

SCHMUCK

“SOMETHING UNNAMEABLE IN COMMON” TRANSLOCAL COLLABORATION AT THE BEAU GESTE PRESS

Considering our special circumstances under we
ZANNA GILBERT well

In 1972, a small group of artists, thinkers, and printers moved into a large but dilapidated farm house in South Cullompton in Devon. From this rural outpost in the southwest of England they formed the Beau Geste Press, one of the most influential small presses of the 1970s. Between 1972 and 1974 they toured the Fluxshoe exhibition, printed scores of books, and compiled the publication *Schmuck*, resulting in an extensive network of collaboration with experimental artists from diverse locations. These contributions and collaborations initially originated from Fluxus but eventually expanded into a broad network of conceptual, postconceptual, and intermedial artists.¹

The first part of this article provides a brief account of the Beau Geste Press. Looking at *Schmuck*, I explore how this magazine was conceived as an “open forum,” fostering translocal communication and networks that enabled artistic ideas to be exchanged, and demonstrating possibilities for an alternative artistic economy. In the second section I examine the two *Schmuck* periodicals that emerged from contacts in Eastern Europe, specifically Czechoslovakia and Hungary, as well as the “missing” *Schmuck*—a Latin American edition that, although never produced, found an alternative completion. In the concluding part of the article, I

1 Olivier Debroise and Cuauhtémoc Medina, *La Era de la discrepancia: Arte y cultura visual en México 1968–1997/The Age of Discrepancies: Art and Visual Culture in Mexico*, bilingual ed. (New York and Mexico City: Turner/UNAM, 2007), 157.

contend that the model of translocal collaboration expressed by the alternative arts scene of the 1970s enabled the expression of both the particular and the local, while it simultaneously propagated a sense of shared artistic and ideological goals and values, regardless of geographical context.

My article proposes translocal artistic collaboration as a communicative model that suspends cartographic concepts of space and challenges the category “ideological conceptualism” for Latin American art. This term has been proposed in recent years as a way of reading conceptual art from Latin America, with politics as the defining and determining characteristic.² The term *ideological conceptualism* aimed to alter the perception of Latin American art internationally and promote the underacknowledged contribution of artists from the region to conceptual art, but it has been widely criticized as essentialist, reductive of artists’ aims and methods, and directed at the inclusion of conceptual art from Latin America in the art historical canon.³ Curator Iris Dressler describes the codification of “political” Latin American art versus “apolitical” Euro-American art as “hardly feasible.”⁴ Importantly, the term obscures the translocal interactions across borders that ensured a constant exchange of ideology and ideas.

Rather, it is the question of networking that is crucial to understanding how those in peripheral, experimental, and alternative art scenes managed to collaborate and share ideas. This also gives us an idea as to how influential ideas about art traveled and how they were reinterpreted according to new contexts, displaying the early possibilities of networking that we now see in digitized networking practices. The networked structure of mail art exchanges suggests a model for writing art history that defies center-periphery models, but that also cannot be encapsulated by

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- 2 See, for example, Mari Carmen Ramírez, “A Highly Topical Utopia,” in *Inverted Utopias*, ed. Mari Carmen Ramírez (Houston and New Haven, CT: Museum of Fine Arts Houston and Yale University Press, 2004) and Ramírez, “Blueprint Circuits: Conceptual Art and Politics in Latin America,” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).
 - 3 See, for example, Miguel A. López, “How Do We Know What Latin American Conceptualism Looks Like?” *Afterall* no. 23 (Spring 2010), accessed April 4, 2012, <http://www.afterall.org/journal/4214/how.do.we.know.what.latin.american.conceptualism.looks.likemiguela.lopez>, and Zanna Gilbert, “Ideological Conceptualism and Latin America: Politics, Neoprimativism and Consumption,” in *Rebus: A Journal of Art History & Theory* no. 4 (Autumn/Winter 2009), accessed April 4, 2012, <http://www.essex.ac.uk/arhistory/rebus/PDFS/Issue%204/Gilbert.pdf>.
 - 4 Iris Dressler, “Subversive Practices: Art under Conditions of Political Repression: 60s–80s/South America/Europe,” in *Subversive Practices: Art under Conditions of Political Repression: 60s–80s/South America/Europe* (exhibition catalogue), ed. Hans D. Christ and Iris Dressler (Stuttgart: Württembergischer Kunstverein, 2010), 45.

the term *transnational*, which merely suggests that cultural production can cut across national boundaries. I suggest instead the term *translocal*, which allows both the articulation of local narratives—bearing in mind that, as Arjun Appadurai reminds us, the local constitutes the regional, national, continental, and international—and the suspension of nationalistic discourse and geographical categorizations that are constantly transgressed by circulatory practices.⁵ Categorizations such as “ideological conceptualism” are unable to account for the extraordinary interplay of communication and exchange between artists during this period.

Translocality has not been widely used as an approach to artistic production. Recently, the term has been employed by Maja and Reuben Fowkes in relation to their position as art historians and curators who operate in a variety of distinct contexts. They explain, “The basic idea of being translocal is to find a way to combine the comparative perspective of the global (in the spirit of counter-globalisation rather than corporate globalism) with the rooted knowledge that comes from belonging to a specific place or community.”⁶ The term also appears in relation to Internet-based art and activism. In her article “Translocal Art of the Internet (Or Where Does Art Happen?),” art and media theorist Eva Wojtowicz’s discussion of translocality conceives it as a state “which does not mean a location in a geographical sense, but rather networked individuals and groups of similarly-thinking people,” reflecting the idea of cyberspace as a place as well as a communicative forum.⁷ I apply the term here in the same sense as the Fowkes’ definition, and bearing in mind the “sociability” referenced by Wojtowicz. Beyond that I refer to pre-Internet analogical networking, which is differentiated from the immediacy of the contemporary situation by the time a work took to physically travel, and by the degree of interaction and integration involved. In 1970s networking, there was a profound gap between the two localities that were connected by an exchange between individuals or groups. My conception of the translocal is a model of interaction in which exchange of objects between artists enables the enunciation of ideas and situations *at a distance*. The translocal involves experiences that occur in specific places (in the mail artwork this is signified by the stamp, the address, the mail worker, and the mailed work) as well as through travel and virtual imaginaries.

5 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*. Vol. 1 of *Public Worlds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 18.

6 Petra Feriancová, “Translocal: Interview with Reuben and Maja Fowkes,” *VLNA* 16 (2010).

7 Eva Wojtowicz, “Translocal Art of the Internet (Or Where Does Art Happen?),” *Art Inquiry: Recherches sur les Arts* 4, no. 13 (2002, revised 2010): 299–307, 2.

The translocal is an open distinction that tries to rethink the way we define and interpret how artistic production originates, doing away with absolute geographical imperatives such as “Latin American art.” Through its emphasis on a locality, the translocal also allows for the emergence of the particularities of a place to be accommodated while simultaneously denying deterministic readings of that context or position. Having “something unnameable in common” did not signify a shared ideology with a set of fixed principles based on grand narratives, but instead denoted a group of artists who were committed to artistic experimentation and who positioned themselves against the state and the art market.⁸

BEGINNINGS OF A NETWORK

The inception of the Beau Geste Press came about in 1970 when the paths of Felipe Ehrenberg and Marta Hellion crossed with that of University of Exeter student David Mayor. Having just graduated from Cambridge in math and history of art, David Mayor arrived in Exeter in 1970 to study for an MA, under Mike Weaver’s supervision, at the American Arts Documentation Centre. Marta Hellion and Felipe Ehrenberg had been living in London since 1968. They had left Mexico after the government’s brutal repression of the student movement that culminated in the events of October 2, 1968: just weeks before the opening of the Summer Olympics in Mexico City, government forces fired on unarmed protesting students at Tlatelolco, resulting in the deaths of a substantial number of the protestors.⁹ The threatening atmosphere continued into the following years and was compounded for Ehrenberg by a conservative art market hostile to experimental work. According to Ehrenberg, they “flew off in worried haste with two little kids and barely 200 dollars in our pockets,” the politicized environment being cited for the couple’s dislocation.¹⁰

