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**Marking the Territory: Performance, video, and conceptual graphics in Chilean art,  
1975-1985**

A Dissertation Presented

by

**Carla Macchiavello**

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

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in

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Abstract of the Dissertation

**Marking the Territory: Performance, video, and conceptual graphics in Chilean art,  
1975-1985**

by

**Carla Macchiavello**

**Doctor in Philosophy**

in

**Art History and Criticism**

Stony Brook University

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In this dissertation I examine the links between the body and the territory in Chilean Performance Art, video practices, and conceptual graphics between 1975 and 1985. During ten years in the midst of Augusto Pinochet's military dictatorship, the body and national space were two notions intimately tied to a range of new art forms in which different concepts of identity were negotiated. In the works of Carlos Leppe, Eugenio Dittborn, Carlos Altamirano, Lotty Rosenfeld, and Gonzalo Meza the corporeal was understood as a space where the repressive political regime could be contested and the self's contradictory relation to the territory and nation be exposed. By analyzing these artists' works and revising the major theoretical and critical writings of the time, particularly those of Nelly Richard, Ronald Kay, and Justo Pastor Mellado, as well as their appropriation and reinterpretation of Poststructuralist and Psychoanalytic theories, this dissertation proposes that carnality and cardinality were joined in the experimental Chilean art of the seventies and early eighties as a form of contesting borders and identities. This work traces varied maps linking artistic and political vanguards while revising the relationships between nationalism and territory in Chilean art of the time by applying a methodology derived from the social history of art, psychoanalysis, and phenomenology. Different theories of space, nationalism, geography, and embodiment are explored to better understand the context and significance of conceptual art in Chile. As the dictatorship was demarcating its own borders regarding Chilean identity, artists were using conceptual languages to define the boundaries of a new national art and create models of social intervention that countered the images of prosperity, progress, and equality advocated by the regime. Using concepts derived from graphic arts and expanding them into everyday life in order to generate different social inscriptions, these artists attempted to demonstrate the instability of borders in the processes of identity construction.

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## Introduction

It is ironic that one of the few people to speak of the importance that geography had in Chile during Augusto Pinochet's military regime (1973-1988) was not a Chilean but an Englishman writing only one year after the coup d'état took place. Addressing an audience of British geographers, David Harvey asked in 1974 whether the discipline of geography could effectively contribute to the creation of public policy and used Pinochet as a primary example of how the military government was taking actions to "actively change the human geography of Chile."<sup>1</sup> Harvey pointed out that since the advent of the regime geography had become a mandatory assignment in schools, stating that Pinochet viewed positively its teaching since geography was an appropriate discipline to instruct the population "in the virtues of patriotism and to convey to the people a sense of their true historic destiny."<sup>2</sup> Harvey also mentioned that Pinochet had a background as a military geographer, to which should be added that he had important published books on geopolitics and some years before the coup even held a teaching position on the subject at the Military Academy of Santiago.

The irony of Harvey's comments lies in the fact that few Chilean authors have noted the importance that geographical matters had in the re-shaping of the nation and the arts during the military regime. For not only did Chile almost go to war with Argentina in 1978 because of a territorial dispute that carried on for several years, or recurrently fought for its territorial integrity with other bordering nations such as Peru and Bolivia, and struggled to assert the legitimacy of its government and its claims of sovereignty with the international community, but specific measures were taken each year by the military junta to enhance a particular sense of national identity associated with the territory. From the construction of roads connecting different provinces and their subsequent economic development, with the concomitant reinvention of the south as the Chilean "far West" ready to be "colonized,"<sup>3</sup> to varied campaigns of "Chilean-ness" throughout the whole

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<sup>1</sup> David Harvey, "What kind of geography for what kind of public policy?" in *Spaces of Capital. Towards a Critical Geography* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 27. Originally published in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 1974.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The project of the "Carretera Austral," a highway connecting remote southern towns and native forests, was from its inception tied to economic development in an area which the government described as composed of "riches that remain unexploited." See the article "Colonos chilenos para Chile," *El Mercurio*, May 4, 1975.

territory and particularly in frontier towns,<sup>4</sup> the representation of the national body or body politic as a united, homogeneous, and progressive place became a central project of the regime.<sup>5</sup> A nationalist geography was being carved and inscribed into the territory and its landscapes, as demonstrated in projects like the “Route of the Conquerors” which would follow the material “traces”<sup>6</sup> left by the Spanish conquerors who had molded the nation, or in the renewed emphasis on internal tourism that was meant to enhance the love of one’s own land while asserting sovereignty over it. As Harvey pointed out with respect to the changes in the health system propitiated by the regime (which exchanged a public approach to health for a private one), geography was not just a matter of renewing the educational curricula, but an everyday concern intersecting many lives and cultural arenas.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, the nation was purged of its non-patriotic elements by means of exile, torture, “disappearance,” and other forms of displacement. The military regime set out to clearly define the nation’s inside and outside, from its geopolitical frontiers to its ideological limits as incarnated by actual bodies. The homeland was cleansed of those subjects who installed foreign ideas ‘unnatural’ to the native landscape, in particular Communism and the near past it represented. Any disruptive components associated with the deposed president Salvador Allende and his “vía chilena al socialismo” (Chilean way to socialism) or which opposed the regime were cleared out like bad weed contaminating the environment, being disciplined, silenced by censorship and menacing discourses in the media, or made invisible through violations of private space and the body. In everyday life, to be or not to be a true Chilean as outlined by the dictatorship became the question.

In the arts, the importance given to geographical matters connected with the nation took two main directions. The first was related to the exhibitions of paintings mounted by official institutions that depicted the nation’s landscape, celebrated the Republic’s formation by its founding fathers, and rejoiced in the virtues of its picturesque forms and inhabitants. Shows like “Century and a Half of Chilean Painting,” “Narrating Chile Through the Landscape,” and “Past and Present of Chile in Painting” of 1976, or the 1981 show “The History of Chile in Painting,” all visited and some even inaugurated by Pinochet, exposed in a pedagogical manner the birth and growth of the nation as seen by local artistic masters. These exhibitions were aimed at improving the consciousness of the nation’s richness, heroic past, and prosperous future, reaffirming through images of Arcadian settings, fertile valleys, and grandiose mountains a sense of having a shared natural identity. Exhibitions of maps and colonial treasures including urban plans and

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<sup>4</sup> There were studies made for example to force radios to transmit music of only national authors in an attempt to reinforce the sense of Chileanness. See “Estudian medida: radios deberán transmitir música de autores nacionales,” *El Mercurio*, June 11, 1975.

<sup>5</sup> From the start, the regime defined itself as “military, nationalist, and anti-communist,” bearing “renovating and unifying ambitions” for the nation. In “¿Aislamiento de Chile?” *El Mercurio*, April 6, 1975. All translations from Chilean newspapers are by the author.

<sup>6</sup> “Reparación de fuertes,” *El Mercurio*, September 24, 1977.

<sup>7</sup> Harvey, “What kind of geography,” 27-28.

topographical works of Spanish and foreign adventurers also provided an external, orderly view of the territory that tied the Chilean past to a history of cultural development and creative impulses.<sup>8</sup> This legacy was being actualized in the present reconstruction of the nation under the lead of strong military fathers as they turned an ideologically and physically forsaken land into a paradise on earth.<sup>9</sup>

In the meantime, a different vision of the national landscape and territory began emerging in works shown at smaller galleries. From menacing mountains compared to a disturbing (gendered) human body to vast and empty deserts associated with the abandoned and derelict plots in the cities, passing through torn and patched up valleys and marginal zones within the capital that went from shantytowns to the city center's slaughterhouses and brothels, these works challenged the placid idylls advocated in the shows of official institutions. Yet they did so not only through their images but also in the mediums they employed. Against the primacy given to painting as an artistic form of representation with mimetic purposes, these works reconfigured the legacy of graphic arts, from incorporating photographs, photocopies, and magazine cut-outs to printed works, collages, sculptures, installations, and even videos, often confusing the boundaries between established mediums by incorporating the actual body of performers and extending art to everyday spaces. In these works, the borders of maps were merged with those of the body, while the margins of society and the corporeal were celebrated as sites enabling the emergence of ambiguous identities while blurring the limits of art and politics. Employing conceptual languages, these works confounded the strict limits distinguishing different materials, corpo-realities, and mediums, reveling in forms associated with the popular or lower classes which were based on mechanical means of reproduction. Against the originality of Chilean painting's fathers, these works raised the banality of the copy, confronting the narratives of national unity and homogeneity as expressed through the landscape with the fragmentation, dispersal, and lack of clear borders of its marginal identities and spaces.

The artists that I am referring to have been generally grouped in Chilean art history and criticism under the overarching concept of "escena de avanzada" (advanced scene).<sup>10</sup> This was a term coined by the critic Nelly Richard in 1981 to refer to a group of artists working in mostly conceptual modes who were reconfiguring the national artistic scene through the transformation of "the mechanics of production and the subversion of cultural communication codes."<sup>11</sup> According to Richard, this was a "primary" scene insofar as there was in Chile an absence of cultural referents that might help understand the artists' radical proposals, the local art scene being "geographically subtracted from all

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<sup>8</sup> For a description of the colonial process, see the article "Fuerza creadora de la colonización hispana en América," *El Mercurio*, July 7, 1978.

<sup>9</sup> Pinochet stated in 1975 that Communism was "an intrinsically immoral and false doctrine," and throughout his government continued to oppose it as a vicious ideology. Pinochet quoted in "La distensión y la moral comunista," *El Mercurio*, September 26, 1975.

<sup>10</sup> The term "escena de avanzada" is difficult to translate, and I have tried to retain both the theatrical connotation of "escena" (scene) and the more avant-garde, military connotation of "avanzada" (advance). An alternative translation would be "scene of advance" or "scene of advancement."

<sup>11</sup> Nelly Richard, *Una mirada sobre el arte en Chile, octubre 1981* (Santiago: no editor, 1981), 13. (Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Spanish texts are by the author).



superior (international) instance of informative control,”<sup>12</sup> and thus lacking the institutional infrastructure and discourses to frame and mediate their propositions. According to Richard, these artists’ works represented an “inaugural” moment in Chilean art, because they were challenging the languages of the past by resorting to a critique of the image as a sign, decomposing its codes and systems of signification, as well as the contexts of its emergence through new mediums (happenings, performance, art actions, video) or “low” art ones (photography, printmaking). By analyzing communicative practices, the artists that Richard gathered under the term “escena de avanzada” were simultaneously commenting on the present political and social situation, particularly the discourses of the dictatorship. This joining of a revision of representation with a critique of society was what gave the conceptual artists in Chile their avant-garde edge.

In 1986, Richard tied the emergence of these new visual strategies and critiques with a particular historical moment. According to the author, the dictatorship had brought about a “breakdown of a whole system of social and cultural references”<sup>13</sup> that had organized everyday life in the past, generating a fragmented ambience, a “dislocated” history, and a repressive environment controlling the movements of its inhabitants. The idea that the coup generated a traumatic break and a crisis of representation on all cultural levels in Chile has been developed by other writers, like Alice A. Nelson, who has argued that the military coup created “a crisis of language and of history, for the previous ways of conceiving of historical continuity and change had failed to eclipse the possibility of the violent authoritarianism that became embodied by the Pinochet regime.”<sup>14</sup> For Richard, artists who were distrustful of official discourses attempted to create new ways of linking again experience to meaning, recomposing from the debris of the coup different versions of a social “history which had been replaced by the Grand History of the victors.”<sup>15</sup> One of the ways in which the “escena de avanzada” performed its critique of the illusions harbored by the regime was through the transgression of any kind of imposed limit, especially between mediums and disciplines. Making works that operated a “displacement of supports and erasure of the frontiers between genres,”<sup>16</sup> for Richard the “escena de avanzada” artists reinvigorated the avant-garde ideal of merging art and life, overstepping the boundaries of artistic materials so as to incorporate the city and the body as the supports of works that critiqued social conformity.

The impact of Richard’s theories regarding the “escena de avanzada” was immediate and longstanding. Her work has influenced subsequent histories of art dealing with the period, from Gaspar Galaz and Milan Ivelic’s *Chile, Arte Actual* of 1988 to

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<sup>12</sup> Richard, *Una mirada*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Nelly Richard, *Margins and Institutions. Art in Chile since 1973* (Melbourne: Art & Text, 1986), 17.

<sup>14</sup> Alice A. Nelson, *Political Bodies. Gender, History, and the Struggle for Narrative Power in Recent Chilean Literature* (Lewisburg and London: Bucknell University Press, 2002), 27.

<sup>15</sup> Richard, *Margins and Institutions*, 17. The Spanish original offers more subtleties than the English translation of the first edition, and when there are discrepancies between the meanings of the two versions, I resort in the footnotes to my own translations of the original Spanish text published in 1986.

<sup>16</sup> This is the title of one of *Margins and Institutions*’ chapters.

nearly all the following narratives written on the subject from a diversity of disciplines. Though Richard continued devoting a large part of her critical labor in the 1980s and 1990s to this topic, her approach remained being a general analysis of the period offering little examination of the precise images used by the artists she labeled as “escena de avanzada” and their connections with a changing social landscape, as well as their links with other “scenes” and the growing problem of defining Chilean identity.<sup>17</sup> Richard’s influential approach has even extended to the most recent scholarship which has begun to trace the impact her theories had in creating a myth around these artists. These revisions have not questioned the idea that the works of the “escena de avanzada” were avant-garde because they were oppositional to the regime and artistically ground-breaking (within the Chilean context), offering scant formal analysis of specific works and their context of emergence. The concrete socio-historical field in which these works appeared often gets reduced to generalizations about the dictatorship’s repressiveness and violence that do little to clarify why certain images, mediums, and concepts were of particular interest to the artists at that specific moment, and how these changed or sometimes were still connected with the past. If this was indeed a “scene,” what has rarely been discussed in revisions of the period is the scene’s fringes or backstage, and its relationship with a larger field of players. This has contributed to the avant-garde aura of political resistance to which the “escena de avanzada” has been related and which has been recently reclaimed in books and exhibitions dealing with political art.<sup>18</sup>

Yet for many years the Chilean vanguard scene remained out of the international artistic limelight. As I will argue in the following pages, the themes and visual strategies employed by these artists, and the insularity they promoted, were some of the reasons why Chilean art has remained so marginal in relation to other cultural circuits.<sup>19</sup> Though the “escena de avanzada’s” discourses can be now read as forming part of larger avant-garde aims and projects, as for example their identification with the “marginal” (whether this meant different social groups or mediums), or of the semantic and rhetorical self-reference of the “neo” avant-garde as had been stated by Pablo Oyarzún,<sup>20</sup> for several

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<sup>17</sup> The only exception to the lack of formal analysis of specific works can be found in the catalogue texts that Richard wrote between 1975 and 1980 for specific artists. Only after the Paris Biennial of 1982 did Richard begin to articulate more forcefully a particular connection between Chilean “advanced” art and other Latin American scenes based on the notion of ‘periphery,’ as will be discussed in the Conclusion.

<sup>18</sup> To mention only one example, works by C.A.D.A. and Leppe were shown as part of the Chilean dictatorial context in the 2009 exhibition “Subversive Practices: Art under Conditions of Political Repression. 1960-1980/ South America / Europe,” at the Kunstverein Stuttgart, Germany. The Chilean part was curated by relatively young historians, Paulina Varas and Ramón Castillo. As will be mentioned in the following chapters, Luis Camnitzer’s new book on Latin American Conceptual art also uses C.A.D.A. as a major example of avant-garde practices in the continent.

<sup>19</sup> Though I do not argue against the fact that there were multiple material impediments to the connection between the arts in Chile with other scenes and to the possibilities of exhibiting abroad, problems which intensified in the 1970s, there is evidence of the artists’ knowledge of certain contemporary trends, which they used or dismissed according to varying interests.

