



Roberto Jacoby
Juice of Theory

THE INVITATION to participate in this theory symposium has not ceased to surprise me, since I am someone who has never seriously studied or written about art theory. But then, as I played with the concepts and metaphors on the table during the symposium, I said to myself that just like the Argentines, Chileans, Peruvians, Brazilians and Colombians, we too would come to be a South with respect to Mexico and its northern neighbors, in the same way praxis would come to be a South with respect to theory. Practice doubtless belongs to the imaginary territory of work but also of the sexual, the body, terrains, disorder and violence. There's a reason they call it fieldwork. Practice means getting your hands dirty.

So far from straining to raise myself to the level of the abstract and the general, I'll try to come down to a highly detailed imagination with regard to local practices, some of the theoretical, in which to some degree I intervened in 2008. It was for this reason I entitled my presentation *Jugo de teoría (Juice of Theory)*.

2008 started off badly for me. In December, the *Belleza y Felicidad* Gallery, in Buenos Aires's Almagro neighborhood, closed. Since 1999, I had considered it a beacon on the art scene—a combination publishing house, gallery, cultural center, orphanage, asylum and house of worship.

That event, along with the conclusion of several cultural projects having to do with the millennium and other regressive social processes,

provoked a sort of depression that pointed to a moment of general as well as personal stagnation.

Here we see the *Belleza* Gallery's closing, with this sort of sweater or poncho that Marina de Caro put over it.

Soon after, the year "went Mexican," practically auguring that I would be here today.

I was quite excited by an invitation to participate, in Mexico City, in the Rockumenta project, an art and music event—though also much more—organized by Carlos Amoraes, Julián Lede and Axel Velazquez.

When I started to research today's Mexico, I was struck by the cases of musical and singing groups that were being murdered in considerable numbers. My friend Judi Werthein and I thought about doing something at Rockumenta, but luckily we consulted with Olivier Debroise—our idea seemed horrible to him—and so we avoided that mistake.

We also thought about doing an edition of *Ramona* magazine in Mexico, along with a writing workshop where the printed articles could be read at the same time, as large-format posters.

So we started working and contacted Francisco Reyes Palma, Olivier Debroise, Carlos Amoraes and probably a number of others, to get the names of people who, in their judgment, should be our writers on that issue. Our e-mail list comprised more than 100 people and the magazine was on its way.

Ramona 78, subtitled "Art and Memory: Current Questions" came out in March.

Ramona is published ten times annually. It operates under Guadalupe Maradei's efficient management and with an editorial board that reviews historians and philosophers such as Ana Longoni, José Fernandez Vega, and Roberto Amigo as well as artists like Graciela Hasper, Fernanda Laguna, Judi Werthein and me.

The memory issue, edited by Ana Longoni, went against nostalgic tendencies to show that a profound process of reflection and collective struggle can make possible the incorporation of historical experience as a value and not as an obstacle in an attempt to visualize current and future conditions of existence.

Within a few days, in March, I went to the RIAA, an international residency we began organizing with Gachi Hasper, Diana Aisenberg

and Melina Berkenwald three years ago, in an old beach hotel some 400 km outside Buenos Aires. For fifteen days and with twenty artists—half of them Argentine and the other half from the rest of the Americas and Europe—we created the model of an ideal society (proyectoriaa.org.ar).

In April, *Ramona* 79 was dedicated to design and Carolina Muzi, an expert who was also then curating the *Genealogías del Sur: conductas del diseño* show, at the MALBA, edited.

The still photos from the video entitled *La castidad (Chastity)*, part of a project I developed from September 2006 till August 2007, were shown for the first time in May. The project was an agreement with sociologist and artist Syd Krochmalny to foment platonic friendships, i.e., to share our readings, music, work and dwellings within a framework of chastity. We organized three banquets at the behest of Periférica, a convention with more than 70 artist-produced spaces, at which we brought together groups of artists that were or had been working by means of friendship and collaboration. Under the subtitle of “Tecnologías de la Amistad” (“Technologies of Friendship”), we published *Ramona* 69.

We also published *Ramona* 80, which—like all issues numbers that ended in zero, i.e., 50, 60, 70, 80, etc., included texts by artists. This is something we’ve done at *Ramona* for four years running now.

The artists write about one of their works and describe its production process, highlight the traditions and ideas to which they refer, and they choose highly significant works or shows by other artists.

The written pieces’ titles are revealing. “How to Represent Pain Without Shouting”... “I Let Myself Be Seduced By Things That Pulled Me Away from What I Was Really Seeking”... “Working the Coneja Remote Control Daily”... “Architecture of the Sublimated Periphery...” “Images That Call for Rain.”

On June 19th, the “*The Age of Discrepancies*” show opened at the Malba, and it was a real moment of discrepancy in Argentina, with protest marches, roadblocks, and food shortages provoked by rural landowners, from the biggest landowners to small farmers of Italian descent often called *gringos* to distinguish them from the group called *criollos*. The nation was divided by a level of hate that until recently had never been known, fired up by the media

monopoly in my country. I was leaving the Era opening when I felt a need to put on my farmer clothes—my *gringo* outfit—and let myself be seen there, to make some buffoonish commentary on the situation, which I hated. So that’s what I did and then I called it “No hay Malba que por bien no venga” (a play on the rough Spanish translation of “No good deed goes unpunished”) or “Crítica a la política del campo” (“Critique of Rural Policy”).

With that we linked together various actions we could call political, concerning a very local political situation, with idiosyncratic humor you can see for yourself on YouTube if you like, under the title “Roberto 100000”. It’s hard to get the humor unless you’re from Argentina and have a certain amount of historical experience.

