists' texts about the works. Reawakening that art in the twenty-first century entails reviving those critiques and showing how they exceed every kind of derivative imitation.

Conventionally Conceptual

With these media art projects from the mid-1960s as a backdrop, it's easier to see the critical intent of Costa's *A piece that is . . .* But at first glance it's also more difficult to figure out how the work fits into his oeuvre. Its conformity to the reigning conceptual aesthetic in 1970 makes *A piece that is . . .* a hapax; Costa had never made a work like it before, and he hasn't made one since.

A piece that is . . . was not Costa's first proposal for the exhibition. In his response to Athena Spear's invitation to participate in the exhibition, Costa first suggested a continuation of his ongoing project of *Fashion Fictions* (1966–2005), which are analogous in many ways to the media works just discussed. Costa produced 24-carat gold jewellery made in the shape of body parts cast from the bodies of the people who would wear them: an ear, a few strands of hair, a toe, and three



BEAUTY
bulletin

IMMEDIATE PROSPECT IN THE U.S.: HAIR SOBERING UP

The newest thing you could own...

It is a mouth that's the heretics... a mouth stilled, but not heaped with volume. A translucent mouth that's the mulberry, the cocoberry, the chinaberry, or the cranberry, that tangey colour on the mouth, left.

These are some of the ten shades of Eddie Lauder's remarkable new See-Through lipstick invention, a matter which could mark a turnaround from the light-bright mouth to something more transparently romantic. The face here is toned, equally transparently, with tan (the door; Eddie Lauder's Go-Bronze peel) and the cheeks are ripened with colour (Youth Blend, a silky form of cream rouge, rubbed in well).

It is hair that fits your head... small and smooth and shiny. Reasons why, told at right.

Coming at left, Ara Gallant.

It is gold sculpture that captivates you... it's made from a mould of your own ear, one of a collection of golden ears, toes, fingers, a single strand of golden hair designed by the young Argentine artist and writer, Eduardo Costa. "Costa's jewels," said Lawrence Alloway, "are a commentary on anatomy."

He trades advertisement as a kind of fiction. "Soon, in fact, all Costa's objects will be characters in a novel—artifacts dissolving into life."

American head: smaller. American hair: gleaming with health, neatening, sobering up. Smart women are dealing now with a change in silhouette that requires a more serious head. If it's short hair, short enough to be crisp, nothing waggling in the breeze. If it's long hair, smooth and disciplined... The wild and abandoned is still here, but it's an occasional piece, a once-in-a-while matter. We talk of the stalwart day-by-day head... Below and on the next page, Alexandre talks of same, puts it in a perspective accumulated during one of his lightning trips to the U.S. In New York recently, Vogue caught this fascinating fellow, the hair maestro of Paris, grounded him long enough to hear the following...

"Man's charm is his teeth. For women it is hair. A woman establishes her personality with her hair and her head. In her life she has two important things to watch—her hair and her diet. A woman who puts on weight and whose hair is terrible is a destroyed woman..."

"I like the head perched on top of the body to be very small... A swanlike neck is an asset. I find that women do not pull enough on their necks. A head should always rise out of the body, as far away from the shoulders as it can..."

"Long or short, there must be real substance to hair. We want to fight against stringy ends and too straight hairpieces. Hairpieces should be soft, caressing, more natural. The secret and the beauty of a postiche now is its invisibility. When we first used hairpieces in Paris, we had to teach that with hairpieces a woman could make her life easier. A woman who did not have the time to do her hair in the morning or at night could make herself more beautiful with hairpieces. The hairpieces followed the fashion. But, as in all fashion, excesses were committed. Too much volume, too much exaggeration. If your personality is a little sculpted head, then you should have a little wig. To amuse yourself in the summer when you go swimming, when you are more nude, you can have a long hairpiece, providing it's silky, alive, curly, natural, invisible..."