<sup>20</sup> Pablo Oyarzún, “Tesis breves sobre arte y política en la época de la elipsis de la obra,” in *Arte y Política*, eds. Pablo Oyarzún, Nelly Richard, Claudia Zaldívar (Santiago: Universidad Arcis and Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2005), 21-25. According to Oyarzún, the “neo” avant-garde “returns, in a way, to the condition of self-reference proper to the determination of autonomy of modern art, inasmuch it

years they were intended to clearly separate and distinguish these new national practices from others. In other words, the demarcation of territories was a preoccupation that extended beyond the dictatorship's hands, also affecting the art scene.

One of the main issues that have not been addressed in art historical narratives dealing with Chilean art between 1975 and 1985 is that there is an interesting parallel between how the military was closing down the nation's frontiers and focusing on its identity and how conceptual artists were defining what true national art was. There is a connection to be made between politics and art that goes beyond the oppositional and inaugural arguments defining the so called avant-gardes in Chile which has become the standard. For as the dictatorship was tracing the physical and imaginary boundaries of the nation and determining who belonged to it, conceptual artists were not only attacking and deconstructing these models by trying to reveal the ambiguity of these frontiers, but were involved in a project of defining the boundaries of national art. A central argument that links diverse topics in this work deals with how as the Chilean conceptual artists were contesting in their works the closed images proposed by the dictatorship regarding identity, they were simultaneously tracing their own lines of belonging to an art that was defined as eminently local and distanced from foreign examples. If in their artistic discourse the Chilean conceptual artists were de-territorializing an essentialist national identity by incorporating the other, the margin, and the difference, in their positioning within the art field they were, on the contrary, re-territorializing their practice. I borrow these concepts from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari<sup>21</sup> and interpret "territorialization" as the practice of fixing the borders of a determined area, which can be countered by "deterritorialization" or the dismantling of those borders, and by "reterritorialization" as the reassignment of new ones.

But the aim of creating a purely national art attuned with its surroundings was not an easy task to accomplish. In order to achieve an imaginary independence, there were many symbolic fathers that these artists were distancing themselves from, local and foreign, present and past. Yet these patriarchal models (with the military dictatorship at its head) were replaced by others only to be ambiguously disavowed once more. It was as if revealing affiliations was detrimental at the time, and it is interesting to note that Chilean art critics of the mid-seventies avoided referencing the specific theoretical sources they used, even though these can be clearly traced back to their origins in foreign discourses. This work is in a way an act of excavation, unraveling theoretical and artistic threads that are interconnected, while trying to place the art works and their possible meanings in a larger and more complex socio-historical and artistic context. Even though the Chilean conceptual artists asserted that they were uninfluenced by foreign art and therefore were creating something novel, the critical ambience in which they emerged was strongly influenced by Structuralism, Poststructuralism, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism, as well as different artists' writings such as those of Wolf Vostell and Allan

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struggles to formulate in the work the consciousness of the effective conditions of possibility of its enunciation." Oyarzún, 21.

<sup>21</sup> The terms have a varied application depending on the work they appear in, as for example in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972; repr., Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota, 1983), or *Kafka. Towards a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (1975; repr., Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

Kaprow.<sup>22</sup> I refer to and analyze these specific theories throughout the course of this work, for they helped shape the interpretations and often the very production of the works of the Chilean artists under discussion.

To look again at the conceptual works produced in Chile between 1975 and 1985 so as to trace their relationships with a larger socio-historical and artistic context is one of the main aims of this work. This dissertation asks why in the works of artists that have been generally grouped by historians as part of this vanguard group like Eugenio Dittborn (1943), Carlos Leppe (1952), Carlos Altamirano (1954), Lotty Rosenfeld (1943), and Juan Castillo (1952), the natural, social, and constructed landscape of the nation took center stage, including not just representations of the mountains, desert, or southernmost plains defining the geographical location of the country, but also of certain of its inhabitants. It aims at understanding why artists sought to identify with the marginal and how this relationship became associated with graphic arts in particular and with the avant-garde in general, leading to a wide array of works that dealt with borders as sites of resistance and political contestation. I intend to analyze how space and its demarcation were further connected to corporeal and social inscriptions, leading not just to theories about confusing art and life but to specific challenges to the dictatorship's discourses and the notions of national identity it upheld. In the pages that follow I intend to make a narrative map of how these artists were contesting ideas about identity and the social body, proposing alternative visions of the national landscape that were based on spatial metaphors and varied concepts of marginality. As the traditional social structures supported by the regime such as the family, the homeland, and gender, were deconstructed and critiqued, these artists were outlining a different social cartography where a multiplicity of bodies dwelled and transformed it. Focusing on the specificity of the body and space, and the relationships of power conforming them, the artists working in Chile in conceptual modes were inscribing opposing and contradictory narratives surrounding the concept of the nation and its limits in what became a battle of identity during the dictatorship.

In looking at these works and their context, I take a general approach derived from the social history of art, which regards art as a social product emerging in a specific context to which it is inevitably tied. Under this view, the artist does not work in isolation, but is part of a collection of social forces with varied interests and material conditions which contribute to the shaping of the work. I analyze for example the interactions between the actual landscape and its representations in the media, in official discourse, and in art, as well as the values given by artists to certain genres, materials and technological elements and how these changed the perception of the landscape. Arnold Hauser's thesis that "every work of art shows clear traces of its own time, and contains

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<sup>22</sup> Much of this theoretical transmission was possible through the agency of particular individuals based on their travels, the places they had studied, the people they met, and the places they worked in Chile. Thus, the importance acquired in the 1970s and early 1980s by universities, workshops, galleries, and even homes in transmitting this information. This was the case with Ronald Kay and Catalina Parra and their connection with Germany, Eugenio Dittborn and his European antecedents as well as the French streak in Richard and Justo Pastor Mellado's writings, and even Carlos Leppe and his connections with Spanish artists. These threads will be slowly unraveled in the next chapters.

the unique, unrepeatable, and unmistakable character of a historical constellation,”<sup>23</sup> has more implications than merely making of a work of art the product and mirror of its age. The notion of “constellation” is apt to describe the workings of art and its meanings, for it refers to a set of social and material relationships changing with time which includes economic forms of production, ideological stances, and class divisions. The social history of art has been associated with ideological characterizations of art, and one can certainly read the works and the art scene in Chile as reflecting class conflicts, as the critic Justo Pastor Mellado has done. Yet the art works that I will deal with did not merely reflect social class structures and opposing political stances, but were inscribed within a larger context of changing discourses regarding art, life, and politics. Taking a strict sociological approach to the arts of Chile within the dictatorship risks reproducing the spatial model of right/left, inside/outside produced by the military regime, diffusing the contradictions within it. What I take from the social history of art is an attention to the specific ideologies harbored in the period and the socio-historical context of Chile during the dictatorship years.

I privilege in this sense the historical frame over any other theory and go back to varied primary sources of the period in order to open up these works to more inclusive contexts. I have resorted to catalogues and the art works’ first critical appraisals, along with the publications and seminars that set up certain ideas about art at the time, laying out in each chapter the critical frames in which these works emerged and which they also helped shape. Revising the exhibitions while analyzing not only the individual works’ images but the materials, technologies, and genres used and how they were understood, has helped me reconstruct on one hand the polemics regarding the role of the artistic vanguard and the importance given to graphic practices within the Chilean cultural environment. On the other hand, I have also continuously referred to official exhibitions, cultural attitudes, and particularly the nation’s image as set up by both the opposition and state-related media, looking into the ideologies that informed them. I do this so as to view the cultural field from different angles, including the often ambiguous relations between artists and institutions. For opposition to the regime and its cultural apparatus was not unequivocal, but as attested by the participation of artists in a series of events, contests, and printed projects, their own production intersected in many ways with the “institutions” they were critiquing.

I am interested in reconstructing the polemics of the time regarding identity in the arts and in culture at large, analyzing how the discourses concerning politics, art, and the everyday, as framed by the notion of the avant-garde or vanguard were formed, carved out, and inscribed in the social realm. In this sense, one could consider these artists and critics as “producers” of culture, a term derived from a Marxist position and used by Richard to describe her position as an art critic in 1979. Her own historic model regarding the avant-garde practices in Chile was not only instrumental in the creation of a coherent vision regarding these works which has influenced later art histories, but it was a discursive practice actively shaping the arts produced then as well. The same can be said of Dittborn, whose own writings in catalogues and artists’ books reinforced concepts, techniques, and genealogies tying artists and practices together. The centrality of their roles as a cultural producers has not been sufficiently analyzed, particularly how

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<sup>23</sup> Arnold Hauser, *The Sociology of Art*, trans. Kenneth J. Northcott (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 77. Originally published as *Soziologie der Kunst*, München, 1974.

Richard's and Dittborn's views on the definition of the new Chilean vanguard art affected artists and their production several years before Richard conceived a term with which to baptize the scene.

Nonetheless, I depart from strict Marxist materialistic approaches to art, insofar as instead of placing class divisions at the center of cultural production I revert to a series of theoretical models that might help explain the varied interests which led to the creation of specific art works.<sup>24</sup> My approach is closer to what Raymond Williams termed "cultural materialism,"<sup>25</sup> which brings together a Marxist analysis of material culture with other theoretical positions. I do this not only because multiple disciplines and sources inform the points of view from which critics and artists were discussing the works, from Marxism to Feminism, but because the very specificity of cultural life during the dictatorship requires a more comprehensive approach. As I attempt to connect particular changes in the Chilean social, physical, and imaginary landscape to specific art works, themes, strategies, technologies, and discourses employed by artists, I have thus resorted to a wide array of sources, from those contingent to the times to more contemporary approaches to questions of space, nationality, and identity.

Because this work deals with the molding of national identity, theories of space are at the center of it. I have based a large part of my interpretations of the works on the writings of Gaston Bachelard and his poetic interpretation of spatial practices and symbols, particularly his conceptualization of the house as a primary abode resembling the human body in *The Poetics of Space*. This conception has guided my approach to the work of Carlos Leppe and the connection made in his work of the motherland to a form of home and matrix of meaning. Bachelard's connection to phenomenology also provides a link to other spatial theories informing these pages, primarily those of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. From Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* I derive several concepts, beginning with the notion that there can be no perception of space without a body.<sup>26</sup> Space is not an empty and passive entity awaiting signification like a vessel to be filled with meaning, nor is it an immutable environment disconnected from the bodies that perceive it, but space and body are intertwined in more than one way. As Merleau-Ponty argued, the body has its own spatiality, which is made evident through simple actions such as movement and our sense of orientation, and it actively assumes and informs space. Likewise, space is corporeal, having depth and materiality, both of which are given and transformed through perception. If the subject is always in a setting, the latter is given meaning in the present through individual and collective past experiences and ideas about the future. Thus, the human body not only inhabits space but projects it,

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<sup>24</sup> This has been the approach of Justo Pastor Mellado, which was heavily influenced by his prior studies of political philosophy in France, as can be seen in *Dos textos tácticos* (Santiago: Ediciones Jemmy Button INK, 1998), his first broad historical analysis of the period.

<sup>25</sup> For Williams, culture was not a 'superstructure' duplicating its economic 'base' like a mirror, nor was it solely associated with 'high' art, but with the whole of life and its myriad manifestations. See Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1958; repr., New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

<sup>26</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002). English edition first published in 1962.

changing its representation and perception. Just like the body is not a permanently fixed entity, space is also subject to transformation and meaning.

This basic phenomenal assertion allows me to move fluidly in this work from spatial examples to corporeal ones. The connection between them is of particular importance when analyzing Chilean conceptual practices of the period, since they often established a displacement from bodies to spaces and back, blurring their borders. Furthermore, while the Chilean vanguards were re-conceptualizing the space/body relation under the banner of a graphic model (reinterpreting them as surfaces of social inscriptions and thus of memory), the dictatorship was also imagining the nation as a body, one that was sick and in need of strong masculine intervention to restore its health. The Chilean territory was often referred to as more than a geographically defined space, but as an organism which was in a process of transformation. The metaphor of the Body Politic, where the state is envisioned as a human body with its different parts and functions corresponding to social members, was constantly evoked in both politics and art as its meaning was contested and attention was brought to how power relations are effectively enacted on specific bodies and places. Alice Nelson has argued that the use of these corporeal metaphors allowed for the erasure of the concrete bodies on which disciplining and defense was performed in Chile, so that “the “diseased members” threatening the values of the fatherland must be extirpated from the social body.”<sup>27</sup> As real human bodies were tortured, murdered, and displaced, the territory was conceived as more than space but as a collection of bodies with different histories, genders, and social markings.

Many art works revealed that this social body was also a gendered one. The body politic was sometimes treated by the military regime as a generative feminine matrix, a Motherland understood as a passive surface awaiting patriarchal inscriptions, or on the contrary it was regarded as an impenetrable Fatherland whose integrity had to be protected. If, as Henri Lefebvre argued in his later works, “the whole of (social) space proceeds from the body, even though it so metamorphoses the body that it may forget it altogether,”<sup>28</sup> it is important to analyze the connections between the corporeal and the spatial and how they were reconfigured and contested by different social agents in order to understand the re-union and con-fusion of body and space enacted in Chilean conceptual practices.

Lefebvre’s own theories of space and the critical interpretation they have received in the work of Edward Soja act as a frame of reference for much of what is discussed in the following pages. Lefebvre developed the notion of the “production of space” as an answer to the binary system separating mental space and history from social practices that had come through centuries of philosophical work in the West. According to Lefebvre, lived space had been reduced in philosophy to a “passive locus of social relations,”<sup>29</sup> isolated into a stage or empty container that was distant from the intellectual life of the subject. Lefebvre was proposing a way of bringing together the physical,

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<sup>27</sup> Nelson, *Political Bodies*, 40.

<sup>28</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (1974; repr., New York: Blackwell, 1991), 405.

<sup>29</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 11.

mental, historical, and social<sup>30</sup> through the idea that space is socially produced<sup>31</sup> and therefore should be reconceived as a changing configuration of ideas, representations, actions, and subjects, as much as of physical and perceptual elements. Lefebvre's distinction between three interconnected spatial components,<sup>32</sup> spatial practices (perceived or physical space), representations of space (conceived space, the conceptualized and administered space architects and urbanists, for example), and representational spaces (or spaces of representation, space as lived and experienced by its users in an everyday manner),<sup>33</sup> was the basis of his analysis of how concrete spaces are socially produced and subject to change. Lefebvre's triad has underlined my discussion of the works of Lotty Rosenfeld and Elias Adasme (1955), in which space in its varied manifestations was conceived as mobile and capable of being transformed not only by the state but by its different users and imagining subjects. The possibility of establishing other contesting relations to space (whether these be urban or "natural") within the dictatorial context, meant reclaiming subjectivity and agency, particularly the capacity to alter space and the relations of power embedded in it.

Edward W. Soja has further developed Lefebvre's idea of "lived space" and thinking in triads in his work *Thirdspace*.<sup>34</sup> While looking at the "spatiality of human life,"<sup>35</sup> Soja searches for a third way out of binaries and even dialectical thinking, an alternative path that bridges and extends the analysis of history and sociality by opening up a "third existential dimension,"<sup>36</sup> which he, like Lefebvre, places in a spatial level. For Soja, *Thirdspace* unites the real and the imagined (Lefebvre's perceived and represented spaces) in order to invent and "produce" other forms of spatiality and thus, of lived experience. *Thirdspace* is defined by Soja as a space of openness, "a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings,"<sup>37</sup> which does not merely celebrate difference and diversity or, on the other hand, close down meaning into dichotomies, but allows for alternative sites of being and knowledge. Though Soja's propositions might seem distant from a place where inside and outside, right and left, patriotic and non-patriotic, were continuously delimited, the political importance he assigns to the creation of an-other space echoes what different conceptual artists in Chile were attempting to produce and incite through their highly spatial works.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Lefebvre, 26.

<sup>32</sup> Lefebvre, 33.

<sup>33</sup> Lefebvre, 38-39.

<sup>34</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagines Spaces* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

<sup>35</sup> Soja, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Soja, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Soja, 2.