Another victim of the Mexican government’s hostility to independent and experimental activities was the bilingual magazine *El Corno*

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- 8 Felipe Ehrenberg, under the pseudonym Kyosan Bajin, quotes George Brecht, who said in 1964, “Individuals with something unnameable in common have simply naturally coalesced to publish and perform their work.” *Schmuck* (South Cullompton: Beau Geste Press, 1972), 1.
- 9 The number of dead is still unknown, the official figure being around forty, but groups such as Comité 68 who continue to campaign for transparency estimate the death toll to be over three hundred. In 2006, Mexico’s ex-president Luis Escheverría, interior minister at the time of the massacre, was arrested on charges of genocide, but the charges were eventually dismissed.
- 10 Rupert White, “Fluxshoe: Interviews with Felipe Ehrenberg, Stuart Reid and Barry McCallion,” *Art Cornwall*, accessed June 12, 2011, http://www.artcornwall.org/interview_fluxshoe_stuart%2oreid_felipe_ehrenberg2.htm.

Emplumado/The Plumed Horn, an independent publication founded by Margaret Randall, Sergio Mondragón, and Harvey Wolin. Ehrenberg contributed to several issues, and it was his first experience of working in a collective and independent publishing venture. Bilingual, experimental, and collaborative in nature, *El Corno Emplumado* published Beat poets as well as key figures in poetry from Latin America, such as the Brazilian concrete poet Haroldo de Campos.¹¹ Ehrenberg describes it as “a highly politicized and far-reaching magazine, which gathered the most prominent and meaningful poets, writers and artists in Anglo and Latin America.”¹² By 1969, Randall and Mondragón were forced to close down the publication. The collective experience and disproportionate reaction to it demonstrated the rich artistic potential of publishing with other artists and poets, while simultaneously making it clear that the circulation and freedom of information were crucial to the government’s attempts to maintain the status quo. Having control of a means of producing and disseminating information appeared to be a highly political act.¹³ Recalling it as a direct response to the repressive atmosphere, Martha Hellion remembers that the magazine was “the first opportunity to reflect and compile works, ideas and political situations in a magazine: for the first time we became aware of Latin America.”¹⁴ The magazine was an early model of one of the key facets of translocal communication: the possibility to create a conceptual community between scattered groups of people who coalesced around common aesthetic interests and worldviews.

Once in London, Ehrenberg quickly connected with an alternative art scene that was engaged in the rejection of institutional exhibition spaces and the operations of private galleries.¹⁵ Ehrenberg’s work was con-

11 Many of the Beat Generation poets, including Margaret Randall, spent time in Mexico from the 1950s onward, as did Latin American poets such as Ernesto Cardenal, Raquel Jodorowsky, and Roger Bartra. Bob Creeley, Rothenberg, Nicanor Parra, William Carlos Williams, Cecilia Vicuña, and Phillip Lamantia were some of those who contributed to *El Corno Emplumado*. See Zanna Gilbert, “The Eclectic World of Felipe Ehrenberg,” *ESTRO 2* (2010): 48.

12 Ibid., 48.

13 The history of the printing press in Mexico is intricately connected to the Mexican revolution and the following years of unrest as the new establishment attempted to consolidate power. Ehrenberg also spent time in a printing workshop run by Catalanian anarchists, who were exiled in Mexico during Franco’s rule.

14 Martha Hellion, “Artists’ Books from Latin America,” in *Printed Matter: Critical Essays* (November 2006), accessed April 4, 2012, <http://www.printedmatter.org/researchroom/essays/latin.cfm>.

15 In particular, he identified with the ideas promoted by Gustav Metzger’s Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS), first launched in 1966, and later continued in the form of the International Coalition for the Liquidation of Art. Ehrenberg comments, “Metzger was the driving force behind the DIAS thing . . . and I became very interested in this elf-like person.

ceptual in nature, with a strong articulation against conservatism both aesthetic and political.¹⁶ By 1970, Ehrenberg had arrived at a clear distinction between “art” and “creation,” the former an ossifying category wielded by the elite and the latter a dynamic energy that cannot be institutionalized: “Creation and art are two completely different concepts for me. Creation is organic, it is internal matter. Art is a historic definition—a solidifying element.”¹⁷ David Mayor saw *The Seventh-Day Chicken* at Sigi Krauss’s gallery, the exhibition that gave focus to these beliefs.¹⁸ Impressed and intrigued, he invited the group to present their work at Exeter University.¹⁹ Eventually, Ehrenberg and Hellion decided to move to Devon themselves. They moved to Langford Court, “a beautiful, thatched mansion overlooking the tiny hamlet of Clyst Hydon near Cullompton,”²⁰ located about fifteen miles from the city of Exeter, which the family first shared with the illustrator Chris Welch and Madeline Gallard.²¹ Slightly later, they were joined by David Mayor, and for the next few years by a stream of artists, including Taikako Saito and Terry Reid. A Fluxus exhibition was initially conceived by Weaver, who was interested in concrete poetry and had met George Maciunas in the 1960s. After Mayor was given the responsibility for organizing the Fluxus exhibition, the project evolved from a historical show into an open call for participation. According to Ehrenberg it was “Dave’s project to gather all his fluxdocuments into a travelling show . . . that triggered the Press into being. The idea was to help all-thumbs Dave get the thing going.”²² The conversion of the show into a contemporary “living” expression of late Fluxus initiated far-flung networks that developed at the Beau Geste Press. Ehrenberg’s dislocation also did much to orient the nature of the press’s collaborations. This distance was in some way ameliorated through correspondence. In

He told me he was a citizen of the world, a passport-less citizen of the world, stuck in England.” See Valerie Fraser et al., “Interview with Felipe Ehrenberg at the University of Essex on the Eve of ‘Xocoyotzin, the Penultimate,’” *Art and Architecture of the Americas* no. 8 (2010): 6.

16 See Issa María Benítez Dueñas, “Restructuring Emptiness and Recovering Space: The Conceptual Ehrenberg,” in *Felipe Ehrenberg: Manchuria: Visión Periférica*, ed. Felipe Ehrenberg et al. (Mexico City: Editorial Diamantina S.A de C.V., 2007).

17 Quoted in *ibid.*, 26.

18 *The Seventh-Day Chicken*, a project by the short-lived Polygonal Workshop at Sigi Krauss’s gallery in Covent Garden, was an exhibition of video, photography, and trash collected during the bin workers’ strike in London in 1970. Sigi Krauss, a German resident in London, had turned his framing shop into a gallery dedicated to showing young, unknown artists.