"It seems to me the time has come to kill the chichis. In general, heads are smaller, more natural, more drawn, more personalized. Foolishness is vulgarity. Simplicity is the definition of elegance: the effect is naturalness. But of course naturalness is manufactured. It is the same for makeup. Luminous, artificial, very pretty shadows, very neat, no chichis... I was the great chichi and eighteenth-century fan. I re-launched those things. I was also the great chignon lover. Now I'm killing the chichis. They've gone too far among too many..."

"An elegant woman is not an excessive woman. Recently women have become too excessive. Too many gâteaux or novelties on their heads. The experienced woman senses this. The woman knowledgeable about fashion is therefore beginning to think in the reverse direction..."

"A woman should recreate herself every ten years, at least. The big mistake is for a woman to be so satisfied with something that she doesn't ever want to change. Some women won't do anything without consulting their husbands. The independent woman makes her own fashion decisions, and her husband should accept them and say amen. Her independence is exciting: it is a refreshment of herself..."

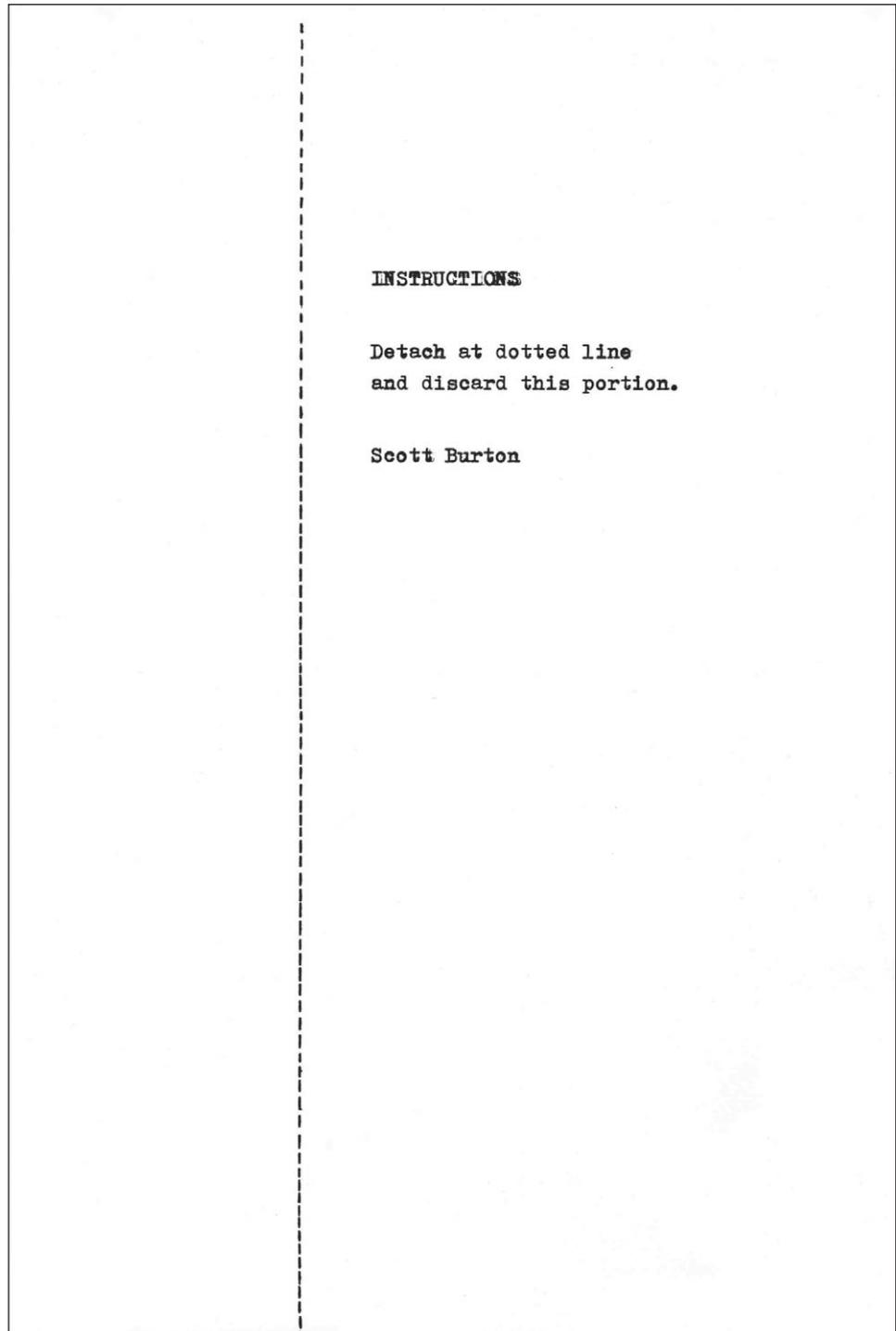
(Continued next page)