Within certain disciplines that deal with space, the territorial and graphic model embedded in geography provides a conceptual basis for this work. I make an association between geographic practices, nationalism, and the arts, insofar as they all involve social practices that demarcate a space, inscribing its contours and separating it from others. In this sense, one could read Richard's work in the field as inscribing (producing) a "scene" and marking or mapping a territory within history, the arts, and culture. From the field of geography I have drawn freely from what authors like David Harvey have termed "critical geography," one of the latest developments within the field whose approach goes beyond the conception of geography as concerned with only physical manifestations of the earth. Instead, critical geography considers larger social, political, and ideological constructions and its actual social implications (justice, poverty, racial difference, among them) which affect the ways we perceive and imagine space. Harvey's work on geography, urban organization, and power relations has been central to make connections between politics, (uneven) economic development, and different forms of displacement that took place between 1975 and 1985 in Chile, particularly in relation to urbanism and the dictatorship's ideas on modernization.

The related field of cultural geography, which studies cultural products such as art, language, and religion, in relation to the locations they originate in and their changes across different places, has been of importance in framing the question of the landscape and its problematic connection with nationality. Within this area, I have drawn from the works of Denis Cosgrove and Irit Rogoff, since they have been attracted to the intersections between landscape, geography, and culture, focusing on their relation with identity formation and art. Even though the problems of belonging treated by Rogoff are anchored in more recent examples of displacement, migration, and loss, her preoccupation with how emplacement and belonging or not belonging constitute subjects who in turn delineate places through their memories and desires, was of particular importance when looking at works that were trying to reconnect geographical matters with specific subjectivities differing from the government's positions. The question of finding the roots of the nation, its particularities, and its cultural manifestations as related with a specific place and its history, or as Carl Sauer argued with "cultural landscapes,"<sup>38</sup> was not just a project of the dictatorship but equally that of artists who questioned (and sometimes duplicated in an inverted manner) the sources from where such notions of authenticity were derived. I have also been influenced by the more historically oriented work of Simon Schama, whose interpretations of the cultural history of mountains in Western cultures have been particularly illuminating when dealing with Chilean art, for one is bound to find the Andes as a major landmark and frame in the picture.

Since several chapters of this work are involved with the landscape, which I take to be not only a genre within the arts with a specific history but a set of practices about looking at and producing certain spaces and places, I also refer to landscape theories. W.

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<sup>38</sup> According to Sauer, a cultural landscape is "fashioned from a natural landscape by a culture group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium. The cultural landscape is the result." Carl Sauer, "The Morphology of Landscape," in *Land and Life: A Selection from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer*, ed. J. Leighly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 315-350 (first published in *Geography* 2, no. 2 (1925): 19-54). Though Sauer gave a central importance to culture in shaping the meaning of landscape, as is discussed below, the very notion of the landscape as "natural" is problematic since it is a cultural product.

J. T. Mitchell's essays on the topic, particularly the collection *Landscape and Power*, have informed my approach to landscape as a politically contested space where power relations are embodied and enacted. Mitchell argues that even though works like those of Harvey have meant to connect geography with a Marxist tradition and phenomenology, the landscape has merely remained in them "a view of a space."<sup>39</sup> Instead Mitchell proposes looking at the landscape as a "process by which social and subjective identities are formed,"<sup>40</sup> and not just a space or its representation, but an active cultural practice through which power is actualized. One of the critical aspects of the landscape is how it "naturalizes" certain social relations and constructions, a point of radical relevance when analyzing the specific images used by the dictatorship and contested by artists, regarding those "given" natural elements that defined the nation, its history, and its representations. Mitchell's critique of Kenneth Clark's *Landscape into Art*, and the connections he traces between landscape and imperial politics has also been useful when discussing the intersections of the Chilean colonial and republican past and the neo-colonizing intentions of the military regime.

Finally, the nation and its conceptualization permeate the question of identity dealt with in this work. While it has been mentioned that the nation was related to bodies, territories, and geographies in Chilean culture, it was primordially envisioned by the dictatorship as a community of individuals sharing certain ideas within a clearly delimited space. For the government, there were those who did not belong to the national community, because they had brought extraneous ideologies into this shared space, contaminating its integrity. Benedict's Anderson's definition of the nation as an "imagined political community,"<sup>41</sup> has been important to understand the "creative" or productive aspect involved in the shaping of a nation and its limits, rather than thinking of the Chilean nation as an essence readily available for grasping. Even though 'imagined,' for Arneson nations are not merely fictional constructs and thus opposed to 'true' ones, but creations insofar as they are socially produced and subject to change. Arneson's recognition of the 'limited' yet flexible character of the nation, as well as its correlated concept of sovereignty, evokes the claims of the dictatorship on a national and international scale, since it declared absolute control over the lands and bodies contained within this abstract and yet concrete social space, and was engaged in a constant battle to secure its rights and frontiers. Though Arneson described this community as a "fraternity," and thus implicitly rendered it masculine, his omission of gender points to the continuity of certain patriarchal questions in the making of a nation. The rhetoric of the family supplied a space for women in Chile as nurturers and mothers of the patriotic sons defending the nation, yet as artists like Carlos Leppe and Eugenio Dittborn pointed, it left many other forms of gendered and ethnic corporeality and subjectivity out of its representations.

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<sup>39</sup> W. T. Mitchell, "Space, Place, and landscape," in *Landscape and Power*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), vii.

<sup>40</sup> Mitchell, "Introduction," in *Landscape and Power*, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 5.

Here the question of the performance of identity becomes central. For the dictatorship claimed that the nation was a historically delimited object, that it was merely extending a project of sovereignty and colonization begun during republican times by the nation's fathers (General Bernardo O'Higgins being at its origins), and that its frontiers were naturally given. Yet its actions demonstrated that those fixed borders and the identity they seemed to encompass were in constant need of confirmation because they were not stable or historically ordained. The nationalistic discourse was a repeated act of constituting itself, an anxiously iterated performance of marking the territory where the act was meant to be read as the result. A guiding thread to several discussions on identity formation and the concept of repetition and reproduction dealt in this work has been the post structural feminist work of Judith Butler on gender and performativity. According to Butler, gender is not only a social construction but the result of actively performing and expressing gender. The performative is understood by Butler as "a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning,"<sup>42</sup> an act that is repeated and thus experienced as a reenactment of meaning, as if it revealed the identity being performed. Gender gets constituted and normalized through the repetition of these acts, as they offer an appearance of continuity and seamlessness. But for Butler, "gender fashions itself as imitation without an origin,"<sup>43</sup> insofar what gets normalized as an essential "ground" or authentic source of gender is only the resulting effect of the need to repeat its performance in order to determine a stable sense of "being." The gaps formed in the acts of repetition, the breaks and discontinuities in this surface of identity offer, according to Butler, possibilities for gender transformation. One can extend this conceptualization of gender formation to other manifestations of identity, particularly to the constitution of a Chilean subject grounded on a fixed location as asserted by the dictatorship and the apprehension generated by the spaces of ambiguity on this surface.

One of the most important themes within Chilean conceptual practices of the late seventies and eighties was concerned with the notion of borders and margins. These were envisioned as both social edges with little interest to centers of authority and as indeterminate spaces joining inside and outside. Margins were regarded as thresholds that not only demarcated a territory at its fringes but placed in contact different ones through their very existence as borderlines or borderlands. Like the white edges surrounding the content of a page or the contour lines on a surface which by closing in the figure also touch what is outside, margins install an ambiguous space of in-betweenness. These (third) spaces were in turn given political connotations by artists, insofar as they could be read as spaces of risk, contestation, and agency, unruly spaces that both mediated and transgressed boundaries, thereby becoming models of social contradiction. From brothels to decaying arcades, passing through geopolitical frontiers and shantytowns, conceptual artists in Chile began identifying with different forms of marginality as sites of potential disruption to the dictatorship's frontiers and claims to identity. To transgress fixed lines and to overstep limits and borders meant choosing marginality as a space and body of resistance against oppression.

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<sup>42</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, Routledge, 1990), 139.

<sup>43</sup> Butler, 138.

As the dictatorship was tracing physical and psychological borders, several Chilean conceptual artists began to use models coming from graphic arts with which they attempted to mark and produce other territories and identities that did not fit into the images of prosperity and national unity proposed by the military regime and reproduced in the media. Starting from basic graphic concepts such as the matrix, which was understood as a source for representation, and using verbs like ‘to edit’ and ‘to inscribe,’ artists working in conceptual modes expanded these notions from the realm of the bi-dimensional page to everyday space and the body. By understanding the act of printing as the marking of a surface with an incision or stain, and reading the ‘edition’ as the repetition of a gesture, Chilean artists were able to move from the space of art into the quotidian, joining representations to concrete bodies and locations, while proposing other forms of generating social inscriptions. If the body could be read as a passive surface awaiting cultural marks, these artists were pointing to how the body is also a producer of signs and a site of opening to others. If, as Lefebvre argued, social relations of production are projected and “inscribed” in space, and in this manner produce it,<sup>44</sup> Chilean artists were translating these social markings onto bodies as well. Through the use of graphic models usually associated with the registering and inscription of reality, the Chilean conceptual artists were trying to demonstrate the instability of borders, the ambiguity of the graphic mark, and the ambivalence of the spatial models in the processes of constructing national identity.

The related notions of repetition and origins, particularly the denial of essences and the indeterminacy provoked by the margin, were at the center of the artistic discussions surrounding the works of the Chilean conceptual practices. These debates can now be read under a postmodern lens, and parallels in terms of subject and even visual strategies could be established between the Chilean examples and those of appropriationism, the “Pictures” generation, institutional critique practices, or neo-conceptual works. Yet postmodern theories were only discussed in Chile beginning in the early 1980s, causing yet another identity crisis when local artistic developments were confronted with current international models. It could be argued (as it was in 1982) that the Chilean artists were anachronistic, latecomers in their avant-garde approach, since Performance, Body art, conceptualism had all been “done” before. Or, the question could be inverted, asking if the Chilean examples were postmodern in advance, and if it was only a matter of distance, of location, which left these artists in the shadows of international discourses. While the conclusion will deal with this topic, it is important to note that in the Chilean scene, reproduction as a critique of origins was primordially envisioned under a graphic and psychoanalytically infused model rather than a strictly postmodern one, which I argue is a particularity of it. In Chile, the break from overarching narratives and origins was not only guided by a modern/postmodern debate, but framed by other local discussions, problems, and pasts which need to be analyzed in more detail, particularly the discussion surrounding mechanical reproduction and its opposition to traditional art forms.

Since this work centers on conceptual graphic practices and their extension into performance and video, I have not dealt with artists who are usually associated with the “escena de avanzada” yet worked in painting. I have only referred to Juan Domingo Dávila (1946), Gonzalo Díaz (1947), and Arturo Duclos (1959), to mention a few

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<sup>44</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 129.

examples, when their works or writings intersected the polemics and discussions surrounding the local vanguard practices. I also refer to artists such as Dittborn, Leppe, Altamirano, and Rosenfeld in particular as “conceptual” instead of ‘conceptualist’ or some other variation of the term for different reasons. First, though these artists never formed a group (except in the case of V.I.S.U.A.L., C.A.D.A., and “Al Margen,” as well as in the varied forms in which they conversed, argued, split, and sometimes even lived together) and did not formally adhere to the specific tenets of Sol Lewitt or Joseph Kosuth, they manifested in interviews a knowledge of canonic North American and even European conceptual practices. But more importantly, these artists proceeded in ways parallel to other movements which privileged language and an analysis of communicational modes, favoring the idea over the finished product, negating artistic skill, producing works in series, or removing themselves from traditional materials and questioning the conventions and institutions supporting them. This formal similarity or “affinity” of sorts is related to the second reason. In the past fifteen years there have been discussions in Latin American scholarship about distinguishing North American and English conceptual art from ‘marginal’ or third world forms of conceptualisms, basing their differences on the political inclination manifested by these conceptual trends. For Alexander Alberro, for example, the Brazilian and Argentinean conceptual artists were more powerful than their Anglo counterparts because of their political edge,<sup>45</sup> a position that was also taken by Luis Camnitzer and Mari Carmen Ramírez in the *Global Conceptualisms* exhibition catalogue where they attempted to define Latin American conceptually based art (one of several ‘conceptualisms’ around the globe) as politically committed. Though I agree with the general(izing) idea that Latin American forms of conceptual art tend to be more politically oriented than their North American counterparts, and could cite as an example how the Chilean artists’ conceptual displacements were meant to ultimately transform the social realm, I prefer to retain the term “conceptual” when dealing with the Chilean art scene. I do so since, as both Alberro and Stimson suggested and as the Chilean works emphasized, the term’s own “origins” are muddled, contradictory, and difficult to determine, with the ‘roots’ of conceptual art extending and showing up in a variety of different contexts at nearly the same time. The ambiguous nature of conceptual art was manifested in the multiple refractions to which this ‘foreign’ model was submitted to in the Chilean context, its forms and language becoming at times molds to be repeated and its self-referential character echoing the local self-enclosure. Yet this was a questioning of art’s parameters and language which could be opened up and transformed so as to question a particular and contingent reality.

One of the ways in which this refraction took place was through the particular characteristics accorded to graphic practices in the Chilean art scene. The adoption of graphic models and the value given to them was tied to a problematic of mediums and of social classes. Graphic arts were associated by Chilean artists with forms of low art and mass culture, with printing and photography envisioned as two different historical moments which had disrupted the exclusivity, skill, and value of traditional art. These mediums were taken as marginal, minor forms within artistic genres because of their similarities and distance from conventions and their connection to the popular. Though in Chile there was a strong tradition of printing practices, both from a high art position

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<sup>45</sup> Alexander Alberro, “Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1977,” in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, *Conceptual Art: A critical anthology*, (MIT Press, 1999), xvi-xxxvii.

(engraving and etching) and low (woodcut and later on silkscreen), it was the latter and its connection with the lower classes, a history of violence, and satirical commentary which was revived and often referred to by these artists. Print culture provided a visual and material base whose mechanical means of reproduction, low cost commercial spread, hybridity, and vernacular subject matter, were turned into emblems of opposition to the preciousness of high art and its uniqueness. The discourse of Walter Benjamin on the subject was of special importance for Chilean artists and theorists like Ronald Kay who constantly worked on the topic of mechanical reproduction and its ties with new possible forms of political and historical consciousness. While Kay favored the German philosopher's redemptive approach to the problem posed by technological dominance, Richard began looking at the question from a French poststructuralist perspective using the works of Roland Barthes, as would critics like Adriana Valdés and others who began contributing in 1979 to Richard's *Revista CAL* and the 1982-1983 publication titled *La Separata*.

The relationship between low art forms and politics was in turn tied to the notion of the avant-garde. While this debate had already started several years before the coup took place, it had been previously linked with revolutionary, leftist, popular, and pan-Latin American projects which were not only shattered in 1973 but considered anachronistically overarching under the new fragmented political circumstances. Political commitment in the arts was redefined by the emerging conceptual artists in Chile as acts of political resistance related to multiple forms of difference and marginality. Even though there were continuities with past projects, as well as a strong "redemptive" inflection as seen in the works of the collective C.A.D.A., the sense of newness associated with the "escena" came in part from the radically altered context in which they were performing their transgressions of artistic limits and attacks on artistic institutions, and partly from their questioning any kind of essential sources of identity. On the other hand, the historic avant-garde's desire to merge art and life was given a renewed meaning in the Chilean context, as graphic inscriptions were associated to social ones literally changing the aspect of bodies and places. The passage from the line inscribed on the matrix to the wounds and scars of the individual and social body gained a political value as life continued to be threatened within a repressive ambience.

The graphic models of repetition supplied by the matrix and reproduction were also tied to a psychoanalytical frame. Sigmund Freud's theories on trauma, the unconscious, and the referential matrix provided by the family, were appropriated by artists and critics alike to reflect on the break the military regime had created in social life and the crisis of representation that emerged out of it. The dictatorship's patriarchal modeling of the nation and its masculine position on its "imagined community" was read by multiple cultural agents through Freud's triangular family model of father, mother, and son by understanding the social construct of the family as an original type of matrix, where the individual's identity begins to be performed and defined. Yet, as Freud's topographical model of repression and memory suggested, this very construction was filled with anxiety and "other" forgotten or erased inscriptions that challenged its own normativity. The family as an organizational category and its connection to gender, ethnicity, and class was questioned by artists in Chile, revealing apprehensions and suppressed desires regarding different forms of subjectivity and their embodiment. These anxieties were read as recurrent symptoms and repeated acts of delimitation and

disembodiment, which performed a displacement of the ‘original’ model, never exactly reproducing it as the same, but rather pointing to its fissures.