19 Mayor is listed as a member of Polygonal Workshop for the show presented in Exeter.

20 White, “Fluxshoe.”

21 Debrouse and Medina, *La Era*, 157.

22 White, “Fluxshoe.”

1970, for example, he was able to take part in the third *Salón Independiente* in Mexico City by creating a work made of two hundred postcards that were mailed individually from London to the exhibition.²³

THE TRAVELING FLUXSHOE

The Fluxshoe exhibition was named by “an inspired typing error”: the show was initially to be called the Fluxshow.²⁴ The group’s ludic sensibility latched on to the new name, but this sense of fun did not stop the project from quickly developing into an ambitious touring exhibition of small British cities, complete with Fluxus performances and gatherings at each site.²⁵ Fluxshoe’s chance baptism was not in fact mere hazard, but rather it was emblematic of the Beau Geste Press’s approach, as well as its relationship to Fluxus and the flourishing network of mail art. In his 1965 manifesto *Fluxus Art-Amusement*, George Maciunas delineated the character of Fluxus works to be “simple, amusing, unpretentious, concerned with insignificances,” to “require no skill or countless rehearsals,” and to “have no commodity or institutional value.”²⁶ The ad hoc submission to chance reveals a deeply held commitment to “a concept, a conviction” within the Beau Geste Press that hoped to develop a network of relationships between artists that bypassed the elitist constraints of art world systems.²⁷

In 1968, the Fluxus-affiliated artist Robert Filliou proposed the idea of an “Eternal Network”: a network of artists operating outside of a commodity structure. Filliou envisioned a fellowship of artists exchanging ideas and art in this “Fête Permanent” (an ongoing festival or celebration) that would replace an avant-garde model of social transformation, “a way of life that is continuous and purposeless, with no end in sight.”²⁸

23 The work, *Obra secretamente titulada Arriba y adelante . . . y si no pues tambien* (Work Secretly Titled Upwards and Onwards . . . and If Not Then Also), was a larger-than-life painting of a topless woman proffering her breast with one hand and showing a football branded “Mexico ’70” with the other. On November 15, 1970, the two hundred postcards were sent one by one from three different post offices in London. Each was addressed to the Mexican Independent Salon at the University Museum of Science and Art (MUCA), Mexico City. The title of Ehrenberg’s work refers ironically to Luis Escheverria’s 1970 presidential campaign slogan: *Arriba y adelante*. As interior minister in 1968, Escheverria was widely considered responsible for the Tlatelolco massacre.

24 Simon Anderson, “Fluxus, Fluxion, Fluxshoe: The 1970s,” in *The Fluxus Reader*, ed. Ken Friedman (West Sussex: Academy Editions, 1998), 25.

25 See Simon Anderson’s article for a full account of the Fluxshoe.

26 George Maciunas, *Fluxus Art-Amusement* (New York: Fluxus, 1965).

27 David Mayor, *Introduction to Aktual Schmuck* (South Cullompton: Beau Geste Press, 1974), 3.

28 Steven Harris, “The Art of Losing Oneself without Getting Lost: Brecht and Filliou at the Palais Idéal,” *Papers of Surrealism* 2 (Summer 2004): 8, accessed April 4, 2012, http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal2/acrobat_files/harris_article.pdf.

As art historian Stephen Harris points out, for Filliou art was “considered as a means rather than as an end in itself” and signified an “anti-formalist artistic practice that often utilizes ‘poor’ materials; a rejection of careerism, professionalism and specialization; a rejection of labour as a positive value, in favour of play; [and] an interest in the creative organization of leisure.”²⁹ The spirit and ethos of Filliou’s Eternal Network was reflected in the Beau Geste Press’s inventive and irreverent enterprises, but it was also key to the openness that allowed translocal collaborations to develop.

Fluxshoe, as cultural historian and Fluxus scholar Simon Anderson writes, “was originally to have been a modest exercise, consisting mainly of photocopies and publications, but as it happened, with the additions and changes that organizer David Mayor allowed, it became a lesson in the living development of art, of the idea of Fluxus.”³⁰ The experimental and open nature of the Fluxshoe conspired to create what Anderson describes as “a travelling circus of experiment and adventure.”³¹ Most curiously, the “open forum” meant deviation from “classical” 1960s Fluxus and its core of operators. While there has been much debate about what or who constitutes Fluxus, the activities of the Fluxshoe remain outside its historicization; the exhibition was seen at the time as an offshoot of Fluxus, allowing Fluxus ideas to develop without the programmatic restrictions imposed by Maciunas.³² Although Maciunas stated in a 1963 letter

See also Ken Friedman, “The Wealth of Poverty and Networks,” in *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet*, ed. Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 419.

²⁹ Harris, “Art of Losing Oneself,” 1.

³⁰ Anderson, “Fluxus,” 25. The idea of a Fluxus “core” goes back to George Maciunas’s ill-fated attempts to tightly control the group, which eventually led to a split between Maciunas and Dick Higgins. See Cuauhtémoc Medina, “Fluxus: Non-Art and Anti-Art. A Study of George Maciunas” (PhD diss., University of Essex, UK, 2003). This understanding of Fluxus is compounded by the importance ascribed to US-based collections such as that built up by Lila and Gilbert Silverman, recently donated to the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the interpretations of Hannah Higgins, but it has recently been contested by exhibitions such as Fluxus East. See Petra Stegmann, ed., *Fluxus East: Fluxus-Netzwerke in Mitteleuropa: Ausstellungskatalog* [Fluxus East: Fluxus Networks in Central Eastern Europe: Exhibition Catalogue] (Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2007). For more information on Fluxus, see Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Owen Smith, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude* (San Diego, CA: San Diego State University Press, 1998); Friedman, *Fluxus Reader*.

³¹ Anderson, “Fluxus,” 25.

³² Anderson also points to a number of exhibitions focusing on key Fluxus collaborators from the 1960s: “The increasingly official and academic historicification of Fluxus visible in these shows, however, also ignores any number of sympathetic attempts to proselytise the idea, or extend the network.” *Ibid.*, 25.

to Dick Higgins that “Fluxus is a ‘collective’ and should not be associated with any particular fluxus individual,” Cuauhtémoc Medina has noted that this sense of the collective was strongly tied to Maciunas’s alignment with the Soviet Union. He would later regularly expel people from the group for perceived ideological and aesthetic transgressions.³³ Maciunas had a clear sense of what constituted the Fluxus aesthetic, even to the extent of writing to warn David Mayor of the “neo-baroque” character of Fluxshoe contributor Carolee Schneemann’s performances. They were, according to Maciunas, “the exact opposite of fluxhaiku style event.”³⁴

Other artists, however, such as the Beau Geste Press interlocutor Ken Friedman, inferred a more general democratization of the arts from Maciunas’s production of multiples and his desire to internationalize Fluxus. In the article “Notes on Concept Art,” published in the first issue of *Schmuck*, Friedman links Fluxus with the development of concept art through the figure of Henry Flynt. He states, “Concept art is not so much an art movement or vein as it is a position or world-view, a focus for activity.”³⁵ Friedman, appointed coordinator of Fluxus West by Maciunas in 1966, was a keen correspondent, promoting the internationalization of the mail art movement by publishing and circulating extensive lists of international participants. Although his ideas were received with some skepticism, this approach to Fluxus found its way into the attitudes and activities of the Beau Geste Press.³⁶ Fluxshoe’s 1970s fusion, through Friedman, of Filliou’s ethic of art as permanent play with Maciunas’s emphasis on anthologies and crafted multiples was based upon a “socially shared idea” in which “chance, opportunity, proximity, personality and willingness-to-help, were the final arbiters of entry, acceptance and continuing involvement.”³⁷ An understanding of the relationship between the Fluxshoe and 1960s Fluxus helps us to understand the motivation for developing artistic networks through anthological publishing. Filliou’s commitment to developing connections between like-minded individuals and Maciunas’s internationalist ambitions coalesced in Fluxshoe and set the parameters for the activities of the Beau Geste Press.

33 See Medina, “Fluxus: Non-Art and Anti-Art.”

34 David Mayor, ed., *Fluxshoe* (exhibition catalogue) (South Cullompton: Beau Geste Press, 1972).

35 Ken Friedman, “Notes on Concept Art,” *Schmuck* (South Cullompton: Beau Geste Press, 1972).

36 Letter from David Mayor to Bob Cobbing: “I think we can feel duly proud of this publication, even if none of us are too keen on the content.” May 23, 1973, Beau Geste Press Correspondence File, 1972–73, A-D, TGA815/3/2-5, David Mayor Collection, Tate Archive.