6 'Beauty Bulletin', two-page spread in *Vogue*, 1 February 1968, including Richard Avedon's photograph of Marisa Berenson wearing Eduardo Costa, *Fashion Fiction No. 1*, 1967. © Richard Avedon Foundation/Condé Nast.

fingers with long nails. He then had photos taken of models wearing the jewellery and wrote a press release in the style of conventional fashion copy, and he met with fashion journalists and editors to pitch the work. For Costa, the works were 'not real jewellery but a set of props invented to trigger the fashion photographs', just as the anti-happenings were meant to unleash media coverage.⁵⁷ In 1968, Richard Avedon photographed the model Marisa Berenson wearing one of Costa's pieces for *Vogue* (plate 6); Hiro's photograph of another *Fashion Fiction* work appeared on the cover of *Harper's Bazaar*; and the Mexican magazine *Caballero* published the photographs of María Larreta (taken by Humberto Rivas and Roberto Alvarado) that Costa gave as part of his press packet to the writer Gustavo Sainz, who was the magazine's editor at the time.⁵⁸ For *Art in the Mind*, Costa proposed creating a diamond ring that would be coated entirely in gold, including the diamond; the ring would be exhibited with a caption reading 'Platinum and 4 kts. diamond, covered by pure yellow gold'. This 'makes the piece'; and this makes it 'conceptual', Costa writes in his letter to Spear.⁵⁹

Spear turned down the proposal, 'perhaps', Costa writes, 'because of the then prevalent vision of fashion as a frivolous field, whereas art and conceptualism were serious'.⁶⁰ But Spear did follow up on Costa's suggestion, in his letter, to invite his friend Scott Burton to participate in *Art in the Mind*. Burton's contribution was a single page in the catalogue, with a dotted line down the middle of the recto; the left side is blank, and the right side has this short text: 'INSTRUCTIONS Detach at dotted line and discard this portion. Scott Burton' (plate 7). The verso is blank, so the reader can cut out half of Burton's page without removing any other artist's work. This is Costa's description of how the two friends made their works for the exhibition:

Athena rejected my *Fashion Fiction* proposal and I had to come up with a more conventionally conceptual, text-based format to participate in the show. My friend Scott Burton and I were quite bored with that kind of narrowness, and we decided to keep our participation in *Art in the Mind* to the minimum. We dedicated one hour to this project, we made our contributions together, and he expressed better than me the way we felt by contributing a page with a vertical line of dots and the instruction to tear off the part of the page with his name.⁶¹



7 Scott Burton, untitled work, 1970. Page from *Art in the Mind* exhibition catalogue, Oberlin, OH, 1970 (printed text on paper, 28 × 22 cm). © Estate of Scott Burton/Artist Rights Society.