Jacques Lacan’s and Julia Kristeva’s interpretations of Freud’s theories in relation to subject formation, the other, and the body formed an important corpus of theories which were indirectly discussed by Richard and Ronald Kay in particular. I have referred to such embodied models in several parts of this work, especially in relation to the works of Leppe and Richard’s discussion of the importance given to the body in Chilean art. Since the early 1980s, Richard appropriated Lacan’s notion of the Symbolic as an eminently linguistic yet all encompassing category marking the entry of the subject into language and order (law, structure). Richard associated the Symbolic with any kind of repressive and controlling cultural model, from the dictatorship to other forms of socialization and meaning production. The patriarchal model embedded in Lacan’s Symbolic allowed Richard to turn to Kristeva’s notion of corporeal “pulsations” as a site of de-regulation, desire, and subversion which transgresses the order of the symbolic.<sup>46</sup> Though I have also used these theories in my own interpretations and owe in general a great deal to Richard’s approach and analysis of these topics, I depart from several of her views on the meaning of the works, particularly her approach to binaries, nationalism, the social landscape, and technology. When dealing with the complex problems of subject formation and identity in Chilean art I have used other feminist poststructuralist ideas (such as those of Butler) and psychoanalytical theories (from Donald W. Winnicott to Melanie Klein) complementing and sometimes critiquing those of Freud, Lacan, and Kristeva. I do so not in a desire to “update” the earlier and important interpretations of the artists’ works, but to look at them from another perspective, trying to open up the significance that they had and still have, while intertwining them with a larger context. As mentioned before, the theories developed at the time surrounding the Chilean art “scene” in the seventies and eighties have had such an overriding foundational impact on later scholarship that much has been overlooked and left behind, from an analysis of the works themselves to the varied and sometimes conflicting ways in which they related to their social environment.

This work is guided by three main themes. First, the notion of the ‘marginal,’ understood by artists and critics as a problematic site of indistinction and ambiguity. By marking the border as a gap distinguishing two fields, margins were conceived as embodying a dangerous proximity to difference. Simultaneously inside and outside, margins became ciphers of the otherness within, of the repressed. This wide interpretation of the marginal enabled multiple interpretations of it, from specific locations, classes, ethnicities, genders, genres, and bodies, to landmarks. Because of the relevance given to marginality, graphic practices associated with popular classes and mass media, from woodcuts, stencil and silkscreen to photography, and their combination in collages, became primary means for the contestation and construction of multiple national identities.

A second guiding thread concerns the idea of ‘marking.’ Derived from a graphic model, the act of inscribing marks onto a surface was regarded as defining the inside and outside of identities, bodies, and spaces. These marks could be variously interpreted as

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<sup>46</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984). Only from 1980 onwards and then in a brief and often imprecise manner, did Richard begin to quote her theoretical sources, such as Kristeva and Lacan.

the frontiers of the national territory, its imaginary borders, and ideological limits, passing through corporeal and personal boundaries. Marking had its own corollary, for the boundary traced by the mark was meant to be overstepped, or rather, called for its transgression. Such trespasses were envisioned by artists as not only subsumed within the world of art but extending to life as well and were given a political value as signs of protest and insubordination.

The third guiding notion is that of displacement. Though originating in Freud's analysis of dreams, the notion of transferring from one place to another could be related to bodies, images, mediums, or concepts. Displacement was translated by artists in multiple ways, as in the embodiment of graphic concepts onto concrete spaces and bodies. The techniques of printing got "displaced" from the space of the page to the three-dimensional, actual space of everyday life, allowing artists to read the city as a surface of inscription and give it a body, just like society, the territory, the landscape, and the nation were understood as corporeal entities. This passage from page to body, from map to actual lived space, was in turn re-inscribed and re-conceptualized through technological transformations. The notion of mechanical reproduction and the connection between graphic arts and the registering of reality allowed artists to connect graphic practices to video, extending their markings to a virtual and yet also concrete realm. Reproduction was in turn related with trauma and to repeat became a way of remembering and producing reproductions that were never fully stable, complete, or original. Each act of repetition was understood as a performance attempting to define a limit of identity, whether national, communitarian, or personal, acts of marking that needed to be renewed in order to gain a sense of fixity. To mark an identity also became one of the avant-garde's goals as they set out to separate themselves from the artistic past, both national and international, analyzing the new socio-historical situation of the nation with different eyes.

Though the specific dates chosen in this work, 1975-1985, mark a decade within Chilean art, Chapter 1 begins some years before 1975 in order to trace several connections regarding the notion of the avant-garde in the art scenes before and after the coup. This is important in order to understand what effectively changed and what did not in the years that followed, and why the "escena de avanzada" has been continually envisioned as marking a radical break with the past. Thus the first chapter works as an introduction to the state of the arts in Chile some decades before the coup, analyzing its transformations, its main actors and the critical theories available, as well as their interconnections. This historical framework sets up a stage to understand why the appearance of the first "happening" by Carlos Leppe in 1974 was received with surprise by critics, and why there was a sense that the scene had been radically altered by new artistic languages in ways that went beyond the changed political situation.

I review in particular the ideas guiding the arts that were considered avant-garde in the years immediately before and during Salvador Allende's government which in itself marked a radical change in Chilean society and the definition of its identity. I begin with the central role acquired by Informalism and by José Balmes (1927) in their connection with politics, passing to the reaction of Balmes' students against abstraction through popular-derived imagery and objects. These two main trends were punctuated by other artistic experiments which were defining different forms of socially committed art. Some examples are the ephemeral installations at the Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago



made by Juan Pablo Langlois (1936) and Cecilia Vicuña (1948) on one hand, and the works of the muralists and the brigades formed during Allende's government that took art to the streets on the other. When looking at their positions, I also point to how these movements were attempting to distinguish themselves from international models and break with the dependent, analogical models of art that had been characteristic in Chile. The theoretical work of Miguel Rojas Mix was of particular importance at the time, since he not only acted as a cultural catalyst binding a diversity of cultural agents and interests, but developed influential discourses regarding the identity of the new Chilean works that dealt with popular subjects and their connection with broader Latin American revolutionary projects.

While a humanistic, social approach was at the root of the artistic experiments in the 1960s which were analyzed by Rojas Mix, the entangled relationship between politics and art was manifested in concrete ways under Allende. Varied positions on the avant-garde and its social roles were determined at the time which asserted its politically transformative capacities. These ideas were not just manifested by artists but by several interconnected institutions and writings which set up networks of relations with both Allende's government and other Latin American settings. As the Chilean scene was attempting to update itself, it did so in tandem with other countries, opening up its area of influence to other international experiments. Nevertheless, this broadening was oriented towards specific political and aesthetic models embedded in a geographical frame, making it a pan-Latin American revolutionary project. This model was brought to a halt with the coup, which reconfigured the cultural scene and sent several important artists into exile (such as Balmes), closing down frontiers, limiting movement, and controlling every aspect of private and public life.

Chapter Two focuses on the 1974 and 1975 works of Carlos Leppe which proposed a different view on local identity. Leppe has usually functioned in Chilean art historical discourses as marking the beginning of performance work in the nation which established a first break from traditional languages. While Leppe's 1974 happening resembled a funerary ritual, his early works were characterized by the emphasis they placed on the performance of national and individual gendered identity. Unlike essentialist versions of identity in which the subject's borders are clearly marked and impenetrable, Leppe imagined incomplete and fragmented subjects in a state of passage, whose boundaries were vulnerable to the effects of others. Though Leppe's flamboyant self-displays in events, photographs, and collage works were regarded by some critics as narcissistic expressions, his focus on the body established a connection with the nation. Resorting to the interrelated concepts of matrix, mother, motherland, and home as primordial spaces of identity formation, Leppe embodied scenes of loss and physical pain, envisioning spaces and bodies that were closed down and torn open, their identities punctured and reconfigured according to severe heterosexual norms of subjectivity. The problematic of gender permeating Leppe's works allows me to analyze the role given by the dictatorship to the feminine body in 1975, especially in view of the current discussions on the strategic role of the family and women in the re-formation of Chile. The renewed importance given to feminine sustenance was linked to the purification rituals on the social body performed by the regime as the national home underwent a spring cleaning.

Though Leppe's embodied subjects evoked the violent shutdown of borders and corporeal repression performed by the dictatorship, they were also ambiguous figures joining female and male characteristics. Instead of proposing a completely battered or defiantly armed subject opposed to the corporeal brutalities of the regime, Leppe installed an uncertain subjectivity, often theatrical and thus doubtful, engaged in a recurrent act of creation. The notion of repetition emerging in Leppe's performative works was tied to both the trauma of separation and the performance of the self as recurrent processes, generating doubles that were never truly original. Judith Butler's theories on performativity and gender have been central to analyze this questioning of fixed boundaries in Leppe's works as his repeated gestures and serial forms reflected the gaps and fissures in the subject's identity.

The notion of iteration and borders was also present in the works made by Eugenio Dittborn and Catalina Parra (1940) between 1974 and 1977. Chapter 3 is an extensive analysis of how these artists began conceptualizing the body as a graphic surface susceptible of receiving social inscriptions and making its own marks. In the works of Dittborn and Parra, bodies were flattened out through mechanical means of reproduction until they became corporeal topographies and maps revealing geographical, mechanical, and social accidents, flat surfaces that could be distorted, enlarged, gridded, torn, fragmented, and stitched back together. Graphic models concerned with space and even history were overlaid by the artists onto the body, so that the national territory that began emerging in between the borders of these fragmented and distorted maps was often one made up of marginal and shattered subjects, their bodies marked by ethnicity, class, gender, and displacement. Parra's model of the "Imbunche," a southern myth concerning a closed down grotesque body, and Dittborn's passage from caricature to the anonymity of delinquents portraits, revealed a different kind of social landscape, a human territory bearing the graphic signs of trauma.

This chapter traces the displacement of the body onto the flat page and analyzes the theories that buttressed such a move. The works of Dittborn and Parra were not only influenced by each other, but also by the theoretical contributions made by Parra's husband, Ronald Kay, particularly in regard to Dittborn and his use of photographic referents. Together, Dittborn, Parra, and Kay formed V.I.S.U.A.L., a group that could perhaps be considered the first post-coup avant-garde scene, insofar as they began editing and publishing independent catalogs and mounting a series of exhibitions at Galería Época in 1977 that acted as manifestos. These writings asserted the importance of graphic arts as a means of social commentary and a model of artistic transformation of reality, and established visual and conceptual examples of displacement. These ideas were supported by the theories of Wolf Vostell (1932-1998) on *décollage* and Allan Kaprow (1927-2006) on environmental works extending from painting, which were quoted in the V.I.S.U.A.L. publications and in the works of Dittborn and Parra. Yet the passage from one medium to others as implied in Vostell and Kaprow's theories, and the confusion of borders or disordering of traditional categories their works promoted, were given different meanings in the Chilean context. The expansive movement that joined the everyday world of the media and art in Vostell and Kaprow's writings was reconceptualized by Chilean artists into the performance of a social critique through mechanical means of reproduction, which in turn were conceived as occupying a marginal position within the arts.

The influence of Vostell is of special importance when considering that Dittborn had started his career in 1974 by negating international and then national artistic fathers, questioning the evolutionary model of art and history in general. For Dittborn's Surrealist inspired drawings and prints did not merely refer to geographic and landscape models, but described a historical topography of national arts where the patriarchs of Chilean painting were discredited through absurd combinations and distortions. If Leppe had turned to the model of the motherland as a matrix of meaning, Dittborn was probing the patriarchal generative model in the local art scene, questioning its "origins" by rearranging its history. In painting, the Chilean landscape had been at the center of defining the new nation's identity, even though, as suggested by Dittborn and several years earlier by Rojas Mix, it had been mostly European eyes which had defined the contours of the local land and brought foreign technologies and genres to visualize it. In Dittborn's works of 1976, Chilean art was made up of a history of displacements and imperialism, its identity defined by others.

Kay developed the discussion of identity in relation to the landscape and the human body in a series of texts dealing with Dittborn's works published between 1976 and 1980. I undertake a revision of Kay's readings of Walter Benjamin, Sigmund Freud, photography, and the landscape, not only because Dittborn's oeuvre began changing in response to Kay's comments, but because Kay and Dittborn gave graphic arts particular importance in the shaping of identity. For Kay, the conquest of America had installed a graphic model of organizing space (through maps and then photography) that eliminated the human body from its representation in an attempt to control the new lands. Rojas Mix had analyzed in 1970 the subject of prints and the New World from the vantage point of a humanistic materialism that criticized the reductive images produced of America, and even though Kay did not mention the former's writings, I compare their theories in order to understand the continuities and transformations of the problem when seen under the lens of mechanical reproduction.

If Dittborn and Parra were using geo-graphic and topographical models to question national identity, Chapter 4 centers on the relationships between graphic marks and the city in the context of urbanism. The urban landscape was the main subject of the works produced by Francisco Smythe (1952-1998), Carlos Altamirano, and Leppe in 1977, which were all exhibited at Galería Cromo under Richard's curatorship. In these exhibitions, the city emerged as a place of violence revealing social differences, alienation and anonymity, a contradictory space incorporating margins and centers, fears and desires, urban control and misdemeanor. Such contradictions were embodied and given flesh through specific places and bodies, as demonstrated in the graphic works of Smythe dealing with the rundown market of San Diego in downtown Santiago. Its crumbling and dark arcades, along with its passages, alleys, and decaying shops revealed an urban landscape that was the underside of the modernizing projects the military regime had begun at the time. San Diego stood as an involuted space of ruin and a sign of otherness within the center, incorporating the margin within. While such derelict zones were envisioned by the dictatorship as spaces of violence and poverty in need of sanitation, Smythe observed this connection from the vantage point of a history of class division, looking at the underlying tensions between Chilean classes while producing a catalogue of urban types. I compare his work to that of Atget at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>

century, for both artists were recording the popular remains in a changing city and envisioned them as sites of potential social disruption.

While Smythe was looking at the faces of the urban margin's inhabitants, Altamirano approached the cityscape from its architectural forms and grids. Using a similar serial and photographic approach to the construction of the image, and departing from traditional printing methods, Altamirano had been, since 1976, looking at the relationships between urban landscape and its users, analyzing how spaces determine and transform social relations. In his series of stenciled and collaged metallic plates of 1977, Altamirano recreated cityscapes organized by grids and traffic signs, where masses of shadows stood in for actual city-dwellers whose movements and trajectories were guided by those signs. Though Altamirano saw the city as a space of physical repression and enclosure, and was very close to Michel Foucault's analysis of spaces as manifesting power relations, his own works posited the possibility of transgressing such demarcations. Altamirano's plates began incorporating the viewer and moving out from the wall, extending the printed matter from the gallery to the everyday space. In this chapter I follow the discussions that ensued among critics, printmakers, and other artists in relation to Altamirano's works, his use of non-traditional materials, and the translation of printing concepts into other spaces, tracing the varied understandings of the processes that were occurring in graphic arts.

In the last of Cromo's exhibitions that year, Leppe gave flesh to the cityscape and followed its narratives of violence through a series of staged crime scenes. Continuing with his earlier form of self-representation in collages and installations, Leppe set up subjects that were both tortured and torturers, the spectator standing as voyeur and participant of these traumatic scenes. Iteration once again took center stage, in both the Freudian sense of a compulsion to repeat in order to dominate the effects of trauma and in the formal arrangements of the works which made use of series, grids, and mechanical processes of reproduction formally echoing the works of Altamirano and Smythe. A second scene could be said to have formed at the gallery, or at least a constellation of similar interests which had gathered under the curatorial hand of Richard. This chapter also analyzes how the three shows at Cromo manifested a similar approach to documentation and the graphic register, refashioning the concepts of reproduction and serialization to posit a conceptual critique of the social landscape. These shows also had an underlying conceptual model of influence that was different from the V.I.S.U.A.L. group: Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968). The latter was often left in the background of these familiar crime scenes and his authority as another father figure for the Chilean conceptual trends has rarely been discussed in Chilean art historical accounts dealing with the period.

