

CRACKING OPEN THE SYSTEMS: MEDIA, MATERIALITY, AND AGENCY IN TERESA BURGA'S SELF-PORTRAIT. STRUCTURE. REPORT. 9.6.72.¹

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*Relying on media archaeology of Friedrich Kittler, this article examines a large-scale installation, *Self-Portrait. Structure. Report. 9.6.72* (1972), by Peruvian artist Teresa Burga (b. Iquitos, 1935) in comparison with the structuralist underpinnings of the dominant formulations of Conceptual art. I argue that in *Self-Portrait*, Burga mobilizes the logic of the media in order to open up closed, disciplinary system inscribed within both tautological/linguistic and so-called critical currents of Conceptual art. Under a familiar concept, Burga's project combines diagrams, blueprints, photographs, medical records, light, and sound. Thus, it functions at the critical juncture of language, media, and material experiences. On the one hand, through text-based proposals and diagrams, Burga asserts the role of the artist as a creator of ideas—the paradigm of Conceptual art. On the other, she puts forth encounters with highly experiential structures, prevalent in minimal, postminimal, and technology-based art. I investigate how the artist deploys the logic of the media to transpose the content of the documents, which at first seem to constitute a repressive, police-like, archival system. I maintain that as a consequence of the transposition, Burga manifests that in reality the discourse and the media are not equivalent. In her *Self-Portrait* there are impassable gulfs between every single element of the piece, even if they are all supposed to encompass just one body. Therefore, by exposing self-contained and self-referential limitedness of discourse, Burga decenters the subject and opens up spaces of freedom in the closed systems that captured the imagination of her generation.*

Key Words: Teresa Burga, Conceptual Art, Technology-based art, subjectivity, transpositions

In June 1972, a 37-year-old Peruvian artist Teresa Burga realized her arguably most expansive and ambitious installation to-date.



Teresa Burga, *Autorretrato Estructura Informe 9.6.72* [*Self-Portrait Structure Report 9.6.72*]. Mixed-media installation with drawings, photographs, medical records, light object, and sound. Dimensions variable. Installation view from the gallery of Instituto Cultural Peruano-Norteamericano (ICPNA), Lima, 1972. Courtesy Teresa Burga and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.

Entitled *Autorretrato Estructura Informe 9672* [Self-Portrait Structure Report 9672], it was shown at the gallery of *Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano* (ICPNA—Peruvian-North-American Cultural Institute) in Lima. Under the familiar concept of a self-portrait, the installation amassed an extensive collection of data, comprised of diagrams, photographs, documents, medical records, blueprints, light, and sound. Like the majority of Burga's projects executed after 1968, which are presented as text-based, typed proposals and technical schemes, at first glance *The Self-Portrait* seems to strictly adhere to “the aesthetic of administration.”² Indeed, the installation *looks* as if the content of a filing cabinet of a diligent bureaucrat were methodologically put on display; thus rendering visible an archive as the primary biopolitical means of production of modern subjectivity. However, by simultaneously

offering a possibility to *materialize* abstract—both numerical or linguistic—data through objects and experiences based in media and technology, Burga points to the possibility of undermining the hegemony of linguistic and, more broadly, representational structures. Her installation reveals gaps and cracks between different archival inscription systems that regiment the subjectivity and the body, and, as such, limit the realm of possibilities of an individual agency.³ As a result of exposing constructed, self-contained, and self-referential limitations of discourse, Burga decenters the subject and opens up spaces of freedom in the closed systems that captured the imagination of her generation.

Paradoxically, though, it is the explicit anti-didacticism and anti-orthodoxy in Burga's work that contributed to the fact that her propositions were obscured and disappeared by the dominant discourses on so-called Conceptual art.⁴ In contrast to the purified genealogy of the art historical canon, Burga's formative experiences—her work with the Peruvian self-proclaimed avant-garde group Arte Nuevo, between 1966 and 1968, and her Fulbright Fellowship at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), between 1968 and 1970—occurred during the period of a radical ferment of the global political and artistic scene. They coincided with and contributed to the explosion of a variety of new, yet-uncodified phenomena, which under a myriad of monikers (in the United States: conceptual, concept, idea, or information art; anti-form, systems, earth or process art) sought to redefine not only the art object itself but also the artwork—spectator interaction.⁵ They all pushed back against Greenbergian formalism and called for total reconfiguration of artistic production. Within that array no categorical boundaries existed yet between what would later become canonized as Conceptual art and a variety of experiments with new media and information technologies that soon after would be dismissed due to the fear of spectacle and total social control.⁶

In order to understand the role of materials, materiality—including the materiality of the media—and the viewer the in Burga's oeuvre, we need to look at the artist's early attempts to reject traditionally understood artistic subjectivity, believed to reside in the author's hand and unique gesture, and expressing her "essential self." The testing of the limits of authorship, spectatorship, and the art object itself are manifest already in her three-dimensional works from 1967 and 1968. Burga delegates the execution of modular, geometric objects—such as,

for example, *Cubos*—to craftsmen and assistants.



Teresa Burga, selection of works from the late 1960s. Installation view from the exhibition *Teresa Burga: Informes, Esquemas, Intervalos 17.9.10* at the gallery of Instituto Cultural Peruano-Norteamericano (ICPNA), Lima, 2010. In the front: *Cubos* [Cubes], 1968. Lacquered plywood. 6 cubes, 40 x 40 x 40 cm each. Photo: the author. Courtesy Teresa Burga and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.

In these works, visual symbols, potentially interlocking abstract forms, and limited stock-color palette allow for the re-composition and reconfiguration of the pieces in a variety of ways, at the same time determining the co-dependence of the individual elements and the multiplicity of internal permutations. As such, these sculptural sets operate according to the definition of a system elaborated by the Argentine critic Jorge Glusberg, co-founder of the Center of Art and Communication (CAYC—Centro de Arte y Comunicación) in Buenos Aires. The system is a grouping of entities that organize and articulate themselves in relation to one another in a dynamic process and that cannot be understood either individually or outside of the framework of their mutual interdependence.⁷ Simultaneously, Burga's projects are strongly influenced by Umberto Eco's conception of the "open work" with its optimistic model of the viewer.⁸ The viewer is implicitly conceived of as an agent capable of navigating the field of possibilities offered up to her, capable of producing meaning, and, thus, of liberating herself. She is *not* a passive spectator whose false consciousness needs to be dissolved and who needs to be liberated: by command and from above.