Their works adhered to a 'conventionally conceptual' style while also signalling their distance from it. Above, the claim was made that *A piece that is ...* was intelligible as conceptual art to Camnitzer and Lippard because its call for imitation corresponded to conceptual art's critique of style. Costa's account of his participation in *Art in the Mind* complicates this assertion. *A piece that is ...* isn't just a conceptual work that criticizes the notion of style; it is a work of conceptual art that criticizes conceptual art as a style. The distancing in Burton's work is more explicit; his instructions, which are also presented in a 'conventionally conceptual' style, could be rephrased as 'get me out of here'. Costa's work could also be rewritten as a critical description of many of the works in *Art in the Mind*, which presents conceptual art as a homogenous corpus with a more-or-less uniform style. Such a rewriting might read something like this: 'Pieces that are essentially the same as pieces made by any of the first conceptual artists, dated two to four years later than the originals and signed by someone else.' For Burton and Costa in 1970, conceptual art was already an imitative style, just as Happenings were in 1966 for Costa and his circle in Buenos Aires.

Travesty, Farce, Deviation

Such an interpretation of Burton's and Costa's contributions would place them among other artists who maintain an intimate yet critical relation with conceptual art. Benjamin Buchloh praises Marcel Broodthaers for just this:

It was left to Marcel Broodthaers to construct objects in which the radical achievements of Conceptual Art would be turned into immediate travesty and in which the seriousness with which Conceptual Artists had adopted the rigorous mimetic subjection of aesthetic experience to the principles of what Adorno had called the 'totally administered world' were transformed into absolute farce.⁶²

For Buchloh, conceptual artists and their critics all imitate. The important question is how they do so. Broodthaers uses travesty ('a grotesque or debased imitation or likeness; a caricature') and farce ('a proceeding that is ludicrously futile or insincere; a hollow pretence, a mockery').⁶³ Both are forms of imitation. The artists mocked by Broodthaers rely on a different kind of imitation, a 'mimetic subjection' to administrative reason. Broodthaers knowingly imitates their unwitting imitation, perhaps most clearly in his assumption of the role of the museum director, with his letterhead and hosted lectures, in response to other artists' production of secondary information.

To theorize this imitation, Buchloh relies on Adorno's conceptualization of administration as that 'which preforms every department of modern life right down to language and perception'.⁶⁴ To counter the homogenizing effects of administrative reason, Adorno suggests practising something like what Costa and his peers perform in their works about the Happening:

Whoever unflinchingly, critically, deliberately makes use of institutions and administrative means is still able to bring something about that would be different from merely administered culture. The minimal differences from the ever-constant which are open to him represent – no matter how tentatively – the difference concerning the totality; it is into difference

itself – into divergence [or aberrance, deviation, *Abweichung*] – that hope has retreated.⁶⁵

In the first sentence here, Adorno carefully formulates his understanding of this subversive ‘use’ of administrative means: it must be ‘unflinching’, ‘critical’, and ‘deliberate’. And he treads just as cautiously in the second half of the sentence. For Adorno, such use offers no guarantee that administrative culture can actually be overcome: nothing occurs, nothing is actually realized; only an ability or potential emerges. In the next sentence, too, Adorno keeps his distance from claims that actual differences from administered culture can be created. These ‘minimal differences’ are not said to exist. They are only ‘open’ to those with the abilities mentioned in the first sentence, and they exist only tentatively. The final phrase explains Adorno’s hesitation: he is describing nothing more than a hope that this difference exists.

Imitation is central to Adorno’s critique of the administered world. The German philosopher’s ‘minimal differences’ correspond to Costa’s call for the creation of a work that is ‘essentially the same’, to Jacoby’s call for a Barthesian mythology in the second degree, and to Burton’s use of a conceptual style to call for the removal of his work from a conceptual context. The efficacy of Costa’s works, and the works he created as part of collectives, rests on their critical use of the specific administrative means that manage, present, and create artworks: dates, signatures, media coverage. By applying pressure to them, by ironically appropriating them, Costa creates ‘something different from merely administered culture’. This is the ‘inversion’ that Ramírez sees in Latin American conceptualism. But like Adorno, Costa keeps his distance from actualization. The force of his work lies in its potential, in its instructional character, in its modesty. And in the works that respond to the Happening, Costa and his accomplices present their works as ‘derealized’, withdrawn from actuality. López’s phrase ‘nostalgia for the future’ is apt here, because it can be used to describe the recapturing of the potential of past artworks, the way in which they imagine a future that was never realized.