But it was Richard's maternal influence which began showing up in a concrete manner during her curatorial labors at Cromo. From that position, she helped establish links between older forms of printing and past 'masters' with the new generation in order to both promote younger artists and the novel languages they seemed to be using, and to produce a "circuit of diffusion" and a "coherent vision of national plastic expression."<sup>47</sup> As graphic arts gained notoriety in the local art scene, different cultural institutions began organizing graphic salons after nearly a decade of oblivion, recuperating from an

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<sup>47</sup> Nelly Richard, *Cuatro Grabadores Chilenos*, exhibition catalogue (Santiago: Cromo, 1977), no page number.

institutional setting these marginal artistic practices. From 1978 onwards, there would be constant graphic contests and exhibitions, forming another platform of visibility for the new conceptual trends.

Richard's role as a cultural producer is treated in more depth in Chapter 5 which takes as its starting point the year 1979. Richard's organization and the conducting role she held in the seminar titled "Seminario de Arte Actual. Información Cuestionamiento" (Seminar of Current Art, Information Questioning) which took place between April and June that year had a large impact on a wide range of cultural producers. The seminar placed Richard at the head of the cultural map and posited specific ideas about art which were also promoted at CAL gallery and its eponymous publication. Defined as "a collective instance of study" and a "reflection and critique of contemporary plastic activity,"<sup>48</sup> the seminar emphasized the creation of national art that was fully aware of the socio-political role it had to fulfill, an art that was uniquely Chilean because it assumed its social reality and the conditions of its time.<sup>49</sup> For the first time, a short version of the precursors of this new avant-garde scene was listed, one of several lists that would be amplified and expanded upon by historically oriented artists like Dittborn. Two years later, the art historians Gaspar Galaz and Milan Ivelic included the works of these artists in their book on the history of Chilean painting, causing in turn the reaction of Richard and the tracing of her own expanded version of the scene as separated from other local and international examples. Richard revised her version in what has been the most influential book on the subject: *Margins and Institutions*, of 1986, produced at a time when the "scene" was disintegrating.

In Chapter Five I analyze the works of several other artists who attended the seminar and seemed to respond to the call of creating a politically conscious national art. I trace the ways in which the Chilean conceptual scene was enlarged through often intertwined works that proposed a revision of the arts, its identity, and its relation to national culture at large. From the language based works of Altamirano which questioned the status of art in the nation, to the performance of Leppe dealing with the Chilean flag as a patriarchal symbol delimiting identity, and Elias Adasme's corporalization of borders as manifested in national maps, I look at the interactions between artists, theories, spaces, and bodies that were proposed between 1979 and 1982. In these works, international conceptual languages were given local connotations as artists were seeking to define a national identity in the arts and lines continued to be drawn and transgressed in art and life.<sup>50</sup> The continuity and persistence of the social landscape and the body of the nation as themes is one of the characteristics of the period between 1979 and 1983. Such a relation could be seen in the joint exhibition titled "Purgatory" where Dittborn, Altamirano, and Leppe formed a new triangulation around the works of poet Raúl Zurita (1951-). As the

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<sup>48</sup> Richard, quoted in "Situación Seminario Arte Actual 1979," *Revista La Bicicleta*, no. 4 (September-October, 1979): 44.

<sup>49</sup> In a summary of the seminar's proceedings published in *Revista La Bicicleta*, it was stated that, "the artists express a whole human group, and a national art a whole people." Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> To give just one example, Altamirano stated in an interview that he believed that "searching for our cultural identity is a positive thing." Ana María Foxley, "Plástica, todo es válido," *Revista Hoy*, July 8-14, 1981, 47.

connections between the nation and a hellish in-between space of torment were made more evident, the landscape motifs were transformed under further displacements of the graphic model. For in 1979, the graphic mark was extended to a diversity of cultural situations and spaces, the act of marking occurring in actual locations of everyday life.

The works of the collective C.A.D.A., “Colectivo Acciones de Arte” (Art Actions Collective), have become in recent years emblematic of this extension and the merger of art and life during the dictatorship. They have acquired a mythical status as examples of the identification with marginality, political resistance, and the making of works that marked and effectively altered (or so they seemed) the social landscape. Yet, as I intend to suggest in this chapter, it was in the individual works of one of the collective’s members, Lotty Rosenfeld, that a more radical proposal of how different city-dwellers could actively shape their environments and transform their everyday spaces was proposed. I use the works of Lefebvre in particular to guide my readings of Rosenfeld’s actions as producing space while pointing to its mobility and social underpinnings. I compare Rosenfeld’s position to that of her fellow C.A.D.A. member Diamela Eltit (1949), where the collective’s redemptive intentions and limitations can be best seen. As more artists took to the streets from 1979 onwards in order to actively inscribe other social marks, as did Altamirano and Hernán Parada (1953), a different relation to memory was posited which challenged the historical narratives of progress and corporeal invisibility supported by the regime.

Chapter Six explores the advent of video art in the Chilean scene from 1980 to 1985, analyzing how it came to be regarded as an extended graphic form of registering and critiquing reality. The passage from graphic arts to video works was supported not only by artists who had backgrounds in printing and photography, but by critics and art institutions as well, and this last chapter aims to reveal how Chilean artists interpreted and made possible such a displacement. While the main differences among these mediums were recognized, conceptual artists emphasized what they perceived to be similarities among video and graphic media, such as their mechanical origins, their reproductive qualities, their apparent relationship of immediacy with reality, their potential for producing editions, and their connection to mass culture. Though video’s relationship with television and cinema was acknowledged, it was often to critique video’s link with propaganda, ideology, and consumption. These last three elements were intimately interconnected during what was known as the Chilean economic “boom” and its following crash in 1982, leading artists to question more strongly the fantasies presented on the television screens all over the territory.

In the videos produced during this time, the Chilean landscape was once again given a central role in the critique of national identity. Though this claim supports the view that video was an extension of the artists’ previous concerns through updated technological means, there were several characteristics of the video works that distinguished these later reflections on the homeland, beginning with the hybrid constitution of the medium. Video’s dependency on other technologies, mediums, and forms of visualization were taken by Chilean artists as a sign of indefiniteness, translation, and the in-between. Moreover, the temporality involved in video was manifested primordially through fluid metamorphosing images instead of fixed essences, and its editing techniques could cut into progress-oriented narratives. The images of the national territory and its landmarks reproduced through video were thus altered, enabling artists to

rethink the problem of performativity of identity in relation to the new forms of technological imperialism, the “invisible” hand of the market, and the multiple agents involved in the social inscription of reality. As the decade progressed and the contradictions between the images, passed through national television, of a growing and healthy nation were countered by protests, continued disappearances, and violence, the question of transgressing the borders imposed by the regime became more poignant and urgent in both the arts and the daily lives of Chileans. This chapter ends questioning the effectiveness of the political transformations advocated by the avant-gardes and their displacements of mediums, pointing instead to how life was sometimes ahead of artists.

The conclusion closes this work with a discussion of how the conceptual artistic practices that had turned inward during the period dealt with their exposure in international contexts during the early 1980s. As the decade progressed, Chilean art was entering into a changed landscape not only within its geographical borders but also without. As the primacy of graphic arts was challenged by younger generations and different versions of painting in the country and abroad, and postmodern discourses made of pastiche and depthlessness a central attribute of the times guided by North American and European examples, the Chilean avant-garde seemed to take a slow retreat from the limelight, its actors taking varied paths, sometimes away from art itself. I briefly discuss different instances where the avant-gardes’ works were confronted by international audiences and discourses, the responses they received, and the discussions they awakened regarding its identity and significance. From the Chilean participation in the 1982 Paris Biennial to the Museum of Fine Art’s takeover in Santiago by the 1985 traveling exhibition of Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008), these last comments aim to look at the contradictions and problems generated by an art that had defined itself as insular, eminently Chilean, and lacking international parents or connections. I argue that these essentialist discourses have contributed to the isolation of Chilean art and particularly its avant-garde examples from international circuits, even to this day. One of the main problems of the Chilean avant-gardes was the re-territorialization of their own borders, even while they were proposing a radical opening of other spaces.

Yet, if there is something to be gained from their example, it is the importance these artists gave to the intersection between spatial and corporeal practices in defining identity, often making tangible in their works how the processes involved in the inscription of a sense of self and other are susceptible of transformation by multiple agents. By revising the works of the Chilean conceptual artists within a larger historical, discursive, and material framework, I intend to trace other maps and spaces from which to read and interpret them which might offer alternative ways of thinking about identity and agency, both in everyday life and in art. In a certain way, I am also “reterritorializing” these works, yet I do so to push their own boundaries and reconnect them to larger, more complicated contexts and relations. Making of the body the primary space of action and identification as well as a primary factor in the creation and interpretation of meaning, the Chilean vanguards were showing how both elements, carnality and cardinality, body and space, are interlocked in the production of meaning.

## Chapter 1: The Rise and Fall of a Chilean Experiment: Artistic Front Lines and Socialism Between 1950 and 1973.

When the art critic Antonio Romera (1912-1975) wrote in the newspaper *El Mercurio* in 1973 a review of newcomer's Carlos Leppe show at the Chilean-French Institute of Culture he manifested discontent with what he perceived to be a turn within Chilean art to anti-aesthetic parameters. Romera placed special emphasis on the 'surreal,' 'neo-dada' disruptive qualities of the objects, sculptures, and collages displayed in Leppe's exhibition and expressed uncertainty as to how to classify them.

Comparing the work of Leppe to that of the artist Juan Pablo Langlois who had previously shown in the same venue, Romera linked both artists to a tradition of 'rupture' within painting, starting with Édouard Manet and Paul Cézanne, passing through Kazimir Malevich, Marcel Duchamp, and ending in Pop Art.<sup>51</sup> By attempting to connect Leppe's work with painting and an established tradition of artistic breaks with the past, Romera could not only trace an international genealogy within which the two Chilean artists could find their niche, but he could also subdue the disruptive implications of the objects as such. As he explained through the Western canon the "rejection of beauty" present in Leppe's "kitsch" objects, Romera subtly undermined their specificity and objecthood, bringing them back to the legitimized realm of painting.

As a conservative critic writing in a traditional right-wing newspaper, Romera was attempting to understand the appearance of the object in Chilean art through the lens of Surrealism and Dada.<sup>52</sup> Prior reviews of Leppe's exhibitions during the year 1972 had used a similar language, as if the only examples available in Chile at the time were of movements that had made their international debut some fifty years earlier. The 'lateness' and anachronism of art criticism in Chile as manifested by Romera's case, who was the leading art critic at the time, was partly due to the pervasiveness in the Chilean art world of abstract painting in its competing geometric and 'informal' variances along with their institutional sanction.

Romera was further confronted in the late 1960s and early 1970s by a radical break with the European abstract tradition which was proposed by certain forms of

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<sup>51</sup> Langlois had exhibited the work "Monuments" (Monumentos) in the gallery the previous month. The exhibition consisted of a series of everyday objects displayed as sculptures, while the "sculptures" pedestals were exhibited separately as works of art.

<sup>52</sup> Romera had been writing for the newspaper *El Mercurio* since 1950 and had a weekly column of criticism in the section devoted to culture titled "Arts and Letters" (Artes y Letras) until his untimely death in 1975. In 1951 Romera published a historical account of Chilean painting, *Historia de la pintura chilena* (Santiago: Editorial del Pacífico, 1951), a vast chronological survey of painting in Chile that was reprinted and expanded three times. Romera's account of Chilean art would only be followed twenty years later by the sociological approach of Miguel Rojas Mix in his *La imagen artística de Chile*, Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1972 (The Artistic Image of Chile), and by Gaspar Galaz and Milan Ivelic's *La Pintura en Chile desde la colonia hasta 1981* (Valparaíso: Universidad Católica, 1982), published in 1982.



artistic experimentation in the Chilean context that had grown through separate channels. To the challenge proposed by informal painting, different forms of objecthood and an incipient version of installation and conceptualism began appearing, disputing the abstract reign in the arts. The period mentioned was rife with changes on both the artistic and political fronts, as Salvador Allende's socialist government began in 1971, a state that advocated the social commitment of artists and their direct participation in changing society. While artists increased their involvement in social transformation, the concept of the vanguard began emerging in the Chilean context as one directly linked to the political, reflecting its European origins in Gustave Courbet. While there was a shift during the 1960s from European models of art to North American examples, there was a further expansion in the early 1970s towards a pan-American project which aimed to establish an utopian community of avant-garde art-making that went against theories of dependency on foreign models.

This chapter discusses the relationships forged between art and politics between the late 1960s and early 1970s, in order to explain the traditions against which conceptually oriented artists such as Leppe emerged, as well as the concepts of artistic vanguard that were being proposed in Chile at the time in relation to identity. This chapter looks at the field of forces they formed as experimental trends began emerging which pointed to an expansion of frontiers (national and cultural), yet whose consistent development was cut short by the 1973 coup.

### 1.1. The Abstract Dispute in Chile: Between Mind and Matter

Abstract painting dominated the art scene and art education in Chile in the 1950s and 1960s, having as its center the Escuela de Bellas Artes (School of Fine Arts) of Universidad de Chile in Santiago. The school played a crucial role in the formation of artists, as well as in the continuity and disruption of traditions, starting in the early twentieth century until the late 1970s.<sup>53</sup> As a center of artistic debate and propagation of knowledge and craft, the School of Fine Arts at Universidad de Chile was the only official setting for artistic training in the nation.<sup>54</sup> Being the oldest Academy, it dictated the artistic canon in Chile. During the first half of the twentieth century it had

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<sup>53</sup> Only in the 1980s was the Art School of Universidad de Chile challenged by the growing influence of the Art School of Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, founded in 1959 by Sergio Larraín García Moreno and Josef Albers. Under the auspices of the School of Architecture of the same university, the Catholic University's Art School followed the teaching model of the Bauhaus as Albers had systematized it with courses such as "Color" or "Composition" guiding the curriculum. The growing importance of Universidad Católica's Art School can be seen in the fact that on his return from exile in 1985, the painter José Balmes would join its faculty. The creation of several private universities in the 1980s contributed to the creation of a number of Art Schools in the 1990s and the diversification of artistic training in Chile.

<sup>54</sup> The School of Fine Arts at Universidad de Chile had grown out of the Academy of Painting, created in 1849 by the Chilean government and left under the responsibility of the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities of the University. The latter had been transformed into the School of Fine Arts in 1902. The Faculty of Fine Arts was founded in 1929, joining the School of Fine Arts to the Music Conservatory and the School of Applied Arts. After multiple separations and re-structurations, the Faculty was dissolved in 1948 by a presidential mandate and replaced by more subdivisions into music, sciences and plastic arts, achieving its final independence in 1954 when it became the Faculty of Fine Arts.

promulgated and institutionalized Post-Impressionism as a modern style, absorbing its opponents into the academy.<sup>55</sup> During the next two decades, a figurative form of abstraction that tended towards Expressionism and Surrealism dominated academic training.

In 1948, the students at the School of Fine Arts José Balmes, Gracia Barrios (1927-), Eduardo Martínez Bonati (1930), the sculptor Juan Egenau (1927-1987), and the painters Gustavo Poblete (1915-2005) and Roser Bru (1923) created “Grupo de Estudiantes Plásticos” (Plastic Students’ Group). The group opposed the current passivity of the national artistic scene, especially as manifested in the academy. Reunited under a “feeling (...) of artistic restlessness,” these artists attempted to confront “the state of abandonment and lack of concern for their practice that has invaded young artistic circles.”<sup>56</sup> Moving towards a more gestural approach to painting that centered on its formal qualities, the group installed a first form of discontent within the academy, aligning themselves with the teacher Pablo Burchard (1875-1964) who, in a Cézanne-inspired approach to form, was exploring the material qualities of painting as a medium. The physicality of painting was associated with a radical position in the arts, a challenge to the academic model that was also joined to political effects, as manifested in the creation of an artist’s union and studios parallel to those of the school.