Here you have a more elaborate version of my clown-like arguments, with the help of the dirty pink group, that lent me its cart, and with other artists in an act we did in the plaza in front of the Argentine National Congress. This second action was called “Hasta la Victoria Ocampo” (a play on the Cuban revolutionary slogan and the name of Victoria Ocampo) that referred to Maoist and Trotskyist groups who supported rural interests as well as to Victoria Ocampo, the aristocrat writer and editor of *Sur* magazine.

As a consequence of this joke, Mariela Scafatti and her silk-screening group printed this tee shirt and we also sold it at the large-scale protests that were then taking place in Buenos Aires.



Meanwhile *Ramona* 81, “Qué Viva México” (“Long Live Mexico”) appeared. It opened with the unhappy news that Olivier Debroise had died.

Almost 30 contributions exceeded page space and the last articles to be handed in were published on *Ramona*’s web page. I couldn’t say if the articles were representative of all the tendencies that exist together here, but the distance between reading a text and being in this city—seeing its activity, meeting and talking with its authors—is tremendous. Doubtless the original project of an open edition, where the magazine would be presented live, would have produced something quite different.

July’s *Ramona* 82, edited by Ana Longoni, is a polemic between four researchers (Spain’s Jaime Vindel, Miguel López from Peru, Fernando Davis, an Argentine and Longoni) who all work on the 1960s avant-gardes.

The real bombshell was a piece by Vindel that questioned a series of commonplaces in Argentine historiography with regard to the sixties. It provoked responses, reformulations, points and counterpoints

A graphic revolution in the magazine started as well, based on a decision to cease publication with issue 101 or 102.

Then came my birthday in a José Garáfalo tango bar. This is the very last bit of drinking, after the decent people had gone home.

A little bit later the farmer came back, but now he was converted into gaucho poetry—Argentina’s oldest avant-garde tradition. He recited a Leonidas Lamborghini poem on the death of his father, within an adobe installation by Catalina León.

On July 11 I opened a show at Appetite Gallery that I named *1968: el culo te abrocho* (*1968: I’ll Kick Your Ass*). There are 28 documents that reference that year, almost all of them from my own archives, which I mixed with songs I wrote a long time back: phrases translated from the *Apocrypha* and quotations from Marx.

In *Ramona* 83, from August, Guadalupe Maradei edits a dossier about blogs, flogs and José Luis Meirás as well as another dedicated to the 70th anniversary of Breton and Trotsky’s *Manifesto Towards a Free Revolutionary Art*.

Ramona 84, from September, was the height of conceptual sophistication: Reinaldo Laddaga edits the translations of every article on the art world that he could read in a week.

A dossier on art and right-wing politics, where Robert Amigo widely documents the relationship between Antonio Berni, an emblem of the Argentine canon, and one of the military junta's commanders; another article traces the relationship between one of Mussolini's mistresses and critic Romero Brest.

Ramona 85 was edited by Gonzalo Aguilar and dedicated to Duchamp, the subject of a show at Proa. He gathered, rescued and translated Duchamp-inspired texts from Augusto de Campos to Cage.

On 22 October I started a financial operation at the Galería Ruth Benzacar called "Arte, la inversión segura" ("Art: The Safe Investment"). It sought to escape the danger of the dollar in crisis, exchanging it for an art currency. The office imitated the gallery reception, which meant it wasn't mentioned in any media reports.

Ramona 86's graphic identity is decidedly shaky. The issue centers on an old strategic article by Mari Carmen Ramírez. There's an interview with Luis Camnitzer on conceptualism and a previously unpublished article by Arthur Danto about one of Duchamp's works.

On 28 November along with Fernanda Laguna, we're presenting "Donaciones" ("Donations") at the Ernesto de la Cárcova Museum in Buenos Aires, a university museum dedicated sculpture replicas and reproductions. The project was commissioned by Haudenschild Garage as part of *Un crimen tiene muchas historias* (*A Crime Has Many Different Stories*). It represents the foundation of a new copy museum in greater Buenos Aires, in a space that includes art workshops for children and young people.

And this very Saturday is the opening for the main piece, which is the foot of Michelangelo's *David*.

At the same time we donated its first modern piece to the Museo de la Cárcova museum: a replica of Duchamp's *Female Fig Leaf*. It's likely that starting with this donation the museum will open a section of modern and contemporary art replicas.

Finally, *Ramona* 87—the last issue this year, and to be called Rosana, since it will be dedicated to a discussion on art in Argentina during the

80s and 90s in relation to the Centro Rojas gallery, which was said to specialize in “pink” and “light” art.

We’re also organizing the Bola de Nieve prize, on line, where artists elect artists. We’re nearly a thousand at this point.

There’s a week of performances we organized with Vivi Tellas that we’re calling Volare, and the Vivo Dito site where performances in Argentina since 1811 are registered.

To wrap up the year, we’re beginning a new project with Judi Werthein and Gachi Hasper: the Centro de Investigaciones Artísticas.

The Centro de Investigaciones Artísticas (CIA) is a virtual and physical crossroads for artists and thinkers around the world, especially Latin America, who study and seek to intervene in today’s changing cultural maps.

At the CIA, projects from all artistic genres come together, with an emphasis on those that blur the lines between practice, genre and media, artistic and extra-artistic materials; or those that propose new forma with regard to production, exhibition, and exchange; those that expand notions of “audience,” “work,” and “author;” and those that explore wider social contexts than those of the institutionalized art scene.

CIA begins operations in Buenos Aires in August 2009.



Closing of the Gallery Belleza y Felicidad, Buenos Aires, 2008