37 Anderson, “Fluxus,” 25.

THE BEAU GESTE PRESS: NETWORKING PRINCIPLES

The Beau Geste Press was conceived by its founders as “a new way of life” and “community of duplicators” in which artisanal printing methods met with postconceptual artistic practices: “At the Beau Geste Press we relied both on highly labour intensive practices—collating, book binding and such—and state of the art technology, such as table-top mimeo machines, electronic stencil scanners and photocopiers. This made it possible for us to pioneer the field of mail art and more importantly, book art.”³⁸ The press was named after P.C. Wren’s novel *Beau Geste*, whose eponymous hero embarks on a transterritorial adventure.³⁹ Ehrenberg makes clear the group’s motivations for setting up an independent press in a letter to Paul Brown, editor of the magazine *Transgravity*:

The answer to the uniformity of the taste, to the monopolic control of culture by the artmongers (publishers, galleryowners, museum curators, critics, the whole proverbial slew of mystifiers—sic-sick) the answer, I repeat, is to set up as many possible sources, each existing within the organic limits of their own capacities and yes, even of their immediate communities’ capacities.⁴⁰

Cuauhtémoc Medina points out that “in the final analysis the goals of the founders of the Beau Geste Press were political; they rejected and discarded the filters of economic, institutional, and good taste that had been imposed on artistic production.”⁴¹ However, as well as a negative stance on the machinations of the art world, the press was concerned with creating an alternative to that system, based on the principle of self-administration. Ehrenberg stated in his 1974 introduction to *Aktual Schmuck* that “our analysis of ways to combat thought control has led us to function the way we have done for the past two years, growing not to coalesce

38 Gilbert, “Eclectic World,” 47.

39 In the novel *Beau Geste*, an English gentleman joins the French Foreign Legion to pursue a family heirloom and restore his honor. The novel’s characters were revived in a 1966 film and were well-known, even notorious, when Ehrenberg arrived in London. Interestingly, the French phrase *beau geste* derives from anarchist poet Laurent Tailhade’s famous response to a terrorist attack in France in 1893: “Who cares about the victims if the gesture is beautiful?” The name also combined references to the press’s printing machine (a Gestetner), a word-play on *geste* and *jest* (“the “beautiful gesture” of print and craft), as well as the implications of art as being “beautiful.”

40 Quoted in Debroise and Medina, *La Era*, 158.

41 *Ibid.*, 158. These “filters” were cultural institutions and private galleries, seen to be imposing the conversion of creativity into a marketable commodity and therefore uninterested in experimental and ephemeral activities.

but to disperse. We believe that only in coordinated dispersal can strength be achieved.”⁴² The idea of establishing a great number of autonomous nodes within a system of independence is based on the notion of a complete alternative system. Therefore, central to the success of the Beau Geste Press would be interaction and participation with “as many possible sources of small groups of creators” that have “something unnameable in common.” The magazine *Schmuck* is exemplary in this respect. One of the key aspects of Beau Geste Press production and a legacy of Fluxshoe and other networks, through *Schmuck* the press established contacts with groups of artists, often operating collectively, in order to foster and consolidate a parallel system that could function outside of the “monopolic control of culture.”⁴³

THE MAGAZINE *SCHMUCK*

Published between 1972 and 1976, *Schmuck* provides a record of the connections, collaborations, and convictions of the press and reflects the strategic and pragmatic changes made during that period. *Schmuck* was an assembling magazine composed of printed multiples and object-inserts by the contributing authors and artists, and it brought together a variety of artists from a range of geographical spheres.⁴⁴ A “network of encounters and exchanges,” its circulation helped disseminate new ideas about art making that were reflected in both the art presented and the essays that appeared within its pages. Independent presses were able to demonstrate, in Felipe Ehrenberg’s words, “how easy and viable it is to ignore publishers and producer-galleries.”⁴⁵ The publication was intimately connected with the rejection of traditional art spaces and a nonhierarchical approach to the production and consumption of art, surveying the “then

42 Felipe Ehrenberg, “Introduction,” *Aktual Schmuck* (South Cullompton: Beau Geste Press, 1974), 2.

43 Ehrenberg, quoted by Debroise and Medina, *La Era*, 158.

44 According to Stephen Perkins, “the concept of assembling is very simple, contributors submit a specific number of copies of their work to a central editor who in turn collates one copy from each artists’ submissions into the final ‘assembled’ product, the number of artists submitting work defining the number of pages in each assembling. The presentation of the final magazine varies, some have loose covers inside of which the pages are placed, some are stapled together, others are bound and a number of others have been placed in a variety of different containers.” See Stephen Perkins, “Assembling Magazines (a.k.a. Compilations),” in *The Zine and E-Zine Resource Guide* (1992), accessed April 4, 2012, <http://www.zinebook.com/resource/perkins.html>; and Craig Saper, “Intimate Bureaucracies & Infrastructuralism: A Networked Introduction to Assemblings,” *Postmodern Culture* 7, no. 3 (May 1997).

45 Ehrenberg, “Introduction,” 2.

diffuse terrain of non-conformist art, and it explicitly devoted itself to distancing itself from the ‘speculative glitter’ of the mainstream art world.”⁴⁶

The title, *Schmuck*, a common insult meaning “penis” in Yiddish, continued the press’s taste for irreverent names, willfully contradicting the “beauty” of the “beau geste.” Following the publication’s editorial principle (“the magazine makes itself, not we the magazine”), Ehrenberg and Mayor allowed their Fluxus-influenced assemblage journal to be shaped by its contributors, echoing the open approach to exhibition-making adopted for Fluxshoe. *Schmuck* was not a mail art publication as such—indeed, David Mayor wrote to Taii Ashiwaza and Ikuo Shukuzawa in 1973 asking for more material for the *Japanese Schmuck*, and commenting, “I would really like to have some more ‘solid’ things from you than just mailed stuff, because I feel that it is difficult to print just-mail things in a magazine.”⁴⁷ However, the magazine and its network did owe much to correspondence art and its networks, and this is a substantial crossover among the participating artists. Many of the themes addressed by the artists, as well as the media in which they were expressed within the pages of *Schmuck*, were also central to mail art: bureaucracy, systems, language, visual poetry, conceptual art, censorship, and politics. Moreover, Ken Friedman’s correspondence networks had been crucial to the contributions to the Fluxshoe, meaning that *Schmuck* was inextricably connected to the ideas and philosophy of the movement.⁴⁸

For the Beau Geste Press, the translocal strategy of “coordinated dispersal” was a strategic elaboration aimed at setting up an autonomous art system. The cooperative’s networks were complex, deriving in part from Ehrenberg’s earlier collaborations such as the Mexican Salón Independiente (Independent Salon, 1968, 1969, 1970) and *El Corno Emplumado* from Ken Friedman’s extensive mail circuits, as well as from somewhat random personal connections and friendships. Some of the connections made at *El Corno Emplumado*, for example, continued to bear fruit at Langford Court, resulting in the publication of books by Cecilia Vicuña, Ulises Carrión, and Edgardo Antonio Vigo.⁴⁹ The eight editions of *Schmuck*

46 Debroise and Medina, *La Era*, 158.

47 Letter from David Mayor to Taii Ashiwaza and Ikuo Shukuzawa, April 1973, “Schmuck etc contributions + pending + Corr w/other publishers etc + General Dead Vol 3 (12/4/74®)” Correspondence File, TGA815/3/2/4, David Mayor Collection, Tate Archive.

48 *Schmuck* was “based on an increasingly expanded network of mail interchanges by artists carried out in the tradition of La Monte Young’s *An Anthology* (1961) and Maciunas’ *Flux Yearboxes* (1962).” Debroise and Medina, *La Era*, 158.

49 As Ehrenberg remembers, “Beau Geste Press went on to publish more Fluxus and fluxlike things, including works like Ken Friedman’s conscientious ‘The Aesthetics,’ Takako Saito’s

were circulated internationally, but each (with the exception of two, *General Schmuck* and *General Teutonic Schmuck*) was put together by an editor from a particular country, usually a leading figure in the alternative arts scene. The editions included experimental artworks from groups of associated artists from France, Iceland, Hungary, Germany, Japan, and the former Czechoslovakia. The Beau Geste Press was “viewed by its founders as a ‘link-up’ among Great Britain, Latin America, and Eastern Europe.”⁵⁰ However, the Press’s approach to geography was not at all arbitrary. Ehrenberg’s introduction to *General Schmuck* makes this clear: “We initially intended to bring out one issue per country, a nice straightforward idea (from George Maciunas), woolly enough at the edges to enable inclusion of current resident foreigners, or non-resident nationals, in my particular case, plurinationalism.”⁵¹ These comments reveal flexibility in relation to geography that undermines fixed ideas of place and nation (wherever you happened to be was where you spoke from). This was a publication that practiced internationalism through specific articulations of the local.