If these experiments define the field of viewers' possibilities within a broadly understood sculpture, the two-year-long studies in Chicago provided Burga with a new set of tools, allowing her to combine the interests in de-subjectivization, temporality, as well as in information technology and communication theories, with the new ways of materializing abstract data.⁹ From 1969 on, the text-based proposals and diagrams constitute the primary basis of Burga's oeuvre and assert the role of the artist as a creator of ideas—what we know as the key paradigm of Conceptual art. The concise, sterile instructions each piece provides aptly compare with the methods described by Sol Lewitt in his "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art": "When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art" (in Alberro and Stimson 12). Indeed, we could take Lewitt's programmatic statement as the manifestation of the transition not only from the manual to the industrialized labor (as hinted by the word "machine"), but from industrial to cognitive capitalism—the statement that establishes a clear value hierarchy between the concept and its material realization. Yet, if Burga's *Proposals* maintain the aseptic appearance of instructions, they

simultaneously put forth encounters with seemingly dematerialized—but highly experiential—structures, prevalent in post-minimal and technology-based art. In other words, they veer towards the type of art that Lewitt dismissed as “another kind of expressionism,” (in Alberro and Stimson 15) perhaps due to the fact that they might divert from the austerity of the intellect.

Such juxtaposition of dry, straight-forward instructions and latent haptic experience operates, for example, in Burga’s *Work that Disappears When the Spectator is Trying to Approach It* (1970), a proposal for a light installation, which hints at Burga’s interest in the light sculpture of Keith Sonnier.

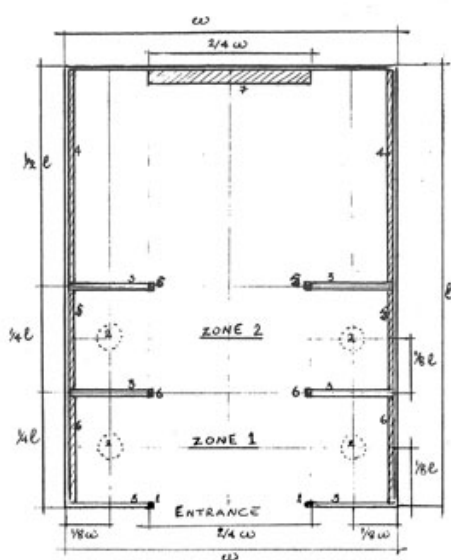
PROPOSAL.- Work that disappears when the spectator tries to approach it.

Elements.- A room of n ft. sq. (rectangular or square area).
Height of its ceiling, preferably not more than 10 ft.

N number of light beams, to create zones equal to a quarter of the room and able to switch off the illumination of a certain quarter or quarters of the length of the room when a person traverses them.

Work itself: constituted by electric bulbs of different colors, placed on a panel, blinking on and off constantly and at random. The electric bulbs are placed forming horizontal and vertical rows on the panel.

Diagram.-Horizontal plane.



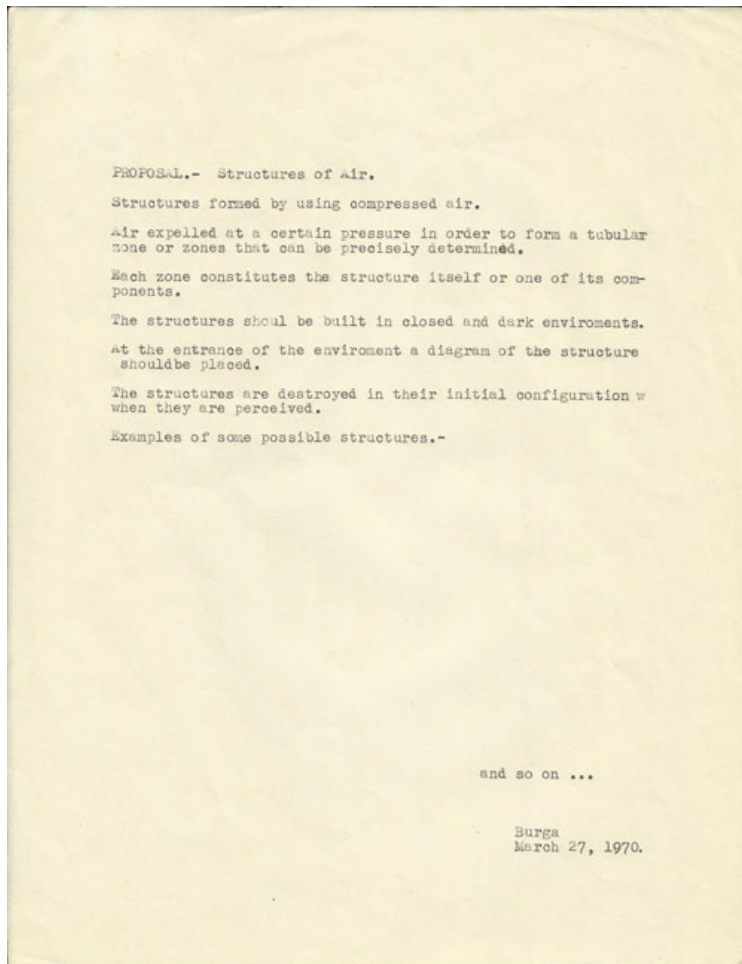
- 1) electric beams that switch off Zone 1.
- 2) position of electric bulbs on the ceiling (each one equal 60 w.)
- 3) panels that go from the floor to the ceiling.
- 4) zone of electric beams switches off the mechanism of the work.
- 5) zone of electric beams that switches off 1/2 of the electric bulbs of the work.
- 6) zone of electric beams that switches off Zone 2 and a 1/4 of the electric bulbs of the work.
- 7) Panel with the light bulbs, goes from the floor to the ceiling.

Burga

April 10, 1970

Teresa Burga, *The Work That Disappears When The Spectator Is Trying to Approach It*, April 10, 1970. Published in the magazine *2/70* (Chicago: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1970), pp. 134–35. Courtesy Teresa Burga and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.