During the 1950s a different group of painters following a geometric form of abstraction also attempted to counter the stagnant state of the arts in Chile. Considering themselves exponents of ‘modern’ art, these painters advocated abstraction as its primary manifestation. The theoretical leader of the movement was Ramón Vergara-Grez (1923), who stood against any expressionistic tendencies in art by anchoring his efforts in rational, geometric forms. The groups Rectángulo (Rectangle), founded in 1955 by Vergara-Grez, Waldo Vila (1894-1979), Gustavo Poblete, and Luis Droguett (1922), and its reincarnation in the group Forma y Espacio (Form and Space), which included Vergara-Grez, Robinson Mora (1947), Carmen Piemonte (1932), and Claudio Román (1944) among other artists, led this geometric movement. In its first version, the Rectangle group remained removed from other Latin American Abstract and

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<sup>55</sup> An example of this institutional co-optation was “Grupo Montparnasse” (Group Montparnasse). The group formed in 1923 after the return of several painters that had lived in Europe in the early 1920s. In Paris, the artists had met exponents of the European avant-gardes and absorbed a Post-Impressionist type of abstraction, Cubism, and Expressionistic tendencies. Upon their return to Chile in 1923 and after a series of polemical exhibitions, some of the painters and sculptors were slowly incorporated into the university system. The closedown of the School of Fine Arts by the dictatorship of Carlos Ibañez del Campo in 1928, and the following scholarships given to professors and students to perfect themselves in Europe, marked a second moment of direct contact with the European avant-gardes, which continued in the vein of figurative abstraction during the 1930s. For a brief description of the Faculty’s history in relation to a history of painting in Chile, see Pedro Emilio Zamorano Pérez, Claudio Cortés López, Patricio Muñoz Zárata, “Pintura chilena durante la primera mitad del siglo XX: Influjos y tendencias,” *Atenea*, no. 491 (2005): 159-186.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Gaspar Galaz and Milan Ivelic, *Chile Arte Actual* (Valparaíso, Chile: Ediciones Universitarias de Valparaíso, 1988), 35. The original states: “El Grupo de Estudiantes Plásticos, formado por alumnos de la Escuela de Bellas Artes considera que existe una obligación ineludible para todo aquél que siente, real y profundamente, una inquietud artística, de unirse para combatir por medio del estudio permanente, de un trabajo sincero y constante, ese estado de dejación y falta de preocupación por su oficio, que está invadiendo los círculos artísticos jóvenes.” All translations from this book are by the author.

Constructivist movements that had been, since the 1930s, springing up in the continent, and instead modeled itself after European Modern movements centering their practice on the intellect, geometry, and an understanding of abstraction as the reduction of things to their essence.<sup>57</sup> Planes of color, flat geometrical compositions, and the rejection of narrative and illusionism in painting characterized the Rectangle Group's works of the time, eschewing any references to the everyday, outside world.<sup>58</sup> Their removal from anything practical and their entrenchment in the precise rendition of pure form was fueled in part by the group's desire to distance itself from Concrete art, another form of abstraction emerging at the time which was defined by the painter Mario Carreño (1913-1999) in a forum organized parallel to a 1958 exhibition of the Rectangle group as "painting-painting, valid on its own terms."<sup>59</sup> What Vergara Grez and his group termed "concrete" art and regarded as their nemesis was a group of young artists who were exploring abstraction's expressive possibilities and whose influence was growing within the Fine Arts School.

Building from the renovating experience of the Plastic Students' Group, José Balmes, Gracia Barrios, Eduardo Martínez Bonati, and Alberto Pérez (1926-1999) formed "Grupo Signo" (Sign Group) in 1961. The official act of naming the group, what the artists would call their "baptism certificate," was Grupo Signo's exhibition in Spain at the end of 1961.<sup>60</sup> In the catalog published for the occasion, the group stated that even though their prior exhibitions in Chile were the equivalent of a "birth certificate," it was the occasion of traveling to and exhibiting in Spain that had generated the need for a name, "legalizing" the "spontaneous coherence of their work." The "nominative necessity" which the Grupo Signo's members spoke of was understood by them as a way of re-appropriating the power to name which the Spanish (and by extension, European) culture had held until then. Interestingly, the powerless who were reclaiming the ability

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<sup>57</sup> The works of "Grupo Rectángulo" show a debt to European avant-gardes, particularly Piet Mondrian. The name itself recalls Mondrian's group "Circle and Square" founded in 1930. The Chilean group would dedicate an exhibition to the artist in 1972 titled "Homenaje a Mondrian" (Homage to Mondrian) with an accompanying catalogue celebrating the artist's "denaturalization of matter" in his works. Ana Helfant, "Homenaje a Piet Mondrian," in *A Piet Mondrian*, exhibition catalogue (Santiago: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1972). But unlike its European counterparts, the Rectangle Group in Chile did not attempt to have a direct social function in the construction of a better society, at least not until the early 1970s when they began taking more socially oriented positions. In this sense, the exterior world and contemporary politics were banned from their paintings, a position that contributed to their alienation and entrenchment within the School of Fine Arts, where Vergara-Grez was also teaching.

<sup>58</sup> Two other forms of abstraction appeared concurrently to the geometric style advocated by the Rectangle Group: a Surrealist abstraction led by Mario Carreño (a Cuban painter who became a Chilean citizen in 1969) and a new abstracted figuration exemplified by the work of Ricardo Yrarrázabal (1931).

<sup>59</sup> Mario Carreño, quoted in Gaspar Galaz, Patricio M. Zárte, Alejandra Wolf, "Entre Modernidad y Utopía," *Segundo Fascículo, Período 1950-1973, Chile 100 Años* (Santiago: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2000), 43.

<sup>60</sup> See "El signo de una nueva pintura en Chile," in *Cuatro Pintores de Chile* (Madrid: Darro, 1962), n.p. In a statement of the group, they declared that: "(...) for many years, these peoples gave names to each of our things. And now that this populace does not baptize us, we have come here to baptize ourselves in it." Ibid. Yet, it was not Spanish Informalism that the group directly quoted as stylistic forefathers.

to name had to travel to the locus of power/naming (Europe, and in the Chilean case because of its colonial past, Spain) in order to assert their claim, maintaining in this sense the logic of center/periphery.<sup>61</sup>

Grupo Signo was characterized by its rough and unconventional use of matter in the painted canvas, be it oil, sand, pastes, or the canvas itself, emphasizing textures, surfaces, and gestures. Stylistically the group was associated by Chilean critics with Spanish Informalism, due to their work with pictorial pigment and abstract gesture as expressive and formal ends.<sup>62</sup> The focus placed by Grupo Signo on matter and the plastic values of painting, led its members to incorporate a diversity of everyday materials into the canvas, including cloth, cardboard, wood, and metals (as in Balmes, Barrios, and Pérez). But it was their focus on the meaningful aspects of the surface and the pictorial act that distinguished the group from its Spanish predecessors. While the four artists felt that these material experiments were attuned with the ‘truly’ innovative energies of the time, their experiences coinciding with those abroad, the group’s raw gestures and materialism were joined from a start to their desire to fight academic and other forms of oppression, a disruptive stance which soon was increasingly connected to social and political concerns within the nation, bringing their art making closer to political contingency.

If the group Rectángulo had carved its own self-referential and private niche within Chilean art and the University, and remained firm in its defense of aesthetic purity, Grupo Signo was characterized by an opening to the exterior, internationally and socially.<sup>63</sup> This expansion was reflected in the number of exhibitions of the group’s works that were

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<sup>61</sup> What is important about this baptism story is that in 1961 the place where a Chilean artist’s recognition (naming) was sought was still found in Europe and not the United States of America or another Latin American country. The rapid changes that took place in the later sixties and beginning of the seventies of opening towards other cultural centers as artistic models, followed by a contraction after the coup, will be examined shortly.

<sup>62</sup> It has been commonplace in Chilean art history to associate the style of Grupo Signo’s participants to Spanish Informalism and view it as derivative or developing from it, starting with Romera’s 1968 assertion that the most “audacious” tendencies of contemporary Chilean art were following the paths of abstraction and informalism. This ‘dependency’ claim is often backed by the reference to the 1960 exhibition of Spanish painting that took place at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chile. Galaz and Ivelic for example stated in 1988 that Grupo Signo “adhered to this [Informal] current.” In Galaz and Ivelic, *Chile, Arte Actual*, 65. Writing in 1996 for the catalog *Latin American Art in the Twentieth Century*, Ivelic reproduced the ‘influence’ theory when he described Grupo Signo as having “assimilated the Informal abstraction of the Catalan painters Antoni Tàpies and Modest Cuixart, causing a profound change in the Chilean artistic scene.” Nevertheless Ivelic then added that “this was reinforced by the presence of uncompromising anti-academic painting that liberated pictorial material from unpremeditated gesture, accident and chance, and also incorporated unusual elements, undermining the notion of beauty and the virtuosity of abstract execution.” See Milan Ivelic’s essay “Chile” in *Latin American Art in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Edward J. Sullivan (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996), 307. While the Spanish influence cannot be denied, whether or not the exhibition mentioned triggered a formal change in the Group Signo is left to be established, for already in the late 1950s Balmes was working in a more material form of abstraction.

<sup>63</sup> Grupo Signo had literally opened the Chilean artistic scene to foreign influences, by beginning a series of trips and exhibitions abroad that brought new airs into the art scene. These connections to the exterior were marked by exhibitions such as the 1961 Biennial of Paris, the 1965 Bienal de São Paulo, and travels in the 1950s to exhibit in Argentina.

organized abroad, as well as the contacts their members established with Europe (especially Spain and France) and other Latin American countries such as Argentina, and their participation in renowned international contests.<sup>64</sup> While the artists poured their experiences abroad into their academic work (as some became faculty at the School of Fine Arts), they continued the transformation of a conservative school by establishing a dialogue with younger students which proved crucial for the development of a new generation. But Grupo Signo's contact with other Latin American artists and scenes also strengthened the artists' commitment to contemporary social concerns on a local and pan-American level.<sup>65</sup> Artistic renovation was united in Grupo Signo to political and social change within the school, as well as within the nation and without, as the political experiences in Cuba and Argentina among others in the continent provided models of action.

On a local level, Grupo Signo was involved in the growing desire for social change that was affecting the nation. Since the late 1930s, Chile was characterized by massive poverty and social differences partly based on a strong oligarchic state. This situation of economic and social stagnation had prompted political leaders from Catholic left-wing parties to slowly move from the 1950s onwards towards a socialist, state-interventionist approach to government in an attempt to extend the nation's wealth to its poorest sectors.<sup>66</sup> A series of reforms took place during the 1960s, extending from the nationalization of the copper mining industry to the land reform started by president Eduardo Frei (1964-1969), the latter being largely based on the expropriation of lands and the creation of state farms. The ambience of social change was echoed by the University Reform of 1967.<sup>67</sup> The latter began at the Catholic University and then extended to all other high education institutions in an attempt to democratize the university system through the reconfiguration of its structure. Changes in the curriculum were joined to the desire to improve research in the sciences and humanities, and to extend the participation of students and faculty, while creating a closer relation between the educational institutions and current social problems.<sup>68</sup> The emphasis placed by the

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<sup>64</sup> For a detailed description of the Argentina's parallel move towards "internationalization" during the 1950s and 1960s, see Andrea Giunta's *Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics: Argentine Art in the Sixties*, trans. Peter Kahn (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), originally published in Spanish as *Vanguardia, internacionalismo y política. Arte Argentino en los años sesenta* (Buenos Aires: Editoriales Paidós, 2001).

<sup>65</sup> The feeling of pan-Americanism developed in these meetings came to fruition in a series of conferences and bilateral exhibitions that took place in the 1970s in La Habana and Santiago, with the participation of important Latin American artists as will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>66</sup> For an analysis of the social ambience before Allende's rise to power, see Arturo Fontaine A., "Revolution on Official Stamped Paper," in *Chile: A Critical Survey* (Santiago: Institute of General Studies, 1972), 57-88.

<sup>67</sup> For a description of the agrarian and land reform in Chile see William C. Thiesenhusen, "Agrarian Reform and Economic Development in Chile: Some Cases of Colonization," *Land Economics* 42, no. 3 (August, 1966): 282-292. Several of Frei's measures were disapproved of by the oligarchy in Chile, most notably the land reform, leading to his party's fall out of favor during the presidential campaign of 1970.

<sup>68</sup> In 1967 students took over the Catholic University of Chile, with the support of priests and leftist parties. For a description of the processes of reform within the university system in Chile and its development

university reform on social concerns, especially those related to the popular classes, reveals on one hand the influence of Marxist thought in the educational system at the time and the idealism embedded in it, while attesting on the other hand to the growth of the Socialist and Communist parties within the universities' organization and their politization.<sup>69</sup>

It was in this context of change that José Balmes began teaching at the School of Fine Arts at Universidad de Chile in the mid 1950s. Soon, the artist attracted students who wanted to escape from the rigor of the geometric abstractionists or the passivity of the painters of interior scenes and Creole subjects that dominated the school. In 1966, at the height of Grupo Signo's international recognition, Balmes was appointed director of the School of Fine Arts, an act that unconsciously marked the beginning of abstract materialism's reign within the faculty, delegating geometric abstraction to a conservative and diminished position within it.<sup>70</sup> Balmes' naming as director, and later in 1972 as Dean of the Faculty, marked a radical change within the academy, a departure highlighted by an opening towards reform in a political and artistic sense. Between 1967 and 1968 Balmes traveled to Europe, mainly Germany and France, to see how European art schools functioned, returning to Chile after May 68's events with a heightened sense of social injustices and the need to work in the faculty with students and society at large. This awareness translated into a series of changes inside the faculty and the way art was taught. Some of the changes introduced by Balmes were the involvement of students as monitors of plastic and creative activities in the city's public schools and poor urban areas. According to Balmes, the aim was to: "pass from a didactic form enclosed in the

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during Allende's government see Tomas P. MacHale, "Ideologies in the Reform of the Universities," in *Chile: A Critical Survey* (Santiago: Institute of General Studies, 1972), 255-273.

<sup>69</sup> By the late 1960s, Marxism was one of the prevailing political discourses within the university, as cathedras of Marxism along with courses of social content became prevalent in the social sciences curriculums. Student organizations and federations were polarized nevertheless between right- and left-wing extremes.