Adorno emphasizes the derivativeness of the differences that would be created by equating them with *Abweichung*, which can be translated as ‘deviation’, ‘discrepancy’, and ‘variation’. There is no hope or nostalgia for great differences, which seem to be irretrievably lost. Hope, in the Adorno passage, has ‘retreated’, but this may be a strategic move, because it may signal a gathering together of resources in preparation for something else, for a new kind of difference. Costa’s works, too, seem to retreat from grand pretensions to opposition and difference. They propose small differences that coincide with striking similarities. This relation can serve as an allegory for considering Latin American conceptualism. The inversion signalled by the twenty-first century’s increased art-historical attention to Latin American conceptualism is just the beginning of an attempt to consider this coincidence of identity and deviation. For critics like Longoni, López, and Ramírez, only an extended engagement with specific works and specific conflicts can allow for a full account of Latin American conceptualism, and this will require not banishing imitation, but considering how its critical force helped shape practices like those of Costa and many others.

Notes

Every effort has been made to contact the copyright holders of the images reproduced in this essay.

- 1 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, Indianapolis, IN, 1987, 175 (§46), emphasis in the original.
- 2 Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, 186–7 (§49). The analysis here is indebted to Martin Gammmon, 'Exemplary originality: Kant on genius and imitation', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 35: 4, 1997: 563–92.
- 3 See also §47, where Kant distinguishes 'copying' (*Nachmachung*) from 'imitating' (*Nachmachung*).
- 4 Kant, *The Critique of Pure Judgment*, 177 (§47). See the related discussion of imitation in Michael Fried, 'Antiquity now: Reading Winckelmann on imitation', *October*, 37, Summer 1996, 87–97.
- 5 Mari Carmen Ramírez, 'Tactics for thriving on adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960–1980', in Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss, eds, *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950s–1980s*, New York, 1998, 54. For a similar claim to move beyond the concepts of 'influences and mimetisms', see María José Herrera, 'La experimentación con los medios masivos de comunicación en la Argentina de la década del 60', in *Arte argentino del siglo XX: Premio Telefónica de Argentina a la Investigación en Historia de las Artes Plásticas*, Buenos Aires, 1997, 101; and Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation*, Austin TX, 2007, 2, 14–15, 22–28.
- 6 Ramírez, 'Tactics for thriving on adversity', 69n5.
- 7 Ramírez, 'Tactics for thriving on adversity', 54.
- 8 See also Ramírez's remarks on parody in Mari Carmen Ramírez, 'Parallelisms' and 'Confrontations with counter-memory: Ugliness and perversion', in Mari Carmen Ramírez, ed., *Cantos Paralelos: Visual Parody in Contemporary Argentine Art*, Austin, TX, 1999, 16–89.
- 9 The editors of that volume thank Ramírez for directing them to 'Media Art (A Manifesto)', which appeared in English for the first time in their volume. See Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Cambridge, MA, 1999, 4.
- 10 Miguel López, 'Secuestros, politizaciones, analitidades, mitificaciones: A propósito del "arte conceptual" en América Latina en los sesenta/setenta', *Ramona*, 82, June 2008, 46.
- 11 López, 'Secuestros', 47.
- 12 López, 'Secuestros', 45 and 47.
- 13 Ana Longoni, 'Respuesta a Jaime Vindel', *Ramona*, 82, June 2008, 21.
- 14 Longoni, 'Respuesta a Jaime Vindel', 23 and 28.
- 15 Miguel A. López, 'How do we know what Latin American conceptualism looks like?', trans. Josephine Watson, *Afterall*, 23, Spring 2010, 20.
- 16 López, 'How do we know', 20.
- 17 López, 'How do we know', 20.
- 18 Athena T. Spear, 'Introduction', in Athena T. Spear, ed., *Art in the Mind*, Oberlin, OH, 1970, u.p.
- 19 Costa was born in Buenos Aires in 1940, and he lived in New York from 1968 to 1971 and from 1981 to 2003; see Kevin Kelly, 'A conversation with Eduardo Costa', in Harper Montgomery, ed., *Open Work in Latin America, New York, & Beyond: Conceptualism Reconsidered*, New York, 2013, 34–5. Costa discusses his early literary and artworks in the interview 'Eduardo Costa: también la literatura ha muerto', *Confirmado*, 27 October 1966, 74. A thorough chronology can be found in *Eduardo Costa: Volumetric Paintings, The Geometric Works*, New York, 2001, 39–59.
- 20 Michael Newman, 'Conceptual art from the 1960s to the 1990s: An unfinished project?', *Kunst & Museumsjournal*, 7: 1–3, 1996, 98–9.
- 21 Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, New York, 1973, 163; Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art*, 93.
- 22 Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art*, 93.
- 23 Alejandro Cesarco, 'Luis Camnitzer', *BOMB*, 115, 2011, 94.