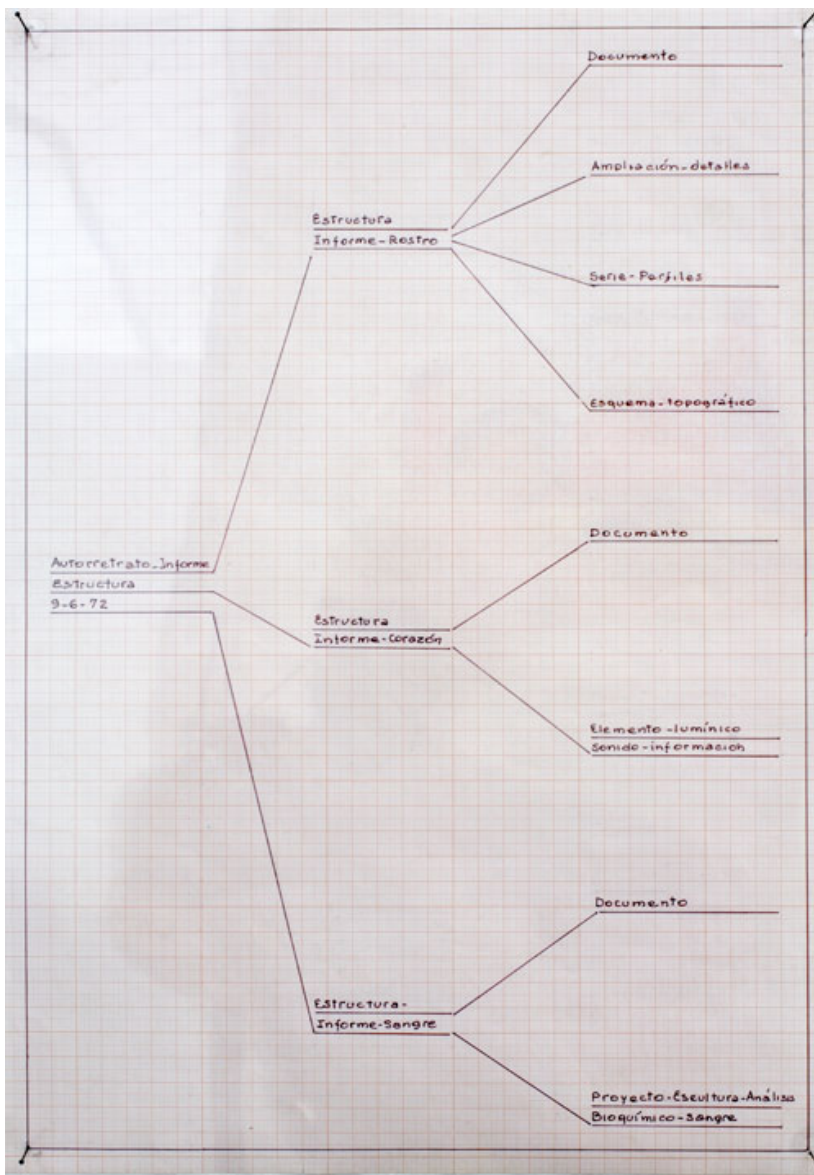
The project concisely describes an interactive environment with a highly elusive “object”: it sets up a large dark room with a grid-like arrangement of blinking lights at the rear wall, which would progressively turn off as the spectator gets closer to them. The redefinition and ambiguity of what might be an *object* of art is crucial here: Is it the document/proposal or the fully realized installation, if/when it comes to fruition?¹⁰ Similarly, *Structures of Air* (1970), with its deployment of invisible substance as the material for the work brings to mind a frequent guest at SAIC, Robert Barry, who in his 1969 *Inert Gas Series* released various gases into atmosphere.



Teresa Burga, *Proposal. Structures of Air*, March 27, 1970. Typewriter on paper. 21 x 29.7 cm. Courtesy Teresa Burga and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin

In contrast to the proposals by Sonnier and Barry, in Burga's projects the viewer is defined as the key actor and "activator" of these works. As opposed to Sonnier's light installations, Burga's work is not given once and for all. It is contingent upon the viewer's action in space and ultimately dissipated by her proximity. Similarly to *The Work that Disappears...*, *Structures of Air* are imagined as an interactive installation/environment. The artist designs another dark room filled with invisible structures—the highly directional currents, "zones," or "tubes" of pressurized air that would be pumped inside. The viewer can only really "perceive" or—more precisely—feel these structures when she steps into them, thus disturbing their integrity: changing their direction or dissipating them.¹¹ We can recognize Barry's gesture of releasing gas into the atmosphere as art *a posteriori*, based on the authorial statement and description of an act performed in solitude.¹² In turn, Burga's structures of air function in relation to the body of the viewer, even if they are destroyed by her intrusion. This critical juncture of language and its rhetorical appeal, media, and material experience potentially "enacted" by the spectator becomes the crux of Burga's work throughout the 1970s.

First conceived in Chicago, *Self-Portrait Structure Report 9672* applies a similar procedure not to imagined structures/proposals, but to Burga's own body. The installation dissects the artist's self into a number of scientifically quantifiable elements: a face, a heart, and blood, as laid out in the introductory diagram that establishes the rigorous, systematic organization of the installation. These constitutive elements of the "self" are then further subject to detailed analysis based on their physiognomic and physiological characteristics registered in just one day, on June 9, 1972. Thus, the facial features are carefully photographed; the heartbeat is recorded and measured; and the chemical composition of the blood is tested. The tripartite structure of the installation is structured upon three core "documents": three identity-document-format photographs of Burga, her phonocardiogram and electrocardiogram, and the result of her blood analysis. The official receipt from the photo studio and the bills from the medical clinics confirm their veracity. It is as if a systematic register of both internal and external organs, and their biochemical make-up could exhaustively describe a person. On a given day, at a given place, the "subject" of a study is just the sum of its measurable parts that can become an object of a never-ending and ever so much minute examination.



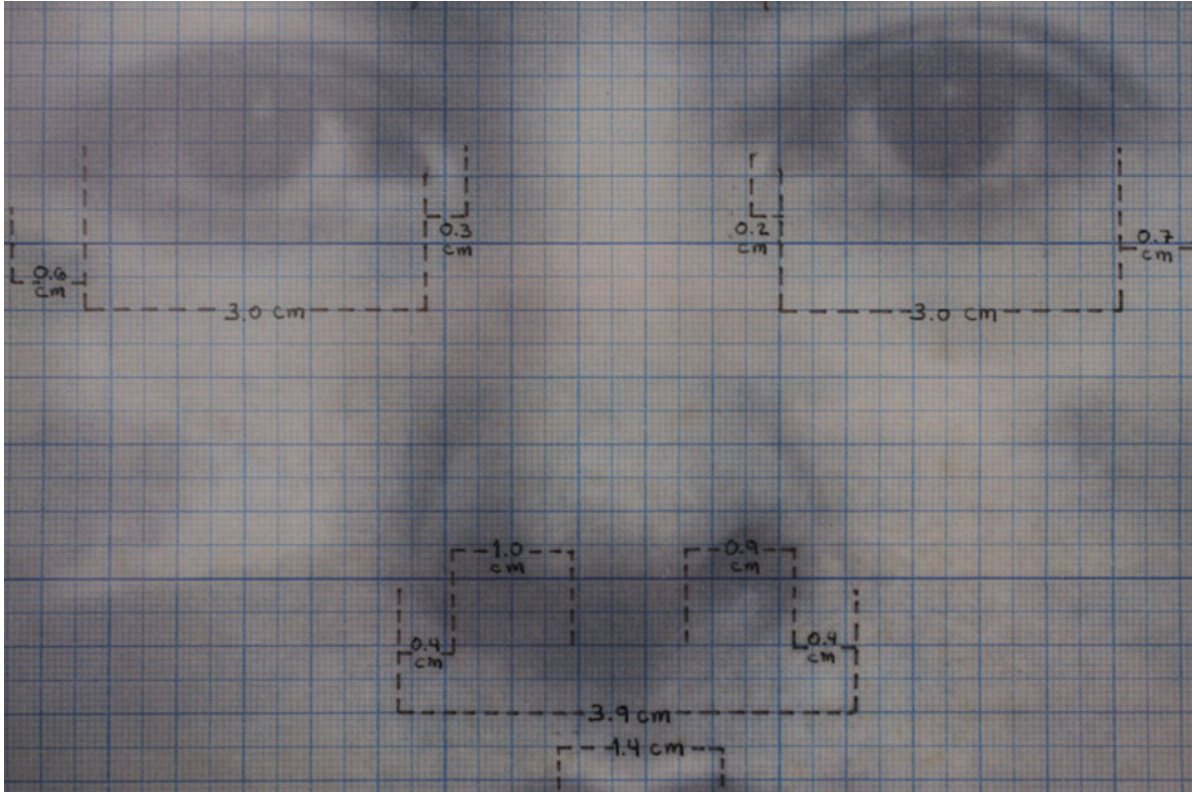
Teresa Burga, *Autorretrato Estructura Informe 9.6.72*. General diagram of the installation. Pen and ink on graph paper (reconstruction 2007). Photo: Hans D. Christ. Courtesy Teresa Burga and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.