<sup>70</sup> In 1970 Alberto Pérez from the same group was designated as director of the Museum of Contemporary Art which was supervised and under the control of the University of Chile. In the same year Pérez published a book on the "fantastic" in art titled *El sentimiento del absurdo en la pintura*, "The Feeling of the Absurd in Painting." (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1970). Pérez book is noteworthy since its subject matter departed from more conventional histories of art in Chile, aiming to analyze instead the continuity of "absurd," fantastic, illogical, and surreal elements in art. Starting with an extended analysis of Hieronymus Bosch, Pérez argued that the presence of fantastic elements close to images derived from dream-states, which often revealed a repulsive reality, were tied to a transcendent human desire. In the illustrations at the end of the text, Pérez included not only images of Bosch's "Garden of Delights" but also works by some Surrealists such as Salvador Dalí and Giacometti, yet he also included a machine by Jean Tinguely and a work with canvas bags by Alberto Burri, thus indirectly joining his own work (and the informalism of Grupo Signo) to experiments with time, abstraction, and everyday materials. Though Pérez warned in a footnote to his text not to abuse psychoanalytic interpretation so as to make the work of art a "clinical case," his interest in the mechanisms of Surrealism, its creation of "an organized reality" defying logic yet operating on its own terms, and the use of Bosch as a primary example of a world-turned-upside-down, bears more than one relation with the early work of Eugenio Dittborn. Pérez, *El sentimiento del absurdo en la pintura* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1970), 12.

university ambience, to an open practice communicated with the social reality of the young people, women, and workers of Chile.”<sup>71</sup>

In his own painting, Balmes increased the scope of the everyday materials he incorporated into its surfaces. He began including photographic reproductions and pieces of newspapers which alluded to contemporary political events, from the United States intervention in Santo Domingo to the Cuban revolution.<sup>72</sup> In the work “Santo Domingo Mayo 65” (Santo Domingo May 65), of 1965 (fig.1.1) a series of newspapers glued to the canvas’ surface interacted with sweeping black strokes and white areas of paint.<sup>73</sup> The collaged canvases that resulted from this joining of pictorial matter in different states of hardening and liquidity, the brutal pictorial gesture and stains, and the actual fragments of the current world and its events, began opening Chilean painting to a social exteriority that could become literally “incrusted” and exposed on the canvas’ surface. As his paintings grew more political in content and more gestural in expression, Balmes paved the road to an art of explicit social commentary that at the same time rethought the boundaries of the everyday and the arts within painting’s materiality.<sup>74</sup>

## 1.2. Art and Commitment: Figuration and the Emergence of “Pop(ular)” Art in Chile

Within the university several students followed this experimental approach to painting with social implications. Francisco Brugnoli (1935) had been a student of Balmes who in the mid-sixties began incorporating discarded materials and quotidian objects into his canvases. Brugnoli’s best known works of the time were painted workers’ overalls pasted with glue, acrylic and oil paint to the canvas (fig.1.2).<sup>75</sup> The rugged and

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<sup>71</sup> In José Balmes and Gonzalo Badal, *Balmes: viaje a la pintura* (Santiago de Chile: Ocho Libros Editores, 1995), 133.

<sup>72</sup> The painter Guillermo Núñez (1930) had also begun employing graphic imagery derived from silkscreen in his works of 1966, while he was living in the United States of America. The imagery often dealt with social subjects and international armed conflicts, such as the Vietnam War as well as the Santo Domingo invasion. Núñez’ politically infused paintings incorporating photographic registers of the late 1960s have usually received less art historical attention than Balmes’ Informalist stained canvases including objects which dealt with similar subjects. I would argue this oblivion is based on the former’s directness and blunt use of commercially derived images instead of the more ‘modern’ language of abstraction, thus connecting Núñez’ works with what in Chilean art historical discourses has been generally labeled ‘illustration.’ This problem between ‘content’ as opposed to the ‘formal’ qualities of a work of art was at the center of the debates regarding the “novelty” and importance assigned to the “escena de avanzada” in the late 1970s and early 1980s, even though often times the discussion was veiled by other terms. Núñez position in Chile acquired more notoriety when he succeeded Pérez as director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in 1971, a position he held until the end of 1972, marking a tendency towards a politicized and socially concerned artistic direction deeply tied to the University of Chile.

<sup>73</sup> “Santo Domingo Mayo 65” is in a private collection, yet a reproduction of the work can be seen on the internet at the website “Portal de arte,” at <http://www.portaldearte.cl/obras/stodgo.htm> (last accessed April 15, 2010).

<sup>74</sup> The other members of Grupo Signo also worked in this materialist approach, with Pérez in particular substituting wooden pieces for the canvas to which he pasted photographs taken from the printed press.

<sup>75</sup> Francisco Brugnoli’s series of pasted and stained overalls known as “pegoteados” have been amply reproduced in Gaspar Galaz and Milan Ivelic’s *Chile Arte Actual* (Valparaíso: Ediciones Universitarias de

plastic looking surfaces created by the smeared overalls brought his work close to that of Robert Rauschenberg's combines and Claes Oldenburg's store, an association to Pop art that increased when Brugnoli's overalls acquired more volume and the canvases became tableaux-like settings.<sup>76</sup> Because of the pasted materials' allusion to popular culture and mass entertainment forms, Brugnoli's works have been usually tied by art historians to Pop Art, along with Guillermo Núñez' contemporary paintings of soldiers in action whose streamlined forms were taken from mass media imagery.<sup>77</sup> Yet Brugnoli's work was more closely associated with social realism than Pop in terms of its content, and formally seemed similar to the social critique proposed by the Argentinean Antonio Berni several years earlier.<sup>78</sup> In both cases, the artists were focusing specifically on marginal

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Valparaíso, 1988), in pages 162-163 and in an unnumbered plate in the same chapter, as well as in the second volume of *Chile 100 Años. 1950-1973: Entre Modernidad y Utopía* (Santiago: Museo Nacional de bellas Artes, 2000), in pages 43 and 102. An interesting photograph reproducing a large scale outdoors version can be seen in the article by José Pablo López, "El arte "pop" hizo su estreno," *Revista Ercilla*, December 8, 1965, 11.

<sup>76</sup> In 1967, Brugnoli reconstructed several façades from a shantytown in the exhibition room of the University of Chile. Among them were the front of a poor wooden house, the metallic façade of a construction manager's office, and the interior of a shantytown dwelling. Popularly called "mushroom dwellings" (poblaciones callampa), these informal suburban camps set up illegally "from night to morning" in often vacant lands, were mainly created by migrant populations from the countryside. The land reform inaugurated by Frei and continued by Allende had increased the illegal takeover of lands ("tomas") by peasants, due to the unfulfilled promise of production development such expropriations had fostered, augmenting the fissures between the Chilean oligarchy and the popular sectors. In 1969 the Uruguayan artist Luis Camnitzer traveled to Chile and mounted in the Museum of Fine Arts an installation titled *Massacre of Puerto Montt* that directly addressed a massacre of illegal occupants at the hands of the military in the south of Chile during the last years of Frei's government. The installation had featured Xeroxed words displayed on the walls, being one of the first fully conceptual installations seen in the country.

<sup>77</sup> The earliest appearance of an interest in the commercial, banal, everyday themes and objects could be placed in 1965, when the VII Art Fair exhibited paintings that inserted objects into the canvas, such as Francisco Brugnoli's canvases with painted workers' clothes and pieces of newspapers. The journalist José Pablo López was the first to use the term "Pop" to describe Brugnoli's works, yet no specific references to international artists or works were made besides mentioning that Pop art was "the latest fashion in Paris, London, and New York." See José Pablo López, "El arte pop hizo su estreno," *Revista Ercilla*, December 11, 1965, 11. Only in 1971 the critic Ana Helfant would specifically compare Brugnoli's works to those of George Segal and Frank Gallo, in a critique of his work that undermined its social underwritings. Helfant ironically commented that while this was an art against the bourgeoisie it was not an art for the people, for the latter "still has an image of art and the beautiful that the artists have not been able to distort," thus making these works merely art made for the bourgeoisie. In "Exposiciones. Brugnoli y la sociedad de consumo," *Eva*, November 5, 1971, 50. Writing in 1991, Ernesto Saul characterized Núñez' paintings as "hard Pop," comparing them to the works of R.B. Kitaj. See Ernesto Saul, *Artes Visuales. 20 Años, 1970-1990* (Santiago: Ministerio de Educación, 1991), 35. In a 1972 interview with Saul, Núñez was the only artist who openly accepted having being influenced by the work of North American artists while he was living in the United States of America during the 1960s. Ernesto Saul, *Pintura Social en Chile* (Santiago: Empresa Editora Nacional Quimantu, 1972), 84.

<sup>78</sup> Antonio Berni's series of paintings revolving around the life of the character "Juanito Laguna," a poor boy living in a "misery" shantytown in Argentina during the 1960s, antecede Brugnoli's "mushroom" tableaux. Berni's paintings incorporated all types of everyday materials and residues of culture, from plastics, to metals, wood, and clothing, to recreate the shantytown's marginal surroundings.



social groups, bringing their realities “closer” to the viewers in a physically tangible manner. The overalls were an evident sign of Brugnoli’s alignment with the working class and his own desire to generate a more direct form of communication with the spectator through the ‘presentation’ of objects associated with their everyday reality.<sup>79</sup> If painting was the background on which the object made its appearance in Brugnoli’s works, the object being embedded *in* the painting, the object as a separate conceptual practice would emerge from a different field within the arts: sculpture.<sup>80</sup>

An artist who was also associated with Pop art by the critics of the late 1960s was Juan Pablo Langlois.<sup>81</sup> Yet Langlois’ work installed a form of object making derived from sculpture that was imbued with institutional critique, marking a turning point in Chilean art. Langlois’ most important work was “Cuerpos blandos” (Soft Bodies), which was installed at the Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago in 1969 (fig. 1.3.),<sup>82</sup> becoming a contested mythical example influencing later artists and writers.<sup>83</sup> The installation consisted of long arms made up of polyethylene plastic bags filled with newspaper trash that were joined to form a 200 meters long appendage. The ‘soft,’ amorphous bodies wound up inside and outside the Beaux Arts-style museum, writhing their way up stairs and filling the exhibition and storage rooms, so as to finally emerge from a window into the exterior where they were tied to a palm tree on the museum’s front side.

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<sup>79</sup> See Brugnoli’s comments in Miguel Rojas Mix *La imagen del hombre* (Santiago: Anales de la Universidad de Chile, 1971), 75-76. In a 1971 interview Brugnoli also mentioned his involvement as a student leader within the university when he was in Balmes’ workshop, and his increasing “necessity to manifest the surrounding reality” accompanying his “desire that [his] works would be reportages of reality.” In Virginia Vidal, “Francisco Brugnoli: Por primera vez en Chile se siente la necesidad del trabajo del artista,” *El Siglo*, October 18, 1971.

<sup>80</sup> The historical art discussion surrounding the entrance of the object in Chilean art has two main arguments. Gaspar Galaz and Milan Ivelic have argued that its appearance took place within the frame of painting, as a consequence of Pop art interests in the works of Hugo Marín in 1963 and Francisco Brugnoli in 1965. Justo Pastor Mellado has argued that objecthood had its roots in the poetic works of the late 1960s by Juan Luis Martínez and Cecilia Vicuña. As will be discussed in the following pages, the object in Chilean art appeared in connection with sculpture rather than painting or poetry. Brugnoli argued in 1971 that he did not see a difference between sculpture and painting, and that his works could not be merely described as collages, explaining that his interest in the projections that man inserts into objects made him want to “present the object instead of representing it.” *Ibid.* A few months later, Brugnoli would explain the overalls shown at the University of Chile by stating that his works were a continuation of the still life’s he had represented before. In “Brugnoli muestra sus overoles,” *La Prensa*, October 21, 1971.

<sup>81</sup> In a review of an exhibition by Langlois, the art critic Antonio Romera classified him along with Brugnoli as examples of Pop Art. See Antonio Romera, “Obras de Juan Pablo Langlois,” *El Mercurio*, Santiago, June 24, 1973. As noted at the beginning of the chapter, Romera aligned Leppe’s work with Langlois with respect to their rejection of painting and the use of humor and irony similar to Dada experiences, as well as their dismissal of beauty or aesthetic norms. As will be discussed in later chapters, Leppe’s “pop” elements get consistently dismissed in Nelly Richard’s influential writings on the period.

<sup>82</sup> Juan Pablo Langlois’ “Cuerpos blandos” has been more extensively reproduced in the second volume of *Chile 100 Años. 1950-1973: Entre Modernidad y Utopía* (Santiago: Museo Nacional de bellas Artes, 2000), in pages 15, 43, 44, 122, 140, and 144.

<sup>83</sup> Leppe stated in a 1998 catalog that he began working with objecthood under the “myth” of Vicuña. See *Cegado por el oro*, exhibition catalogue (Santiago: Galería Animal, 1998), 11.

Looking like the tentacles of a living organism that crawled its way towards the outside world, the plastic bags transformed the museum from the inside out, defamiliarizing its spatial layout and institutional role. The bags' softness and flaccidity were opposed to the museum's architecturally harsh straight lines, while the notion of 'bodies' alluded to a living being that contrasted with the glass and iron ceiling and marble sculptures at the main hall. The plastic bags' laxity and appropriation of the space questioned whether the museum was appropriate to 'exhibit' and 'contain' a conceptual form of sculpture or had to be literally invaded and infected by ephemeral works escaping from its confines and whose 'life-span' nevertheless invoked a fresh form of sculpture.

The making of the work involved the participation of a group of people paid for each meter of "filled" plastic bag, the artist only directing the work and collecting the results in a conceptual manner. Langlois associated collective labor with industrial manufacture and synthetic materials, producing an "impersonal" type of work. Yet even though the artist's touch or manufacture of the actual work was not important, the conception, process, and materialization of the work were, however impermanent the result. If artistic "handicraft" was being devalued by Langlois through the use of ignoble and mass-produced industrial materials, their very ordinariness and the soggianness achieved in terms of shape disrupted notions of industrial regularity and metallic resistance.<sup>84</sup>

Other sporadic interventions characterized by their ephemeral quality and focus on process were carried out the following two years in or outside the Fine Arts Museum.<sup>85</sup> A related intervention by Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978), which has in recent years received more critical attention, took place at the Museum of Fine Arts in September 1971. The museum had been closed temporarily while the underground exhibition room named after the artist's father, Roberto Matta (1911-2002), was being constructed.<sup>86</sup> "Untitled" (fig. 1.4) consisted of a series of cuts made between the underground and first stories of the museum's floor, connecting these two levels with the museum's glass and iron roof through a series of mirror and their reflections.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, Matta-Clark's

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<sup>84</sup> During the 1970s Langlois continued working with industrial materials criticizing received ideas regarding sculpture and viewing practices. In 1971 Langlois created the work "Monuments" (Monumentos), displayed at the Museum of Fine Arts. It consisted of polyurethane pedestals covered in fabric and painted over, the pedestals often separated from the works they were meant to display. Between 1972 and 1973 Langlois centered his production on transforming the aspect of everyday objects with covers of plastic resin and from 1973 to 1979 used newspaper as a material for sculptures centered on the human subject and its quotidian environment, including animals and everyday objects.

<sup>85</sup> In 1972 Valentina Cruz (1940) executed the one-time action titled "Death of Marat." The action consisted of burning a bathtub with two molded human heads, all made with newspaper and glue. Cruz did not continue doing actions, but devoted her artistic work to prints and drawings.

<sup>86</sup> Roberto Matta had been living in Europe for several decades, but travelled often to Chile. Each of his visits was celebrated by the press, and in the 1970s his involvement with local muralist painters was acclaimed by critics. See Saul, *Pintura Social en Chile*, 51.

<sup>87</sup> For reproductions and a description of the work made by Jeffrey Lew see Thomas Crow's "Gordon Matta-Clark," in *Gordon Matta-Clark*, edited by Corinne Diserens (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2003), 40. Nemesio Antúnez (1918-1993), the Surrealist painter and printmaker, had assumed as director of the museum in 1969 and granted Matta-Clark permission to work inside the museum while it was closed to the public.

work passed unnoticed, and local artists did not hear of the cutouts performed by Clark.<sup>88</sup> A similar situation occurred with Joseph Kosuth's mythical visit to Chile in 1971 and the lecture he gave titled "Painting Versus Art,"<sup>89</sup> which did not receive any critical commentary at the time. The 'invisibility' granted to the most prominent examples of Conceptual practices by Chilean cultural authorities should be noted, since it relates to the 'slowness' and lack of coherence in the development of a local Conceptual movement at the time.<sup>90</sup> Langlois' "Soft Bodies," for example, was temporarily removed while the president of the nation, Eduardo Frei Montalva, inaugurated the exhibition "Panorama de la pintura chilena" (Panorama of Chilean Painting) which opened in November at the Museum.<sup>91</sup> Their softness and deflation not only intercepted the regularity and formality of the museum but introduced a formlessness, a collapse of form that was too problematic to be displayed along the canon of Chilean art which was based on a painting tradition.

