

# Roberto Jacoby

## Desire Rises from Collapse

This is the first occasion on which the wide-ranging and elusive work of Roberto Jacoby has been shown in a museum. Jacoby's artistic praxis spans a wealth of divergent terrains including experiments with different means of communication, technological trials, experimental communities, networks and writing, the latter encompassing literature, essays and theory. Rather than a body of work, the present exhibition should be seen as a tentative and varied series of experiments in installation and explanation, types of archive and strategies of display.

*Archivo en uso* is a working space that allows the visitor to access Jacoby's vast documentary holding via a hyper-textual design and two computers. This archive consists of written texts, videos, songs, and more. Delving into it requires curiosity, not expertise. *Gabinete de curiosidades* can be seen as an installation that takes the present institutional and market tendency to worship conceptualism, the dematerialisation of the work and action art to its furthest consequences. Much of the material surviving from the artist's earlier interventions no longer exists or was never recorded. The few surviving vestiges are so far from possessing the intensity of the collective life experiences of the type that Jacoby has been promoting since the 1960s to the present day that they laconically reveal the impossibility of displaying them and that any attempt to do so falls short. *1968 el culo te abrocho* introduces an irreverent and theatrical strategy by manipulating these documents and overprinting them with new layers of meaning and experience. *Vivir aquí* aims to be a "space to be in" and was conceived and constructed in collaboration with various artists in order to give home to projects whose power lies precisely in the technology of friendship: from *ramona* magazine to the record of unreleased songs entitled *Tocame el rok*. *La Castidad* fictionalises a micro-social experiment using video format: the pact of co-existence that was maintained for a year by Jacoby and Krochmalny. Eight video recordings from the *Darkroom* partly document the unrepeatable experience of that laboratory of darkness, conceived as a performance for a single spectator, the only one that sees in a momentary world of the blind. The tenuous thread that links this diverse material is its undermining of the limits between art/life, the contemporary/the historical, the present/the document, reality/fiction.

### **Inventing life concepts**

Most of Jacoby's works, which are located between celebration and social research, revolve around the de-materialisation of art and the invention of new ways of living. Almost all his actions take place in the vicinity of art, exploring its institutional limits and even its very status as a "work", exploded through its immateriality, discontinuity, ephemeral condition and specificity of context. Almost all of Jacoby's output is based on collaborative creation: the potential for many people's skills to flourish with *a little help from my friends*. This energy, which Jacoby terms "technologies of friendship", underlies his initiatives in which he involves other people as participants in setting in motion a machine of shared and mutually sustained desires.

Jacoby's "inconstancy", his continual migration from one subject to another, one field to another and one genre to another, is also one of the reasons for the dynamic vitality of his projects. They could not be further from the tedium of

the artist who fixes on a discovery and makes it a recognisable formula or an identifying trademark. Jacoby prefers to start from zero every time and to generate the circumstances in which unexpected encounters and unexpected relations can come into being between artists and non-artists, visual artists, musicians, writers, intellectuals, architects, sociologists, and philosophers: all intellectually restless beings ready to make use of their different skills and professional backgrounds. Jacoby does not so much promote an interdisciplinary approach per se as one that functions in relation to the limits established between different terrains and fields of knowledge, with the aim of implementing other, collective ways of thinking and doing. "Getting people doing things", as he once said, expressing that capacity for encouraging others that defines his "homemade bio-politics."



Image from the performance *Darkroom*. Buenos Aires. Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires, 2005. Photo Rosana Scholjet. Jacoby Archive

### **Experimental communities**

Following the defeat of liberation projects by the South American dictatorships of the 1970s and the crisis of the Marxist model as manifested in the fall of the Berlin Wall a decade later, the re-formulation of political action via new routes manifested itself in a series of conceptual shifts in Jacoby's praxis: he moved from revolution and utopia to proposing ideas/energy such as experimentation, dis-utopia and micro-utopia. With the hope of contributing to immediate change in his surroundings that would allow for the emergence of "a space of fraternal, egalitarian and fair exchange", Jacoby promoted various different projects, the common denominator of which was the notion of experimental communities and micro-societies.

In Jacoby's dictionary, utopia and dis-utopia are not antithetical terms. Dis-utopia means transforming utopia into something that is immediate, realisable, accessible and real. Jacoby falls within the context of the legacy of the utopian thinkers, particularly Charles Fourier, when he describes *Proyecto Venus* as a "sensible phalanstère", a utopian colony that acts itself out in the gaps between the normal, standard world and that does not look to impossible rules but to "comfortable, voluntary agreements". This colony nourishes itself from the conviction that a different existence can be invented here and now, using the resources that we have to hand and involving people from our immediate surroundings who are well disposed to contact with others, to giving and to being interested in our fellow human beings. This shift from the hope for a different future to the transformation of the immediate present is based on the interconnection and reciprocal influences arising between wish and possibility.

While the social networks that Jacoby promotes "maintain", as he says, "an ambiguous relation with regard to their self-assessment as 'art', they do not hesitate to locate themselves within this terrain of shifting frontiers or to use art as that social space and, as one might put it, that secular religion." What is expressed here is a commitment to collective projects in which it is the artists themselves, rather than the market or institutional agents, who decide on the legitimacy of the work in question and whether it falls within the realm of art.