The *Self-Portrait* employs a police-like procedure. Three stark photographs of the artist—the “document” of the *Self-Portrait: Face*—are a frontal view, and a left and a right profile, that conform to the conventions and criteria of identity photographs.

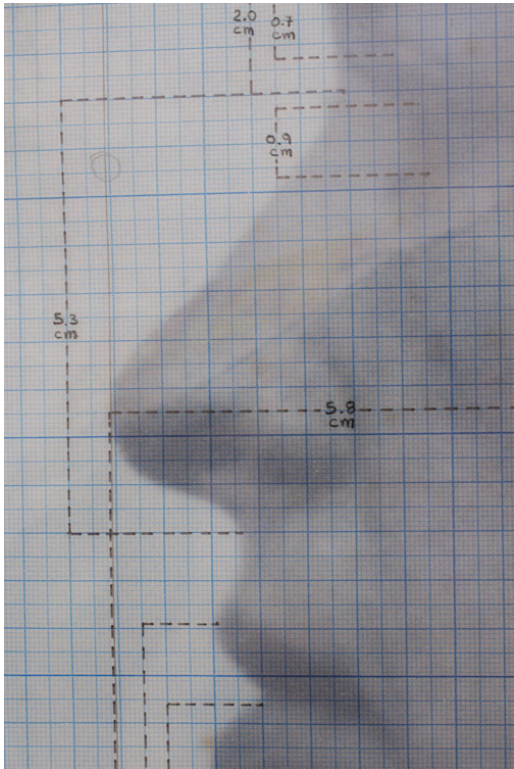


Teresa Burga, *Autorretrato Estructura Informe 9.6.72: Estructura informe – rostro*, details. Installation view at the 12th Istanbul Biennial. Photo: Nathalie Barki. Courtesy Teresa Burga and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.

With their expressionless, blank stares, they are not unlike mug shots. Moreover, the “face” is also presented as a series of five right-profile and five left-profile views, outlined at various angles, as well as a “topographic” mapping of the skeletal structure that underlies soft, recognizable features. In a series of “enlargements,” precise measurements inscribed onto a translucent graph paper that overlays the blown-up photos identify to the millimeter the length of the nose and the chin, the height of the forehead, the width of the eye and the eye socket, and the distances between nostrils: this is a kind of anthropometric examination. Hence, multiple aspects of the body are quantified and registered, creating—seemingly—an unmistakable, individualized “case” or a “file” on the subject “Teresa Burga.” Notably, this kind of examination also reoccurs in Burga’s drawings and her last large endeavor—*The Profile of The Peruvian Woman*, realized as a group research project with Marie-France Cathelat and the association *ISA—Investigaciones Sociales y Artísticas* between 1980 and 1981.¹³



Teresa Burga, *Autorretrato Estructura Informe 9.6.72: Estructura informe – rostro*, details. Photo: Hans D. Christ. Courtesy Teresa Burga and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.



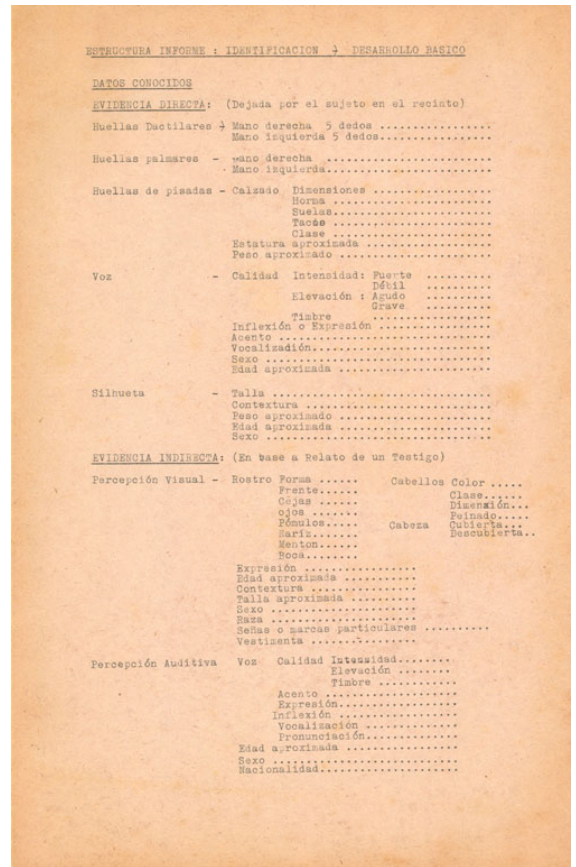
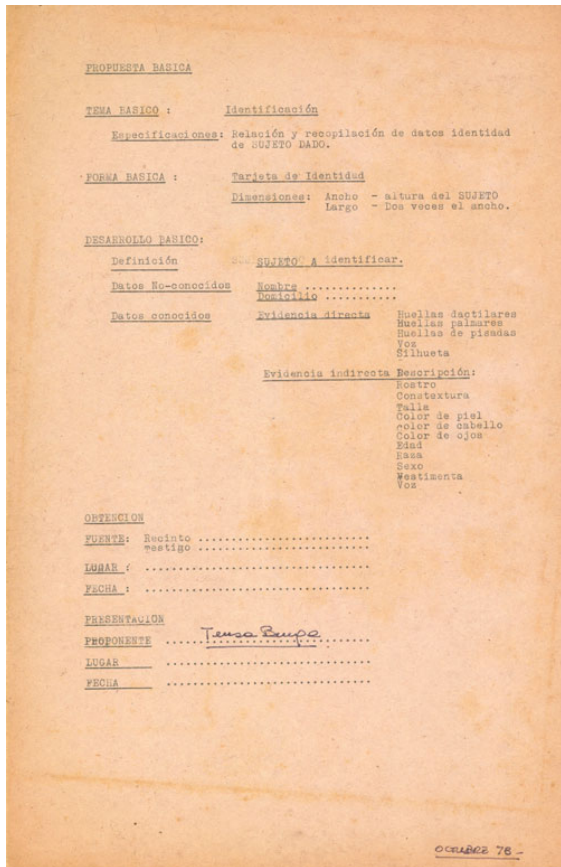
Such examination—whether performed by medics, anthropologists, or police—is not a benign mean: above all, as Michel Foucault argued, it is a tool of biopolitical power. Through measurement, description, notation, accumulation of documents, constitution of files and archives, through “[arrangement of] facts in columns and tables”—that is, through statistics—the system quantifies the norms and designates deviations, producing in the end the docile, individualized subject (Foucault 189-91). In these procedures biopower relies on the accumulation of data and the efficacy of the description, on the “power of writing ... as an essential part in the mechanism of discipline” (Foucault 189). From the nineteenth-century criminology to the twentieth-century eugenics and ergonometics, the visual “evidence” provided by photography and the figures obtained by anthropometric measurement are converted into immense pools of data that aim to distinguish normalcy from pathology. The centralized recording and storage of this data are crucial aspects necessary for the success of such an endeavor and arguably reach their symbolic pinnacle in the scientifically and technologically managed “organizational” society of the mid-twentieth century.