- 24 For a critique of the term 'protoconceptual', see Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art*, 27.
- 25 Ian Wilson, 'Conceptual art', *Artforum*, 22: 6, February 1984, 60.
- 26 On conceptual art's transformation of primary and secondary information, see Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, Cambridge, MA, 2003, 154–9.
- 27 See Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, *Del Di Tella a 'Tucumán arde', vanguardia artística y política en el 68 Argentino*, Buenos Aires, 2002, 69–70; and Ana Longoni, 'El deshabitador: Ricardo Carreira in the beginnings of conceptualism', in Marina Baron Supervielle, ed., *Arte y literatura en la Argentina del siglo XX*, Buenos Aires, 2006, 171–4.
- 28 Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art*, 93.
- 29 Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, New York, 1978, 145.
- 30 Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', 145.
- 31 See Alex Potts, 'Notes from the field: Mimesis', *Art Bulletin*, 95: 2, 2013, 209–11.
- 32 J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, Cambridge, MA, 1962, 61.
- 33 On illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, see Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 116–21.
- 34 See Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 14–15.
- 35 On the temporality of the speech act, see Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman, Evanston, IL, 1988, 17–20.
- 36 On 'Happening boom', see Longoni and Mestman, *Del Di Tella a 'Tucumán Arde'*, 68–71; Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, 'After pop, we dematerialize: Oscar Masotta, Happenings, and media art at the beginnings of conceptualism', trans. Linda Phillips, in Inés Katzenstein, ed., *Listen Here Now! Argentine Art of the 1960s: Writings of the Avant-Garde*, New York, 2004, 160–1; Oscar Masotta, 'After pop, we dematerialize', trans. Eileen Brockbank, in Katzenstein, ed., *Listen Here Now!* 208–15; and Andrea Giunta, *Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics: Argentine Art in the Sixties*, trans. Peter Kahn, Durham, NC, 2007, 185–8.
- 37 Eduardo Costa and Oscar Masotta, 'On Happenings, Happening: Reflections and accounts', in Katzenstein, ed., *Listen Here Now!* 201.
- 38 Costa and Masotta, 'On Happenings, Happening: Reflections and accounts', 205.
- 39 See Jacoby's comments on this in Ana Longoni, ed., *Roberto Jacoby: El deseo nace del derrumbe: Acciones, conceptos, escritos*, Barcelona, 2011, 39–40.
- 40 Costa and Masotta, 'On Happenings, Happening: Reflections and accounts', 202.
- 41 For a summary account of the work as well as documentation of media coverage, see Roberto Jacoby and Eduardo Costa, 'Creation of the first work', in Katzenstein, ed., *Listen Here Now!* 225–9. Eliseo Veron analyses the media reports in a 1967 text first published in 2001 as Veron, 'La obra', *Ramona*, 9/10, 2000/2001, 49–50.
- 42 Roberto Jacoby, Eduardo Costa and Raúl Escari, 'An Art of Communications Media (manifiesto)', trans. Eileen Brockbank, in Katzenstein, ed., *Listen Here Now!*, 224. For a list of media works by Costa and others, see Herrera, 'La experimentación con los medios masivos de comunicación', 102–11.
- 43 Oscar Masotta, ed., *Happenings*, Buenos Aires, 1967, 111–45. A partial translation of this dossier can be found along with documentation of media coverage of the anti-happening in Inés Katzenstein, *Listen Here Now!* 223–36.
- 44 See the editors' note in Veron, 'La obra', 46.
- 45 Judith Rodenbeck shows how happenings are in fact more complex than this in Judith Rodenbeck, 'Madness and method: Before theatricality', *Grey Room*, 13, Autumn 2003, 69.
- 46 Jacoby, 'Against the Happening', 232.
- 47 Karen Benezra, 'Media art in Argentina: Ideology and critique "después del pop"', *ARTMargins*, 2–3, 2012, 153.
- 48 They also seem to want to give the Happening the complex reception that it deserves, instead of the trivializing and uncritical treatment that it received in the Argentine media. This is the claim in Oscar Masotta, 'After pop, we dematerialize', 208–16.
- 49 Jacoby, 'Against the Happening', 232, translation modified.
- 50 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers, New York, 1972, 135; quoted in Jacoby, 'Against the Happening', 230.
- 51 Jacoby, Costa and Escari, 'An Art of Communications Media (manifiesto)', 224, emphasis in the original, translation modified. See the commentary on this passage in Barthes and Jacoby in Alexander Alberro, 'A media art: Conceptualism in Latin America in the 1960s', in Michael Newman and Jon Bird, eds, *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, London, 1999, 142–3.
- 52 Jacoby, 'Against the Happening', 231. On the conative function of language, see Roman Jakobson, 'The speech event and the functions of language', in Jakobson, *On Language*, ed. Linda R. Waugh and Monique Monville-Burston, Cambridge, MA, 1990, 74–5.
- 53 Jacoby, 'Against the Happening', 231.
- 54 Jacoby, 'Against the Happening', 231. See also Jacoby's comments in a