### **Happiness strategy**

The repression strategically carried out on Argentinian society under the last dictatorship (1976-1983) successfully acted as an agent of physical discipline through mass disappearances, murder, torture, and legal and illegal imprisonment, while also pervading the fields of education, the mass media and everyday life. Despite the existence of this institutional terror, strategies existed for getting around it, confronting it and surviving it. Jacoby acknowledges two forms of confrontation with the de facto regime that point to two different ways of recovering the political potential of the body. These two ways were presented as compatible rather than mutually exclusive, and on some occasions manifested themselves with enormous force and energy. The most obvious was the action undertaken by the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. The other took shape in the context of underground culture and that whole subterranean network of encounters, poetry recitals, magazines, rock festivals, group events, parties and other forms of socialising that also contributed in its own way to reconstructing social ties broken by terror.

Jacoby uses the phrase "happiness strategy" to describe this response or reaction in the face of depression, discouragement and fear. One of the Moura brothers, leaders of the rock-pop group *Virus*, had been detained and had disappeared. The group, however, played extremely cheerful music. In the midst of tragedy, dancing and enjoying being together can also be experienced as a political act. This is how it was seen by Indio Solari, singer and leader of

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the band *Patricio Rey and los Redonditos de Ricota* when he made it clear that their music aimed to help people to maintain a positive state of mind rather than letting the terror drag them down. “For me, *Virus* was clearly a political project”, Jacoby explains, in contrast to those who saw the fact that Federico Moura wore lipstick in his concerts as a sign of frivolity, superficiality, hedonism and above all, homosexuality. In such acts the body is a zone of political insubordination given that it calls into question disciplinary, normative regimes that have been interiorised or “made flesh”. Dancing, moving, bodies, cross-dressed and unpredictable, submerged in a collective dance without rules; celebration, the party, the improvised parade, all bring about potential situations for the body that shatter any fixed identity.

### Biography

From 1966 to 1967 the Argentinian artist and sociologist Roberto Jacoby (Buenos Aires, 1944) was a member of the *Arte de los Medios* group, together with Eduardo Costa and Raúl Escari. The group undertook research on the social presence of the mass media and its capacity to steer and construct events. The group’s founding work, the *Anti-happening*, consisted of putting into circulation in the press a piece of invented news concerning the performance of a happening that never actually took place.

In 1968, together with other members of the Argentinian avant-garde, Jacoby encouraged the exodus from art towards the still more uncertain terrains of social and political conflict. *Tucumán Arde* aimed to generate counter-information and to turn the spotlight on the falseness of the dictatorial propaganda about the social and economic crisis that was devastating the northern province of Tucumán due to the closure of numerous sugarcane refineries. After the forced cessation of *Tucumán Arde*, and like many members of the Argentinian avant-garde in the 1960s, Jacoby opted to abandon art in search of direct, political action. He embarked on activities such as the anti-

Action *Mao y Perón*,  
un solo corazón,  
Central Park,  
New York, 1967.  
Photo Julián Cairol.  
Jacoby Archive



magazine *Sobre* and on research into the popular urban uprising known as the *Cordobazo* (1969). In the midst of this convulsive climate, his celebrated “antiafiche” made use of the classic image of “Che” Guevara to offer a prophetic indication of the subsequent media mythification of the heroic *guerrilla* fighter



Image from file taken control as part of the installation *1968 el culo te abrocho, 2008*. Jacoby Archive

and to question the way in which his image had become trivialised.

During the last dictatorship in Argentina and in the early years of the transition to democracy, Jacoby composed dozens of songs with the *Virus* rock-pop group and organised itinerant parties and encounters in “underground” venues.

In the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Jacoby designed and carried out various experiments with social networks of artists and non-artists, as well as other collaborative projects, including *Internos* (ca.1979-85), *Chacra 99* (1999), *Bola de nieve* (from 1999), *Proyecto Venus* (2000-06), the magazine *ramona* (2000-10), *La Castidad* (2006-07) and the Centro de Investigaciones

Artísticas (from 2008). Jacoby’s polemical action with the rest of the Brigada Argentina por Dilma at the 29<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial (2010) should be seen in the light of his 1966 manifesto: “a game with the reality of things and the unreality of information, with the reality of information and the unreality of things”. In the midst of a Biennial whose theme for 2010 was the encounter between art and politics, around thirty Argentinian artists and intellectuals set up an office to unofficially canvas support for Dilma Rousseff, the official candidate for the Brazilian elections, in a context that was doubly hostile, given that neither the Biennial nor the city of São Paulo supported the governing Workers Party. It was a telling corollary to Jacoby’s thoughts, formulated in the mid-1960s, on the capacity for the mass media (in the 2010 case, electoral propaganda) to be affected by an action that was both artistic and political.

ANA LONGONI

## **Activities**

### **A Conversation between Roberto Jacoby and Ana Longoni.**

On the occasion of the presentation of the exhibition and of the book *El deseo nace del derrumbe*.

A video-interview with the writer Ricardo Piglia will be projected as well.

**Place:** Sabatini Building, Auditorium

**Date:** 25<sup>th</sup> February 2011

**Time:** 7.00 p.m.

**Museo Nacional  
Centro de Arte Reina Sofía**

**Roberto Jacoby**  
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**Sabatini building**

Espacio 1/Protocol Room/Bóvedas Room  
Santa Isabel, 52

25 February – 30 May 2011

[www.museoreinasofia.es](http://www.museoreinasofia.es)

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**Museum hours**

Monday to Saturday  
from 10.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m.  
Sundays  
from 10.00 a.m. to 2.30 p.m.  
Closed Tuesdays

Galleries close 15 minutes  
prior to museum closing