As if to emphasize this drive towards the accumulation, control, and exploitation of information, the invitation of *Self-Portrait Structure Report 9672* is silk-screen printed on an 80-column IBM punched card.



Teresa Burga, *Autorretrato Estructura Informe 9.6.72*. Exhibition invitation. Silkscreen on a Hollerith card. 1972. Courtesy Teresa Burga and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.

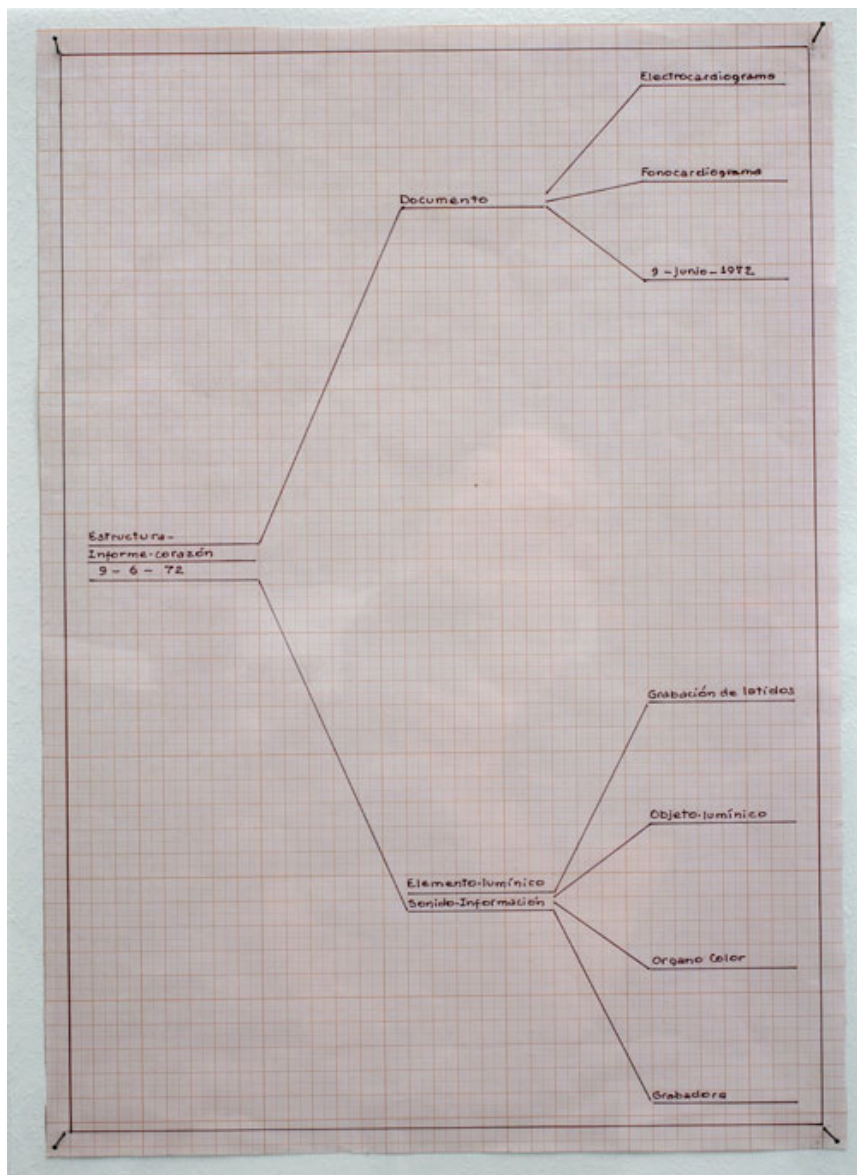
The card—widely used for data entry, storage, and processing—stands for a “prime symbol of computerized bureaucracy” and uniformity and impersonality that it entails (Lubar). This direct reference to information technology might have been the principal hint that lead the journal of the magazine *Correo* to ask in the title of the interview “Teresa Burga: An artist or a computer?” (July 17, 1972, p. 23) The fear of complete depersonalization in the process of a total technocratic social control seems to drive the interviewer’s questions that pitch the machine against the human.



Teresa Burga, *Identification*, 1978. Typewriter and pen on paper. 34 x 22 cm each of the two sheets. Courtesy Teresa Burga and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.