DEVON-BUDAPEST/DEVON-PRAGUE: *SCHMUCK* AND EASTERN EUROPE

Two editions of *Schmuck* were produced by artists working in Eastern Europe. In 1972, *Hungarian Schmuck* was published under the editorship of László Beke and Dora Maurer, and two years later *Aktual Schmuck* was published with contributions from the Czechoslovakian Aktual Group, coordinated by Milan Knížák. Both were touched by controversy. Although the artworks and ideas in these two issues of *Schmuck* did not reflect only on the political and aesthetic conditions of censorship, this context was nevertheless manifested within their covers. The crucial capacity to enact, reproduce, and distribute artistic statements was under question at all stages of publication.

Aktual Schmuck was printed and circulated after its editor Milan Knížák had been sentenced to two years in prison for subversive activities.⁵²

wondrous productions and Ulises Carrión’s sensational ‘Arguments.’ We produced my own and David’s works, those of Opal L. Nations, Mike Nyman, Carolee Schneemann (“Parts of a Body House Book”), Genesis P. Orridge, Milan Knížák, and many, many others. We even produced Sitting Dog’s methane gas producing manual which sold especially well.” In White, “Fluxshoe.”

50 Debroise and Medina, *La Era*, 158.

51 Felipe Ehrenberg, *General Schmuck* (South Cullompton: Beau Geste Press, 1975), 1.

52 He was jailed in 1966 and again in 1972. Knížák “holds the record for having been arrested over three hundred times between 1959 and 1989.” See Kristine Siles, “Performance,” in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Schiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 94.

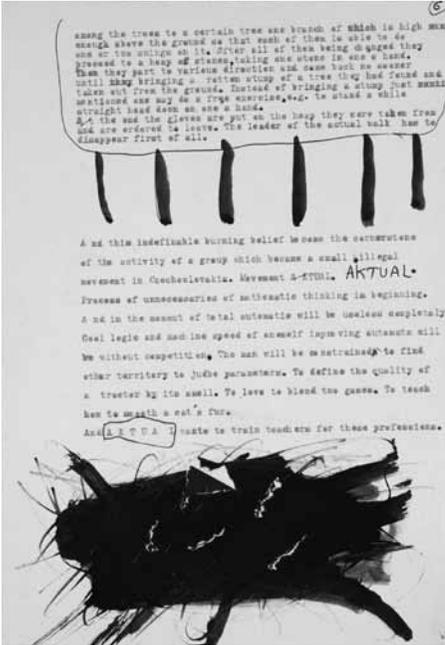
Knížák was the founder of the Aktual Group in Czechoslovakia, which since 1964 had staged happenings, events, and actions in and around Prague. In 1967 he was made “director of Fluxus East” by Maciunas. Departing somewhat from *Schmuck*’s editorial principles, *Aktual Schmuck* profiled a specific group movement rather than a broad cross section of the Czech underground. Knížák’s approach to editing *Aktual Schmuck* was to create an overall design: “I was the editor and selector of everything. I made every page myself.”⁵³ *Aktual Schmuck* was a collection of essays, photographs, texts, and instructions for actions complemented by Knížák’s designs that implored the reader to “[p]aint your nails blue, make your jewellery from anything, design your own fashion.” The photographs present a species of proto-punk fashion in which a comb, a key, a nail, and a safety pin are used as brooches. The documentation of actions displays an interest in rituals, the natural environment, and “barbaric” activities alongside an interest in fashion and body painting. The group’s credo was defined as follows:

AKTUAL
Is a way of life
It means we want to change all
The things
We touch on our way through life

The route to this change was enacted through happenings in the streets of Prague that attempted to present an alternative to the rigidity of mainstream culture, but these were precisely the kinds of activities considered undesirable by Czechoslovakian cultural policy.

Knížák’s introductory essay to *Aktual Schmuck* concerns the position of artists in Czechoslovakia in relation to “international” conceptual art. Knížák’s essay is typed in red but has been marked with revisions in ball-point pen and thick black ink. The original text is covered in thickly underlined, crossed-out, and circled areas as well as arrows and repetitions of the typed text in large capital letters, which has the effect of emphasizing parts of the earlier text. The additions render the meaning unstable and partial, while at the same time aligning it with the red and black color scheme of the rest of the issue. Knížák’s text is partially self-censored, with repeated “xxxx” marks over some words, oscillating between artistic

53 Milan Knížák, email message to the author, September 13, 2011.



Milan Knížák. "Introductory Essay," *Aktual Schmuck*, 1974. Tate Library Special Collections. Image courtesy of Milan Knížák.



Milan Knížák. "Some Aktual Jewelry," *Aktual Schmuck*, 1974. Tate Library Special Collections. Image courtesy of Milan Knížák.

statement and essay. A discussion of the Czechoslovakian situation follows, in which Knížák idiosyncratically explains the particularity of artistic production in the country. "Here in CSSR [sic] appeared xxxxxx activities known in the other world as happenings, events, actions, etc . . . but there is a big difference between such activity at other countries/especially so called western countries/xxx and at CSSR [sic]."⁵⁴ Knížák's evocation of the West as the "other world" makes it clear how profound the restriction of information to and from Czechoslovakia was. Indeed, he states: "I and also friends of mine were completely isolated, [it was] impossible to do anything in public, impossible to publish. I was permanently under police supervision."⁵⁵ In Knížák's text the idea of an almost impermeable border and a highly restricted amount of information about art attests to not only an autonomous node of the system envisioned by the Beau Geste Press but also an isolated node with an idiosyncratic approach to conceptualism.

54 Ibid.
 55 Ibid.

In 1973, the Beau Geste Press resolved to put together a seven-page document containing details of Knížák's arrest by the Czechoslovakian authorities and his subsequent sentencing in which he received two years in prison. The document was mimeographed and sent out with all the press's correspondence, reaching hundreds of their collaborators and eventually contributing to the reduction of his custodial sentence to parole. The document contained a statement by Dr. Hans Sohm, a German collector of Knížák's work who had also been arrested and interrogated by the Czech border police but was subsequently allowed to leave the country after paying a fine. Narrating the events of the morning of May 27, 1972, Sohm states, "Essentially, questions were asked about . . . the artist Milan Knížák, and his work. It was of interest to know whether the confiscated works would be exhibited, sold, or published abroad."⁵⁶ According to Sohm's statement, the main points of the charge were "attempted export of material that is intended to discredit the image of Czechoslovakia abroad and the dissemination of pornographic pictures and writing."⁵⁷ Interestingly, this capacity to reproduce and distribute information was both the reason for Knížák's arrest and, later, the means by which he obtained his freedom.