- 1997 interview reprinted in Longoni, *Roberto Jacoby*, 37.
- 55 Jacoby, 'Against the Happening', 229–30. On the links between advertising and conceptualism, see Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, especially 2–5.
- 56 Eliseo Verón, 'Comunicación de masas', in Masotta, ed., *Happenings*, 137.
- 57 Eduardo Costa, email to author, 29 June 2013. For Costa, they were not real jewellery because they couldn't be worn; there were no findings on the back of the gold ears, so they had to be attached with adhesive tape to the models' ears.
- 58 These projects are documented in Maria José Herrera, ed., *POP! La consagración de la primavera*, Buenos Aires, 2010, 39–41.
- 59 Eduardo Costa to Athena Tacha Spear, 20 February 1970, from the recipient's archive. John Perreault discusses, and includes an image of a similar Costa work in his article 'False objects: Duplicates, replicas and types', *Artforum*, 16: 6, February 1978, 26–7.
- 60 Costa, email to author, 29 June 2013.
- 61 Costa, email to author, 29 June 2013. Although this session with Burton took place in March or April 1970, *A piece that is ...* is dated January 1970. Costa recalls that he had the idea for the work in January 1970 and finalized the work during the one-hour meeting with Burton.
- 62 Benjamin Buchloh, 'Conceptual art 1962–1969: From the aesthetic of administration to the critique of institutions', *October*, 55, Winter 1990, 143.
- 63 *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'Travesty' and 'Farce'.
- 64 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Stanford, CA, 2002, 30.
- 65 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Culture and administration', in Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein, New York, 2001, 146, translation modified.