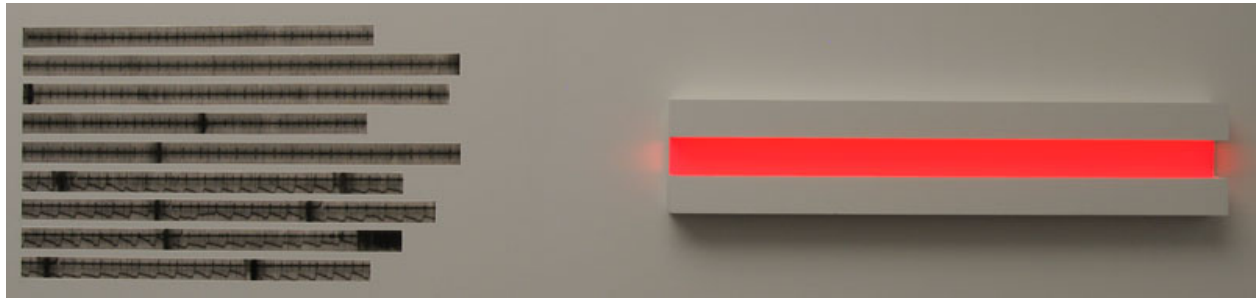
But does Burga's *Self-Portrait* provide any kind of evidence, for anybody? What is this highly analog accumulation of information?¹⁴ Do her documents indeed “capture and fix,” and normalize, or standardize, her subject? (*Perfil de la mujer peruana*). Looking at the work titled *Identification* (1978) might illuminate the answers. In this text-based project, Burga proposes a similar—because nearly forensic—examination of an individual. It would result in the form of an ID card as high as the subject and twice as wide. The artist aims to compile an exhaustive register of facts about “a subject”: from finger- and palm-prints to the shoe-sole pattern and the timbre of the voice. In addition, her own account of the investigated individual (or what she calls “the direct data”) is to be complemented by a similarly thorough report of a “witness” (or “the indirect data”). There is an element here that disturbs the order of the archive. There is no guarantee of proof in the confrontation of data provided by the “author” and the witness. A process of relaying the information is not a description but rather a complex, dynamic system of sending, transmitting, and receiving, susceptible to feedback and distortion. Two accounts on the same subject might very well produce discrepancies and disagreements; insecurity rather than an indisputable, confirmed fact. Rather than supply or augment a disciplinary system, they subtly subvert it and they do so by exposing its constructed, self-contained, and self-referential limitedness.

Conversely, the *Self-Portrait* does not solely consist of the quantifiable data on different aspects of the body inscribed by numbers and letters. Whatever “facts” on the subject medical records present, they are also conceived to be supplanted by material objects that *transpose* their content.¹⁵ In the “blood” and the “heart” sections of the installation Burga complements the diagrams outlining their structure, the documents, and the receipts with proposals: the instructions and blueprints for materializing the data the documents contain. And so, the blood analysis is to be rendered in a series of prismatic structures, one for every single biochemical component, contingent upon its level in the bloodstream and the height of the individual. The heart “object” takes on yet more complex, multi-sensorial form.



Teresa Burga, *Autorretrato Estructura Informe 9.6.72: Estructura – informe corazón*, detail (general diagram). Photo: Hans D. Christ. Courtesy Teresa Burga and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.

A recording of Burga’s own heartbeat, its rhythmical sound permeating the exhibition space, is used to regulate the pulsation of a simple light sculpture: a sleek, elongated case housing a long sequence of red Christmas lights. Whatever this object “communicates,” as Burga would have it, cannot be properly “read” or decoded. Instead, it manifests the incongruity between the material thing and its experience, between the sensations of sound, rhythm, and flickering light, and the cool database that has been accumulated on supposedly the very same “subject.”



Teresa Burga, *Autorretrato Estructura Informe 9.6.72: Estructura --- informe corazón*, detail (document–phonocardiogram and light object). From the installation at the Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, 2011. Photo: Hans D. Christ. Courtesy Teresa Burga and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.

Unlike translation, *transposition* from a medium to a medium—as Friedrich Kittler claims—implies that the source information must necessarily, and somewhat arbitrarily, be reconfigured: “to transfer messages from one medium to another always involves reshaping them to conform to new standards and materials.” Therefore, statistics is revealed not as a perfect medium of description, but rather as an imperative of a historical, “despotic, indeed murderous command to limit data to what the medium *script* [emphasis mine] could exhaust” (Kittler 267). From the noise of the media and experience only small factual details would be extracted: the details that could be fully classified and provide the subjectifying evidence in form of the letters (Kittler 279). However, in reality the discourse and the media and their experience are not equivalent. The *Self-Portrait* demonstrates that there are impassable gulfs between every single element of the piece, even if they are all supposed to encompass just one body.

Through transpositions what once might have been an easily palatable, understandable, transparent message of a bureaucratic apparatus becomes a barrage of opaque and incomprehensible material. While the mediatic presence asserts the contingent factuality/reality of the statements, it also reveals their radical dependency on established, agreed-upon, hegemonic representation systems: on the order of the word and the order of images inscribed as script or signifiers.¹⁶ If second generation of critical conceptualists effectively scrutinized ideological bases of representation, exposing it as equally dangerous and constitutive means to establishing subjectivity, it did not necessarily succeed in evading the

representation system, which could at best be reconfigured and reprogrammed.¹⁷ As Eve Meltzer has persuasively argued, in the dominant structuralist views of the epoch “the world had become a network of systems, and being a subject in that world meant being subjected by those systems” (Meltzer 122). This logic operated equally strongly in diverse models of conceptualism: from the “tautological propositions” of Joseph Kosuth to Robert Barry’s inert gases (which can only be seen as art based on the verbal statement of the performed action). The same logic also underlay seemingly distinct institutional critique of Hans Haacke or even Peruvian critic Juan Acha’s engaged, didactic *no-objetualismo*, aimed at dissolving false consciousness.¹⁸ Yet, as Meltzer said, the “dream” or “nightmare ... of the world as a total sign system ... sometimes promise[d] revolution, but just as often threaten[ed] to completely dissociate cause and effect, sign and referent, subject and world” (Meltzer 132).

To some extent, the history of Burga’s disappearance from the Peruvian art scene mirrors the intellectual conflict with such ideological systems. Burga returned to Peru in 1971 as stipulated by the Fulbright Fellowship requirements, since the Fellows were expected to utilize their newly acquired knowledge and skills in their homelands. In fact, the exhibition *Self-Portrait Structure Report 9672* was her first solo presentation in her native country following almost a three-year stay abroad: two years at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and almost a year in Hamburg, Germany. Soft power operations aside, the fact is that the proposals that Burga had developed while in the United States were not welcome under the cultural policy of populist nationalism of the leftist dictatorship of general Juan Velasco Alvarado. The new national body was being forged through the reaffirmation of the Peruvian national “authenticity” located in the Andes.¹⁹ In the militarized “revolutionary” climate of the decade there was no room for the loss of control or ambiguity, which Burga’s proposals inadvertently postulate. Even her old ally, critic Juan Acha, who was one of the few of Burga’s constant interlocutors throughout the years, admonished the artist for “not extending the reality to the objective social conditions.” Creation of uncertain situations, in which the spectator would not be explicitly told what to think or would not be explained how to assess what is presented to her, was simply not politically or socially acceptable. Acha recommended “clear and explicit phrases” instead of the endless “confusing” accumulation of data.²⁰