The second publication that developed the Beau Geste Press's links with and dissemination of Eastern European activities was *Hungarian Schmuck*. Organized by László Beke and Dora Maurer, it provided a broad overview of the Hungarian art scene.⁵⁸ The twenty-four artists who contributed to *Hungarian Schmuck* made a joint statement that spuriously and ironically claimed that they had withheld their permission to publish the issue, stating,

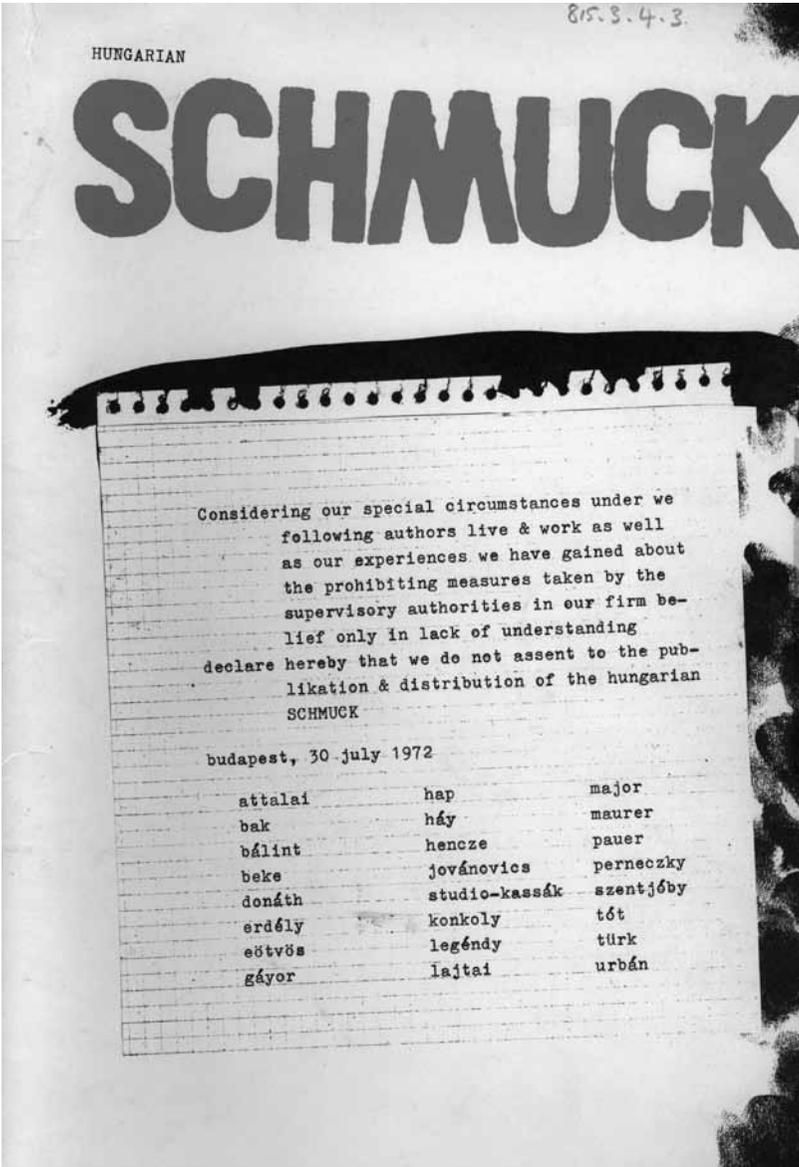
Considering our special circumstances under which we following artists live and work as well as our experiences we have gained about the prohibiting measures taken by the supervisory authorities in our firm belief of a lack of understanding declare hereby that we do not assent to the publication and distribution of the Hungarian SCHMUCK [sic].⁵⁹

56 *Action on Behalf of Milan Knížák* (South Cullompton: Beau Geste Press, 1973), 3.

57 *Ibid.*, 3.

58 David Mayor met Dora Maurer through the German mail artist and art historian Klaus Groh in Oldenburg, Germany. Mayor asked Maurer to compile a Hungarian edition of *Schmuck*. Maurer had an Austrian passport and therefore was able to travel. Dora Maurer, email message to the author, December 19, 2011.

59 Dora Maurer and László Beke, *Hungarian Schmuck* (South Cullompton: Beau Geste Press, 1972).



Dora Maurer and László Beke. Front cover of *Hungarian Schmuck*, 1972. Tate Library Special Collections. Image courtesy of Dora Maurer.

Printed on the front cover of the issue, the statement may attest to “lack of understanding” as a deliberate strategy of obfuscation or to the “lack of understanding” of the would-be censors when confronted with their work. Artist Andre Tót recounts that censorship in Hungary was erratic in this period and did not always extend to the postal service, open-

ing up possibilities for unique lines of communication beyond local and intimate circles.⁶⁰

The contents of these two issues of *Schmuck* demonstrate just how crucial the publication was in enabling the production and dissemination of artwork. Dora Maurer comments that the artists “were part of an alternative art scene, which was forbidden in Hungary: no exhibitions, no publicity.”⁶¹ The reproduction and distribution of the material in the form of a widely distributed magazine would have been impossible to achieve in Czechoslovakia or Hungary at the time. According to Knížák, *Aktual Schmuck* was not distributed in Czechoslovakia: “I got very few copies. . . . If they sent more they never came to me—the police were always controlling my mail.”⁶² László Beke explained that the art scene was very limited in Budapest as they had “neither galleries nor any art collectors,” adding that “Our possibilities for exhibitions and publications are very rare. We are also aware of the momentarily general and grave period of crisis of art.”⁶³ The crucial and contested natures of networks, contacts, circulation, and publishing are starkly apparent and serve to magnify what was at stake for the whole network: freedom of expression and information together with resistance to varied forms of censorship. The idea that those who collaborated had something “unnameable” in common refers to a collective spirit that, rather than coalescing around a fixed set of ideas—the old notion of avant-gardist revolutionary goals rejected by the ongoing project of Filliou’s Eternal Network—they together espoused a set of open principles that centered on maintaining artistic activity beyond the control of the state or art market.

Conceptual methods translated well in Eastern Europe because of their flexibility and the availability of materials through which to articulate their aesthetic concerns, while also reaching a broader audience. Beke’s article “‘Concept’ Art as the Possibility of Young Hungarian Artists” [sic] posits that in Hungary “there is no concept art in its severe and original sense” but that instead “there is a very vivid and strong tendency of young artists who have started consciously from the social and histori-

60 Tót recalls that at one time during the 1970s, “The control of the KGB was not so strong. My sending letters was scarcely controlled or not at all and because of that I could communicate very well with the western world.” Klara Kemp-Welch, interview with Tót, Cologne, January 6, 2006, quoted in Kemp-Welch, “Figures of Reticence: Action and Event in East-Central European Conceptualism 1965–1989” (PhD diss., University of London, 2008), 149.

61 Maurer, email message.

62 Knížák, email message.

63 László Beke, “‘Concept’ Art as the Possibility of Young Hungarian Artists,” in Maurer and Beke, *Hungarian Schmuck*, n.p.

cal decidedness existing in their country.”⁶⁴ In their introductory essays, both Beke and Knížák are at pains to point out the impact of their specific contexts on the manifestation of conceptual art. Beke argues that while the works in *Schmuck* might look like any other conceptual work, and are not therefore stylistically particular to Hungary, they “may carry some special meaning.”⁶⁵ Further stating that “we neither intend to do ‘particularly’ Hungarian art, nor to be characteristic,” Beke points out that rather than trying to keep up with international trends, the motivations for using “new vehicles” (written texts, photographs, Xerox copies, mailings, etc.) are that they “are relatively easily available and free and flexible for us . . . with the help of these new media appearing as an international language for us we should like to give information about our particular problems and results, generally speaking about our special situation.”⁶⁶ These shared values compelled translocal collaboration, but *Schmuck* also enabled artists to engage in an idiosyncratic approach to conceptualism that could respond to their own particular needs. The importance of reciprocal exchange with artists from outside Hungary is made clear in Beke’s closing statement: “We send our greetings to every friend of ours who communicates with us . . . and welcome those friends of ours who will communicate with us.”⁶⁷

With a closer look at *Hungarian Schmuck*, its collaborative model can be discerned more clearly. The artworks reproduced in the publication reveal a deep concern with structuralist ideas about language as a system, a key concern for conceptualism worldwide. Endre Tót’s contribution, part of his *Zero Joys* series and also known as *NOTHING AIN’T NOTHING*, explores the limits of language within a framework of communication, ironically managing to communicate through mail art and publishing, but without communicating anything (linguistically) at all. Klara Kemp-Welch explains that Tót used the mail network, “but paradoxically only in order to communicate variations on the theme of the zero.”⁶⁸ Tót provides us with an interesting example of engagement with structuralist ideas on language and communication in a context of censorship. *Zero Joys* were sequences of zeros that substituted words in his letters and statements, and sometimes the zeros replaced whole sentences. In his 1971/1972 artist’s book *Incomplete Informations/Verbal and Visual*, Tót writes,