Yet, for Teresa Burga cool analysis and proposals for transposition of data were a mean to seek a way out of relentless models of subjectification. Similarly to philosopher Vilém Flusser, she recognized that we (individual agents) *can* change our contingency, but that we can do so only by *exchanging* it: by *migrating* from one system to another one, which might be simultaneous but not equivalent or congruent with the previous one (Flusser 21-22).²¹ For Burga, such productive space of emigration existed between the system of writing/data and the systems configured by physical objects and technological media; between language as inscription and language as a tool for communication; between the “author” and the “spectator”—that is, anyone invited to realize one of her “proposals” or turn her blueprints into material objects. This invitation to move between different documents and media in the *Self-Portrait* opens up a closed, disciplinary system inscribed in both linguistic proposals of narrowly understood Conceptual art and also in critical Conceptualists’ scrutiny of ideological bases of representation. It exposes both the most symbolically charged and the most fleeting and nonsensical details of Burga’s “self.” Hence, Burga’s work cogently combines the attitudes and approaches that the subsequent historicization divided, categorized, and judged: separating words from the bodily experience and the “babble” of media and technology. Thus, it also encourages us to examine current state of our perceptions on the genealogies of contemporary art and the allegiances we pledge: to discern what does and what does not count in our own written reports on the real.

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Notes

¹ This paper stems from the research for the exhibition *Die Chronologie der Teresa Burga: Berichte, Diagramme, Intervalle 29.09.11* that I curated together with Miguel A. López and Emilio Tarazona for Württembergischen Kunstverein Stuttgart (September, 30 2011– January 8, 2012), as well as the paper "Chicago Effect: Teresa Burga before and after the School of the Art Institute," which I presented with Tarazona at the symposium *Encuentros: Artistic Exchange between the U.S. and Latin America*, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC, October 5–6, 2011. I am deeply indebted to Miguel and Emilio for introducing me to Teresa's work and for all the invaluable conversations during the development of our projects. I presented the preliminary version of this paper at the Graduate Student Symposium: *Transnational Conceptualisms between Latin America and the U.S.*, at the Hunter College, New York, on March 15, 2013. I am grateful to the symposium organizers and Dr. Harper Montgomery and Dr. Daniel Quiles for their useful feedback and comments. Many thanks go also to my advisers from the University of Texas at Austin, Dr. Andrea Giunta and Dr. George Flaherty, as well as the peer-reviewers of *alter/nativas*.

² The term "aesthetic of administration"—that has captured so much writing and reflection on Conceptual art—is taken from Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 105–143. The phrase "of administration" is useful in relation to the *look* of Burga's work, especially the data she accumulated in the work *Autorretrato* and the procedure she developed in the late 1960s and 1970s in her drawing practice: noting down precise time brackets dedicated to the execution of each piece as a part of the work. However, following the work by Eve Meltzer, I suggest that the two opposing strains of conceptualism Buchloh distinguishes (the tautological and the critical) do share the very same structuralist underpinnings. See: Eve Meltzer, "The Dream of the Information World," in *Oxford Art Journal* 29.1 (2006): 115–135.

³ In consolidating this thesis two texts were extremely helpful: Meltzer's "The Dream of the Information World" and Friedrich A. Kittler's *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

⁴ Miguel A. López in the essay "Conceptualismos 'fallidos': Extravíos estéticos y pulsiones políticas en la obra de Teresa Burga" carefully considers Burga's institutional career—or, rather, the lack thereof—in the complex—in his own words, "fractured"—political and socio-cultural context of 1970s Peru. In *Teresa Burga. Informes, esquemas, intervalos 17.9.10* (Lima: ICPNA—Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano, 2011), 81–102.

Some of the key positions responsible for the canonization, critique, and rewriting of conceptual art include: aforementioned article by Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," Robert C. Morgan, *Conceptual Art: An American Perspective* (Jefferson, NC/London: McFarland, 1994); *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*,

exh.cat., (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995); *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, exh.cat. (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999); Michael Newman and Jon Bird, ed., *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (London: Reaktion, 1999); Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, ed., *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass., London: The MIT Press, 1999); Anne Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001); Michael Corris, ed., *Conceptual Art: Theory, Practice, Myth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2004); John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (London and New York: Verso, 2007); and Liz Kotz, *Words To Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* (Cambridge, MA: the MIT Press, 2007); for the English-language accounts of so-called Conceptual Art in Latin America, see influential writing by Mari Carmen Ramírez, especially “Blueprint Circuits: Conceptual Art and Politics in Latin America” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, 550–551, and “Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960–1980” in *Global Conceptualism*, 52–71; Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007); Miguel A. López, “How Do We Know What Latin American Conceptualism Looks Like?” *Afterall* 23 (Spring 2010): 5–21; and Harper Montgomery, “Conceptualism, Dematerialization, Arte no-objetual? Historicizing the 60s and 70s in Latin America,” *Post: Notes on Modern and Contemporary Art Around the Globe*, July 11, 2013, < http://post.at.moma.org/content_items/246-conceptualism-dematerialization-arte-no-objetual-historicizing-the-60s-and-70s-in-latin-america>; accessed August 30, 2014.

⁵ These are just some of the terms that appear in conjunction with production of that moment. All of the monikers we are mentioning come just from one source: Lucy Lippard’s seminal account of the period. See: Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). It would be worth it here to mention also key propositions of the Argentine avant-garde, which had a significant impact on Arte Nuevo in the 1960s; see: Inés Katzenstein, ed., *Listen, Here, Now: Argentine Art of the 1960s: Writings of the Avant-Garde* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2004). For the critical rereading of Arte Nuevo, see: Miguel A. López and Emilio Tarazona, “Juan Acha y la Revolución Cultural. La transformación de la vanguardia artística en el Perú a fines de los Sesenta,” in *Temas de Arte Peruano 3. Nuevas referencias sociológicas de las artes visuales: Mass media, lenguajes, represiones y grupos, Juan Acha, 1969* (Lima, Universidad Ricardo Palma, 2008); and Miguel López and Emilio Tarazona, “Desgaste y disolución del objeto en el arte peruano de los años sesenta. Una primera coordenada de rastro apenas perceptible,” in *Imágenes Perdidas: Censura, olvido, descuido. IV Congreso Internacional de Teoría e Historia del Arte y XII Jornadas del CAIA* (Buenos Aires, CAIA, 2007).

⁶ Edward A. Shanken examined the connections and historiographic disassociation of Conceptual art and technology in the article “Art in the Information Age: Technology and Conceptual Art,” in *Leonardo* 35. 4 (2002), 433–438. As he writes about art and technology experiment: “Critics opined that it was dominated by the materiality and spectacle of mechanical apparatus, which was anathema to the conceptual project. Technical failures of art and technology exhibitions, like Software (which, ironically, was plagued with software problems), contributed to waning public interest, just at the moment that a succession of large, successful exhibitions of conceptual art were mounted.” (436) Elucidating remarks on the issue can be also found in the writings by Pamela Lee, for example in “Bridget Riley’s Eye/Body Problem,” in *October* 98 (Autumn 2001), 26–46. The body puts the purity of the mind in danger, threatening it with the seduction and submission into the material spectacle. The body is inherently dangerous, treacherously close to the world of fashion, other commodities and — one might add — the art world politics. Such fears were fueled by the emergence of cybernetics and broadcasting media, and automated age, which were seen by many critics as perfect tools to total social control through the “programming of the body.”

⁷ Glusberg relies on the definition of the Real Academia Española: “Conjunto de reglas o principios sobre una materia enlazados entre sí. Conjunto de cosas que ordenadamente relacionadas entre sí contribuyen a determinado objeto” (135).

⁸ For Spanish edition, see: Umberto Eco, *Obra abierta: Forma e indeterminación en el arte contemporáneo*. (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1965). For English: Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

⁹ Due to the pressures exerted by the radicalized student body, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago went through a decisive transformation around the pivotal year 1968: it revamped its curriculum, opened up narrowly defined departments, introduced seminars in new media (such as the Generative Systems program, which would embrace the newest recording and imaging technologies), and allowed students to create their own courses of study with faculty consultation. On the Generative Systems, see: Sonia Landy Sheridan, “Mind/Senses/Hand: The Generative Systems Program at the Art Institute of Chicago 1970–1980,” in *Leonardo* 23. 2/3, *New Foundations: Classroom Lessons in Art/Science/Technology for the 1990s* (1990): 175–181.

¹⁰ Very few of Burga’s proposals were actually produced during 1960s and 1970s, two large-scale installations being exceptions: the discussed here *Autorretrato* and *Cuatro mensajes* [Four Messages], which the artist exhibited at the ICPNA gallery in Lima in 1974. Miguel A. López and Emilio Tarazona reconstructed *The Work that Disappears...* for the exhibition *La persistencia de lo efímero. Orígenes del no-objetualismo peruano: ambientaciones, happenings, arte conceptual (1965–75)* (Lima, Centro Cultural de España, 2007).

¹¹ *Structures of Air* were materialized for the exhibition *Fleeting Imaginaries. 2014 CIFO Grants & Commissions Program Exhibition*, CIFO Art Space, Miami, September 5–November 2, 2014.

¹² For more on Barry, see in particular: Robert Barry et al., *Robert Barry: Some Places to which We Can Come: Works 1963–1975* (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2003).

¹³ *Perfil de la mujer peruana* was exhibited in *Primer Coloquio de Arte No-objetual y Arte Urbano*, in Medellín, Colombia, and in the gallery of Banco Continental in Lima, in 1981. It was also accompanied by the book: *Perfil de la mujer peruana, 1980–1981* (Lima: Investigaciones Sociales Artísticas, 1981).

¹⁴ Paradoxically, Burga’s projects have little to do with either the most advanced media or technologies. They are low-tech rather than high-tech. They generally utilize simple electric circuits and easily accessible media (such as slides, tape recording or 16mm films).

¹⁵ The idea of transposition is crucial to Kittler’s text. As he explains: “A medium is a medium is a medium. Therefore it cannot be translated. To transfer messages from one medium to another always involves reshaping them to conform to new standards and materials. In a discourse network that requires ‘an awareness of the abysses which divide the one order of sense experience from the other,’ transposition necessarily takes place of translation. ... The transposition of media is accomplished serially, at discrete points. ... Every transposition is to a degree arbitrary, a manipulation.” Kittler, 265

¹⁶ See Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, especially “Rebus,” 265–304. At this point it is also worth recalling the classic text of Roland Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” which vividly describes the procedure of “fixing” images by words. (In Roland Barthes *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation* [New York: Hill and Wang, 1985], 269–285.)

¹⁷ Liz Kotz writes about the second generation of conceptualists, especially Victor Burgin, in respect to “construction of subjectivity through images in the modern mass media.” See: Liz Kotz, *Words To Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* (Cambridge, MA: the MIT Press, 2010), 231–254. As Meltzer points out, “the world had become a network of systems, and being a subject in that world meant being subjected by those systems (122).” However, as she further asserts, “by signing its name to this picture of things artists did not so much embrace it, as lay it bare, broach its fictions and its limitations, even as they often risked getting caught in the very systems they adopted to do so. ‘This is the dream of the

information world', they seem to be telling us. A dream (indeed a nightmare for many) of the world as a total sign system, where even language has been stripped of affect and pared of everything save the bones of its infrastructure; a dream that sometimes promises revolution, but just as often threatens to completely dissociate cause and effect, sign and referent, subject and world (132)."

¹⁸ See, for example, Juan Acha, "Teoría y práctica de las artes no objetualistas en América Latina," First Latin American Conference about "Arte no objetual," Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín, 1981. ICAA, Documents of 20-th Century Latin American And Latino Art, record ID: 1088533.

¹⁹ For details, see Miguel A. López, "Conceptualismos 'fallidos.'" The coup of Velasco Alvarado overthrew the democratic government of the president Fernando Belaúnde Terry in 1968, just a few months after Burga's departure to the United States. This unusual for Latin America regime (the military dictatorship, unlike Chile Brazil, or Argentina, tied to the Soviet Union rather than the United States) faced an emerging economic crisis and the pressure of social movements fueled by the reverberations of Cuban Revolution. As a result, the junta settled on the set of populist reforms focused on the rural and working classes (including the highly contested agrarian reform). Notably, while the official cultural policies postulated a massive movement of popular participation, this movement was centrally, top-bottom organized through the ministry-level entity called SINAMOS—Sistema Nacional de Apoyo a la Movilización Social. The self-proclaimed Revolutionary Government put an ironic twist on the critic Juan Acha's previous calls for a cultural revolution and markedly changed the character of the Peruvian art scene. By the end of the 1960s the avant-garde group Arte Nuevo definitively disbanded and, by the early 1970s, Acha emigrated to Mexico, following an arrest on the unsubstantiated drug charges at a house party.

²⁰ Juan Acha, letter to the artist, sent from Mexico City, dated January 15, 1979. The archive of Teresa Burga. In this letter, Acha discusses specifically the projects *Identidad* (most likely 1978 *Identificación*, which I briefly discussed in this essay) and *Paisaje Urbano 19...* .

²¹ Flusser identifies irony as the space that allows "a clearer view of our contingency." It could be argued that there's a dose of irony in Burga's titillation of the viewer with the promise of the complete picture of phenomena she proposes to investigate and the utter failure of the accumulated data to deliver such a picture.