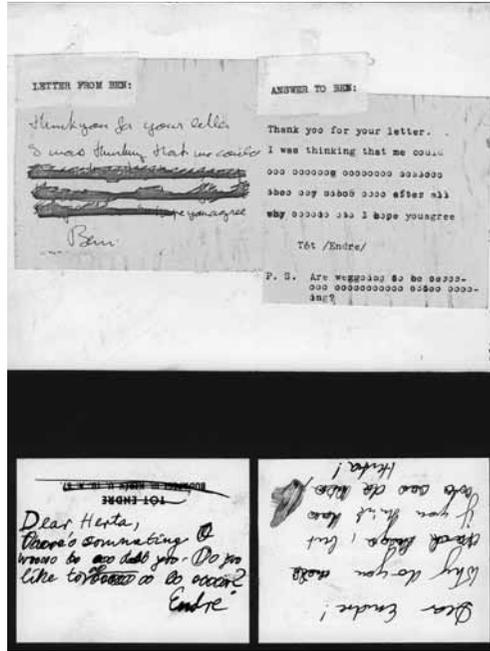
64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Kemp-Welch, “Figures of Reticence,” 156.



Endre Tót. *Zero Joys*, Hungarian *Schmuck*, 1972. Tate Library Special Collections. Image courtesy of Endre Tót.

“What you don’t understand write in a language that cannot be understood by anyone.”⁶⁹ Despite the fact that he was seeking to connect and communicate through the post, Tót had developed a visual language that failed to carry explicit information. Kemp-Welch also points out that Tót’s use of English as his main language of communication testifies to his desire to locate his discourse within an international field, but this self-conscious attempt is accompanied by a critique of the possibility of a shared, let alone a universal, language. However suspect Tót may have found it, having a common aesthetic language and a common artistic and ideological position did enable a degree of communication between artists across borders.

AMÉRICA LATINA: THE MISSING *SCHMUCK*

In 1973, a call for contributions to a Latin American edition of *Schmuck* was distributed by the Beau Geste Press, stating, “Our basic politics is not to make even one concession to the speculative pressures that exalt the ego and deform thought and creativity. We hope to serve as a point

⁶⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 150.

of information between Latin America and Europe.”⁷⁰ This broad political standpoint indicates the common ground of the press’s collaborators. By early 1974, a wealth of contributions had been delivered to its headquarters in Devon. That same spring, however, Ehrenberg moved back to Mexico, taking this material with him with the intention of publishing a Latin American issue under the splintered imprint of Beau Geste Press: Libro Acción Libre. Ehrenberg relates that by the time he settled on a small coffee farm in Xico, Veracruz, he found himself “completely unable to relate to the mathematics of European logic or Eurocentric culture,”⁷¹ which, intriguingly, seems to have included the conceptual production of his Latin American colleagues.

Ehrenberg recalls, however, that “much spilled over” from his recent past, including the problem of the missing *Schmuck*. In 1978, Ehrenberg returned to the abandoned material: “Thanks in part to a Guggenheim award, it finally became possible to convert the Latin American material I had filed away into an impressive show . . . at the Museo Carrillo Gil in Mexico City.”⁷² Moreover, the National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA) printed 260,000 copies of a two-part cultural supplement that finally published the material originally intended for *Schmuck*. *Testimonios de Latinoamérica* boasted contributions from some of the region’s most celebrated mail artists, conceptual artists, and writers such as Antonio Caro, Cildo Meireles, Clemente Padín, Victor Muñoz, Tunga, Regina Silveira, Harry Gamboa, and Horacio Zabala.

The first installment of *Testimonios* was released on September 20, 1978, and featured the work of seventeen artists from the region accompanied by articles by critic Néstor García Canclini and by Ehrenberg himself. Like Knížák and Beke, García Canclini and Ehrenberg weigh up conceptualism’s expediency for the specific conditions of the Latin American context. García Canclini argues that conceptual strategies are relevant to Latin America insofar as they can be used to “rethink the idea of art.” Accordingly, the region requires “a critique of the language used to critique society. . . . Because we cannot conceive a distinct society if we continue to perceive and represent the present with the philosophy that produced it.”⁷³ The idea of language—aesthetic or linguistic—as a structurally determined system that could reproduce only societal inequali-

70 *Schmuck América Latina* (1973) (V B.G.P.LXXIIIa,7EHRE), Tate Library Special Collections.

71 Felipe Ehrenberg, “Fluxus Has Always Seemed to Me to Be about Collaboration,” *Fluxus Research*, Special Issue of *Lund Art Press* 2, no. 2 (1991): 21.

72 *Ibid.*, 21.

73 Néstor García Canclini, “Art That’s Not for Sale,” *Testimonios de Latinoamérica*, National Institute of Fine Arts no. 42 (September 20, 1978): 3.



Testimonios de Latinoamérica, 1978. Front cover with a reproduction of a work by Waltercio Caldas. Image courtesy of Waltercio Caldas.

ties and political crises is repeatedly addressed, as is the idea of creating new languages, echoing the skepticism surrounding the act of communication through conventional linguistic structures expressed in the work of Endre Tót. However, instead of addressing the limitations of communicative possibilities as a result of censorship and self-censorship, the critique focuses on communication constrained by conservative artistic practices.

The invitation to participate in a Latin American edition of *Schmuck* presented an opportunity for artists' reflections on artistic and political issues to reach an international forum. Horacio Zabala's contribution testifies to the political situation in Argentina, at the same time interrogat-

ing the possibilities for art practice. The lapse of time between the material being created and its publication had seen the end of one dictatorial regime in 1973 and the establishment of a new one in 1976. Zabala's *Anteproyectos* (Pre-projects) are sinister prisons designed for vanguard artists and left-wing dissidents. The structures are depicted floating in isolation in a fictional river or buried underground, while everyday street life continues above.⁷⁴ The sterile architectural design solution comments upon the political situation, in which Zabala's projects are barely even preposterous. However, in this project, closely related to Zabala's mail art project *Hoy el arte es una cárcel* (Today Art Is a Prison), carried out between 1972 and 1976, Zabala not only was criticizing the military junta but also reflecting on the position of art and the artist, of information and fiction.⁷⁵ The text accompanying the work states that "art is a pre-project," defined as "imprecise ruminations that precede more precise projects in order to arrive at a work or an action."⁷⁶ This concern with exploring the limits and possibilities of art, which is central to conceptualism, was coupled with deconstructing the systems of violence that remained invisible in the context of the Argentinean everyday.

Testimonios's concerns with semiotics, the symbolic order, and communications media are comparable to the Eastern European issues of *Schmuck*. The destabilization of linguistic processes we have seen in the work of Endre Tót and Milan Knížák is manifest in the contributions by Mario Montefiore, a Guatemalan writer living in exile in Mexico; the Colombian Gabriel García Márquez; and the Mexican artist resident in Amsterdam, Ulises Carrión, in Part Two of *Testimonios*, published a week later. Montefiore presents two works: on the left of the allotted page we find a roughly sketched portrait of the author marked "London 20/V/72." On the right side of the page a handwritten text has been carelessly scribbled out, intentionally obscuring the underlying narrative. García Márquez's contribution is a book-shaped black rectangle printed diagonally across the page, from which part of the black "cover" has been removed to reveal a small but ultimately unintelligible segment of prose. The text is partial to the point of illegibility, and so, once more, narrative is thwarted

74 Felipe Ehrenberg, "Testimonios de Latinoamérica," *Testimonios*, 5.

75 Zabala's project was an extensive investigation into this theme. He sent hundreds of preprinted forms—a convention of mail art projects—headed by the statement "Today, Art Is a Prison" and asking for responses. In 1976, the results of this collaborative work were published as a book and presented in an exhibition.

76 Horacio Zabala, text from the work reproduced in *Testimonios de Latinoamérica*, National Institute of Fine Arts no. 42 (September 20, 1978), 4.

nacular culture of Mexico. Ehrenberg meditates on the subtleties and imperatives of cultural translation, musing,

The reader may question the use of languages that are foreign to the Latin American continent; but facing the repression, facing the lack of resources, facing the necessity to enrich their experiences, the artist emigrates, travels. In exile and in his desire to communicate, he often adopts—while temporarily—the languages of a society that receives him. Other times, and exactly to overcome the inherent limitations of such a language (theirs or foreign), the creator invents their own alphabets.⁸⁰

Ehrenberg's conflation of artistic and verbal language testifies to a sense of shared experience of emigration, dictatorship, lack of resources, and the desire to communicate. However, in this case—as distinct from the *Schmuck* anthologies produced in Eastern Europe—the varied localities come to reflect shared values, a pan-Latin American solidarity between two points. Like Knížák and Beke, Ehrenberg is extremely aware of the relation between “alien” artistic languages and the local context; yet a third position is also proposed: in order to overcome the limitations of either local or foreign languages, the artist invents a new language according to his or her own needs. Conceptualism, for Ehrenberg, seems to oscillate between an alien aesthetic language, a language through which he could connect with other artists across borders, and a flexible tool with which to invent new languages. Like the principle of the open network, conceptual methods were by definition open to reinvention.

Although the material originally intended for *Schmuck* did not change with its metamorphosis into *Testimonios de Latinoamérica*, the audience it reached did. The publication was distributed through Mexico's system of daily newspaper circulation—reaching a broad public—rather than through Beau Geste Press's worldwide artists' networks. Ehrenberg saw this as a fitting way for the works to circulate; the newspaper was thoroughly removed from “aestheticized” elite art publications: “This type of production achieves an almost total escape from the mercantile structures that condition artistic production in Latin America.”⁸¹ This change had to do with Ehrenberg's misgivings about his own position as a Mexican artist who had emigrated and returned. Although the change in strategy

80 Ehrenberg, “Testimonios,” 2.

81 *Ibid.*, 2.

was somewhat pragmatic, Ehrenberg's move and the Mexican National Institute of the Fine Arts agreement to back the show was what precipitated it, what it really shows is the flexibility of the networking model pursued by the Beau Geste Press, and the Press's dedication to publishing—to *making public*—artistic endeavors across borders.

FACETS OF TRANSLOCALITY

What all these translocal nodes had in common was “unnameable” because it was not a programmatic ideological connection or set of goals. Instead, artists took on a broad ideological position against global capitalism: a commitment to furthering the cultural and political gains of 1960s and 1970s counterculture, the promotion of artistic freedoms, and an experimental outlook that was more concerned with process, ideas, and systems than with sending objects to market. Translocalism had a particular significance in politically oppressive climates: as a means of escape, especially considering that the work in some cases acted as a wishful proxy for the body. Dora Maurer describes the effect of *Hungarian Schmuck* as “fresh air” and a “mental support” for artists.⁸² In some ways, translocal communication might be thought of as one locality temporarily traveling into another in the form of the mailed artifact. This breach, however tiny, enables the establishment of an alternative artistic economy based on gift exchange, and contrasts with the immediate reality that one experiences. This notion corresponds with the fact that the artists wished for their experiences to be known in other contexts. The Aktual Group's desire to enact a futurist-style total aesthetic stands as a direct response to an overtly controlled public sphere, and the ability to collaborate translocally enabled their alternative vision to become a reality in print, if not in Czechoslovakia itself. *Testimonios de Latinoamérica* also published material that could not have circulated in the countries where the works originated; as such, the translocal functions as a transference of a moment and a context to a different one.

What is the significance of these ad hoc networking structures—a press based in England, co-run by a Mexican artist, with international visitors, printing a magazine produced in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Japan, or Iceland—for how we write about and try to understand circulatory cross-border practices? Networks such as these prove resistant to explanation and definition when we employ cartographic approaches to art history (“Latin American” or “Eastern European” art), or notions of center

82 Maurer, email message.

and periphery. Art that is in flux by definition resists attempts to locate it, if to locate a work of art is to place it within a period, a context, or a set of geographical coordinates. Magazines like *Schmuck* and other networking models, such as mail art, suspend the cartographic, temporal, and spatial operatives that usually govern the historicization of artistic production. Circulatory practices refuse to settle comfortably: in their flights and voyages they defy the gravity of art historical methods, demanding that we continue to think.⁸³ This demand happens not only because networked art challenges common assumptions about what constitutes art—the categories of object, author, and materiality—but also because it questions how we try to understand, record, archive, and organize knowledge. The continuation of thought that is provoked by mail art’s productive and antagonistic tensions is a condition that continues to permeate its historicization in exhibitions, publications, and museum practice.

The rejection of geographical boundaries as the primary means of defining the parameters of artistic production is a first step toward understanding the dynamics, nuances, and complexities of this period. Networking practices and their international scope demonstrate the dialectical rather than oppositional nature of Latin American and Eastern European contacts with the rest of the world, nullifying in the process the geography-based category of ideological conceptualism. Translocal artistic strategies encourage an art historical approach that encompasses varied genealogies and interdisciplinary thought (communications theory, cybernetics, systems and media theory, as well as philosophy and anthropology), the rapid exchange of ideas, and the decentralization of artistic practice.

Mail art’s unique contribution, as a broadly defined conceptual practice, lies in the fact that artists were able to take part in a global movement that was ideologically motivated in the broadest sense because the principle of “openness” was not to be sacrificed to programmatic goals. For this reason, the Beau Geste Press decided to leave the common ground between artists unnamed.⁸⁴ In the networked 1970s, artists were counterhegemonic mostly in spirit; however, the translocal networks examined here did enunciate at least some of their goals. In their pursuit of freedom of artistic expression, mail artists created a space in which censorship (whether inflicted by the art market or the state) could be contested.

83 Mauricio Marcin, “Arte Correo en un libro,” insert in *Arte Correo*, ed. Mauricio Marcin (Mexico City: Museo de la Ciudad, 2011), 12.

84 For twenty-first-century practice, Maja and Reuben Fowkes sum up this political standpoint as being “in the spirit of counter-globalisation rather than corporate globalism.”

The “open” ideology mentioned above relates directly to Filliou’s proposition of an ongoing festival of communication: his Eternal Network. The model goes beyond the programmatic goals of the avant-garde to promote dialogic, rather than one-way, communication. The importance of the Beau Geste Press lies in the fact that it enabled and made visible connections artists felt with colleagues and friends in other locations, a spirit expressed by Beau Geste Press collaborator Cecilia Vicuña: “We didn’t have the sense that this is Argentina, this is Chile, this the border, that is Europe; we had the feeling . . . there was a humanity searching for itself.”⁸⁵ The artist Paulo Bruscky goes further, stating that the network “managed to end the idea of nationality in the arts.”⁸⁶ On the basis of this counterhegemonic spirit artists were able to explore the political realities in their respective countries, while at the same time acting within a flexible global network of communication. While a degree of cynicism was maintained concerning conceptual art as an imported “Western” artistic language, and indeed concerning the possibility of communication altogether, translocal networking practices did carry with them an implicit critique that originated in marginal or postcolonial sites. In networked art *all* artistic manifestations are local, whether they occur in San Francisco, Devon, Mexico City, La Plata, or New York City.

85 Valerie Fraser, “Interview with Cecilia Vicuña,” January 4, 2011, Santiago, Chile, unpublished.

86 Paulo Bruscky in *As Aventuras de Paulo Bruscky*, dir. Gabriel Mascaro (DVD, 2010).