The museum as a place to be intervened was also the center of Cecilia Vicuña's work "Salón de otoño" (Autumn Salon) of 1971 (fig.1.5).<sup>92</sup> In June, Vicuña had three trucks loaded with leaves from a popular downtown park come to the museum and leave them at its door. With the help of friends and family the artist then moved the leaves into the

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<sup>88</sup> No press articles refer to the event and the lack of documentary material, mainly a few photographs taken by Matta-Clark's companions during the journey, are the sole referents to the existence of the work. Though some of the photographs appeared in the 2003 catalogue mentioned before, they were shown to the public for the first time in the 2009-2010 traveling exhibition "Gordon Matta-Clark: Undoing Spaces," curated by Tatiana Cuevas and Gabriela Rangel. For a (speculative) reappraisal of the work's importance, see the essay by Justo Pastor Mellado in the exhibition catalogue, *Gordon Matta-Clark: Undoing Spaces* (Lima: Museo de Arte de Lima, 2009).

<sup>89</sup> I describe Kosuth's lecture as "mythical" insofar as the exact location and time of his lecture has not been mentioned by any historian or Kosuth himself. Camnitzer quotes the lecture and arrives at a similar conclusion stating that it had "no major consequence for the Chilean artists," though he does not mention the location or date when it was given. Luis Camnitzer, "The Aftermath of Tucumán Arde," in *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 86. Research in newspapers of the time do not mention Kosuth's visit either.

<sup>90</sup> For no matter how present in the public sphere, these types of works were invisible to the press. An important example that did not receive media attention was the projections on the Museum of Fine Arts' façade made by Swiss-born, Argentinean-based artist Lea Lublin in 1971. The work was titled "Dentro y fuera del museo" (Inside and Outside the Museum) and it consisted of two large screens placed on the Western front of the museum and one on the north side, where projections of documentaries concerning the state of culture and art were shown. Inside the museum, a circuit was created with movable walls leading to four more projections, including at the entrance a wall where a "mall of history" presenting a narrative on the most important historical events related to the arts of the time were displayed. For a description of the work see Rodrigo Alonso, "Arte, ciencia y tecnología," *Cuadernos del Centro de Estudios en Diseño y Comunicación* [Ensayos], no. 20 (2006): 21-34, and Lea Lublin, *Mémoire des Lieux, Mémoire du corps* exhibition catalogue, (Quimper, France: Le Quartier, Centre d'Art Contemporain, 1995).

<sup>91</sup> See the image of the stacked "arms" in the museum's storage area in the catalogue *Miss/ Juan Pablo L. Vicuña; textos de Claudia Donoso, Roberto Merino, Guillermo Machuca* (Santiago: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1997). For a critical analysis of Vicuña's relation to Conceptual art, see Guillermo Machuca, "La Masacre Olvidada," in *Miss/ Juan Pablo L. Vicuña; textos de Claudia Donoso, Roberto Merino, Guillermo Machuca*, 38-48.

<sup>92</sup> The few photographs of the installation were published in *Cecilia Vicuña. Otoño Autumn* (Santiago: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2007), in pages 8, 13, and 14.

museum's main hall. Three feet high, the leaf mounds created a 'sea' that interrupted normal passage through the main hall into the exhibition rooms, obliging the visitors to crumple the leaves and thus transform and pulverize the work.<sup>93</sup> The 'natural' autumn landscape was transported into the museum as a live yet decaying form, changing its aspect with the passage of time.<sup>94</sup> The title of the work invoked old academic salons while alluding to their withering, pointing in turn to the inability of the museum as an institutional space to accept or "house" contemporary art forms.<sup>95</sup>

The process-oriented form of the work was underlined by Vicuña's stress on its existence as an organism and her desire to make a "living sculpture."<sup>96</sup> In the texts she placed on the wall containing reflections on the meanings of what the artist called a "sculpture," Vicuña emphasized the impermanent act of making the work and the importance of the person's experience "executing the work, more than in the sculpture itself."<sup>97</sup> To call such a process a work of art was possible according to Vicuña because what made it a "work" was in her "head." Antúnez described the work as a form of "conceptual art," one of the few direct references to the international movement that had taken preeminence since the 1960s. Antúnez description of the work as conceptual was

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<sup>93</sup> Vicuña later described the work made in June 1971 as "a dark brown sea." At the back of the room a text titled "Autumn Diary" described the work "in reverse, beginning with the last day." The installation was in place for only three days and Vicuña later dedicated the work to the construction of socialism in Chile, alluding to Allende's government. See Cecilia Vicuña, in "Quipoem," *The Precarious. The Art and Poetry of Cecilia Vicuña*, ed. Catherine de Zegher (New England, Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997), 30.

<sup>94</sup> A similar image was proposed by Patricia Saavedra in 1981 for the Museum's main hall, though this time she would "plow" the earth brought into it, creating ridges similar to engraved lines. By 1981, the importance acquired by graphic arts had displaced earlier "process" based models, reorienting the understanding of art actions, as will be discussed in Chapter Five. For an image of Saavedra's proposed work, see, "¿Qué es el arte hoy? Un asunto polémico," *El Mercurio*, August 16, 1981.

<sup>95</sup> The title given by the artist was "Autumn," though the director of the museum, Nemesio Antúnez, changed it to "Autumn Salon" in the invitation card, curiously or "ironically" reinscribing it within the history of the "salons" as has been mentioned by Alberto Madrid. See Alberto Madrid, "'Salon de Otoño': The Missing Pages," in *Cecilia Vicuña. Otoño Autumn* (Santiago: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2007), 30.

<sup>96</sup> In *Saborami/ by Cecilia Vicuña* (Cullompton (Langford South Court, Cullompton, Devon): Beau Geste Press, 1973), no page number. Justo Pastor Mellado has related this form of "living sculpture" to the Conceptual work of Argentinean artist Alberto Greco, whose "vivo ditto" sculptures (much like Manzoni's signed works of art as has been mentioned by Mari Carmen Ramírez, among other critics) consisted in marking as art objects anything the artist marked or circumscribed with chalk, starting with himself. In Justo Pastor Mellado, "Historias de Anticipación," *Transferencia y Densidad: Tercer Período, 1973-2000. Chile 100 Años* (Santiago: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2000), 25. While the similarities are evident, especially in terms of Vicuña's reference to "the sculpture is me," Greco's work was largely unknown in Chile at the time, especially since from 1961 to his suicide in 1965 he was living in Europe and had become a marginalized figure within the Argentinean art scene in the early 1960s. See Giunta, 171.

<sup>97</sup> Celicia Vicuña, in *Cecilia Vicuña. Otoño Autumn* (Santiago: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2007), 24. The English translation of the text included in *Cecilia Vicuña. Otoño Autumn*, does not include the original Spanish phrase).

antedeceded only by an article published in 1969 in relation to Langlois' "serpents" as part of an "intellectual art" much "in fashion within the United States and Europe."<sup>98</sup>

While conceptualism had begun setting its deep roots in Brazilian and Argentinean art in the mid to late 1960s, it would still take some six years before a full-bodied "conceptual" art scene materialized in Chile.<sup>99</sup> Conceptual forms began surfacing in Brazil as part of an abstract, perceptual tradition that evolved from Neo-Concretism to performances, participatory works and installations, while in Argentina they largely emerged out of a web of modernization measures in the arts among cultural institutions and an oscillating relation to painting. The relation of Chilean artists to other Conceptual practices within Latin and North America of the time was scarce and achieved mostly through personal acquaintance, readings, and the few exhibitions mounted in the Museum of Fine Arts which introduced the conceptual graphic works of artists like Liliana Porter and Luis Camnitzer. Some of the more updated international exhibitions were "París y el arte contemporáneo" (Paris and Contemporary Art) which travelled from Argentina in 1972, and the series of Graphic Biennials (Bienal de Grabado) of 1968 and 1970. The latter introduced works by Roy Lichtenstein, John Rauschenberg, Robert Motherwell, Louise Nevelson, and Les Levine along with Porter and Camnitzer in 1968, who were founding members of The New York Graphic Workshop, and works by Josef Albers, Porter, Camnitzer in 1970. While the museum and Chilean galleries had focused during the past decade on more conservative international exhibitions, during the late 1960s and beginnings of the 1970s a different version of contemporary and modern art that was based on forms of socially committed artistic expressions began to take hold of the art scene.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> According to the author of the article, this intellectual art form morphed into different terms according to its use: from conceptual to processual, from minimal to optional. The writer ascribed to Langlois several influences, from Oldenburg, to Christo and Otto Piene, thus creating an international conceptual genealogy based on sculpture. Langlois had referred then to his work as a concept, not even an object, further describing it as "things that do not have a value, except in the context where they are placed." N.O., "Arte. J.P.L., el arte del diario y el plástico," *Diseño*, 77.

<sup>99</sup> The differences between the Brazilian and Argentinean cases must be properly noted, since each emerged from specific artistic and social movements (Concretism and Neo-Concretism in Brazil, an interest in the media and social uprisings in Argentina associated to specific cultural institutions such as the Di Tella Institute, to name a few distinct influences), and had particular relations with industry and modernization. Art historians have since the 1990s established different dates for the beginnings of Conceptual art in South America, from the mid-1960s (Ramírez) to the late 1960s, and have set out to clearly distinguish it from a "Calvinist" (Mellado, Machuca), "cold" (Pacheco), North American practice of conceptualism. While this interpretation of Latin American Conceptual Art as "hot" or "counter" to a North American version is useful to mark its different context and signifying experiments, it also tends to subsume very different scenes and groups under a homogeneous idea of resistance (mostly to dictatorships and economic hardships) that occludes the radically different contexts of their emergence and the specific junctures in which they arose. These narratives further tend to construct Latin American Conceptual art as a heroic, at times even 'purer' example of Conceptual art, as can be seen in the introductory essays' of Alejandro Alberro and Blake Stimson to the book *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: MIT Press, 1999).

<sup>100</sup> Actualization or modernization in Chilean art would come through its association with a particular form of artistic vanguard that was taking precedence throughout the continent during the 1960s, whose roots in Chile had been set by Balmes and which ripened with the assumption as president of Salvador Allende.

Cecilia Vicuña was among those artists whose relation to Conceptual art came from a personal inquiry rather than from an environment of concerted efforts.<sup>101</sup> Vicuña's work with the ephemeral and process-oriented had begun in the mid-1960s, when she collected elements from the trash or residues found at the beach, making small sculptures and assemblages with them which she called "precarios" (precarious). The discarded materials were understood by Vicuña as a metaphor for the position of Latin America within world politics, particularly in the context of Henry Kissinger's reference to South America as the United States' backyard. In a related 1967 experience, Cecilia Vicuña formed the group "No Tribe" (Tribu No) with the photographer Claudio Bertoni (1946), producing a manifesto that advocated the use of the negative as the only possible form of resistance of the peoples from the Southern Hemisphere.<sup>102</sup> This action was linked to the creation of the Bank of Ideas for Allende (Banco de ideas para Allende), a project made in 1968-69 involving the participation of anonymous groups of people to develop ideas for Salvador Allende's presidential campaign.<sup>103</sup> The Bank of Ideas consisted in producing several objects and actions coming from ideas produced collectively by random people met in the streets or called over the phone.<sup>104</sup> As a form of collaborative participation attempting to induce social change by challenging current modes of thought and behavior, the Bank of Ideas was related indirectly to Hélio Oiticica's 1967 manifesto on "Brazilian New Objectivity", which advocated an art of "engagement" that would take "a position on political, social, and ethical problems."<sup>105</sup> Yet Vicuña's "bank" was more

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<sup>101</sup> In a 1972 review of her "naive" paintings shown at the National Museum of Fine Arts, the critic Antonio Romera wrote that Vicuña's "intellectualism" was largely a result of her poetic interests. See Antonio Romera, "Pinturas de Cecilia Vicuña," *El Mercurio*, July 14, 1972. I mention Vicuña's poetic production because there has been a later narrative of Latin American Conceptual art espoused by Luis Camnitzer in his 2007 book *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* which is based on a literary tradition in the Americas in which the word as a visual and auditory sign plays a significant role.

<sup>102</sup> See Magda Sepúlveda, "Cecilia Vicuña: la subjetividad poética como una operación contra americana," *Revista Chilena de Literatura* (November 2000): 111-126. Vicuña's interest in American indigenous was joined to the changing everyday experiences in contemporary Chilean culture, an interest that was worked through poetic means of expressions. One project involved the creation of circular letters sent through the regular postal system, made as a poetic pun on the "circulars" sent by offices to all of their employees.

<sup>103</sup> Vicuña has said that when she sent the proposal of the bank to Allende, he responded by saying "Chile isn't ready." See Vicuña, in "Quipoem," *The Precarious. The Art and Poetry of Cecilia Vicuña*, 33. Vicuña's deep commitment to politics was displayed in *Autumn's* texts, where she elaborated on the need to expand and transform the consciousness of people, to "precipitate the revolution," and the desire to make a work that would make manifest "the urgency of the present, which is the urgency of the revolution." In *Saborami*, no page number.

<sup>104</sup> Some of the actions included calling to random telephone numbers and asking the question: "what is poetry to you?" See M. Catherine de Zegher, *The Precarious*, 22.

<sup>105</sup> In Hélio Oiticica, "General Scheme of the New Objectivity," originally published in *Nova Objectividade Brasileira*, exhibition catalogue (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna, 1967) and republished in Alberro and Stimson, 40-42. Vicuña has stated that she had no knowledge of Oiticica's or other contemporary Brazilian Neo-Concretism works at the time, which because of the scarce interest demonstrated by Chilean museums and galleries at the time in exhibiting Latin America works seems highly probable.

immediately connected to the increasingly active role taken by Chilean artists in politics, of which Balmes continued to be the spearhead.

The intertwined roles of politics and artistic experimentation which had been burgeoning in Balmes' work and later in Brugnoli's social realism would come to fruition in the early 1970s due largely in part to the emphasis placed by Salvador Allende (1908-1973) and his government on the social effects of art. As will be discussed in the next section, this relation between politics and art, between two forms of "vanguard" and their connection to social change and the modification of reality, would nevertheless take a particular form of "pan-Americanism" and anti-imperialism. The opening of the Chilean artistic scene in the early 1970s to other Latin American artistic and social experiments was based on a notion of a common destiny which had to be played out politically and culturally through the creation of "authentic" expressions of a Latin American identity.

### 1.3. Art, Politics, and Latin America: the Social Role of Art Under Salvador Allende

Salvador Allende's government supported the idea of bringing art closer to the people in a concrete way. Allende had assumed the presidency of Chile in November 1970 and from the start gave a primary role to culture as an agent of social change.<sup>106</sup> For Allende, the arts were considered another "front" of revolutionary practice<sup>107</sup> and he was determined to open the arts in Chile to other Latin American experiences that reflected the socialist ideals espoused by his government.

The 1969-70 exhibition "América no invoco tu nombre en vano" (America, I do not invoke your name in vain) opened in the midst of Allende's campaign for presidency. Organized by the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Chile and the Museum of Contemporary Art, the exhibition featured installations and objects in a circus-type tent set in the park in front of the Museum, showcasing not only art objects but also theater and literary performances.<sup>108</sup> The reunion of different art forms in one mobile space was meant to make art more accessible for larger audiences, bringing it closer to "the people" and thus changing the dynamics of cultural production and distribution focused on the museum. These dynamics were believed to be governed by "capitalistic" and bourgeois concerns which excluded the popular classes from access to and the creation of 'high' culture, focusing instead on European art forms or their imitation to be consumed by private patrons while forcing the masses to ingest pre-packaged forms of mass culture. In

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<sup>106</sup> Allende's "basic program of government" stated that a "new culture" would emerge out of the triumph of the people, a culture with a critical position on "reality." See *Programa básico de gobierno de la Unidad Popular* (Santiago: Horizonte, 1970), 28.

<sup>107</sup> See, for example, the title of Miguel Rojas Mix' article written on the verge of the 1973 military coup: "El proceso revolucionario chileno y el frente de las artes" (The Chilean Revolutionary Process and the Front of the Arts), published in the Mexican magazine *Excelsior*, in September, 1973.

<sup>108</sup> The title of the show was taken from an epic poem by Pablo Neruda (1904-1973), a close friend of Allende whose poetry had turned since the 1940s towards American identity and social differences in the continent (the poem *América no invoco tu nombre en vano* was published in 1942, being then added to *Canto General*, an epic poem of grand proportions dealing with American history which was finished in 1950). In 1971 Neruda had been nominated by the Communist Party as a presidential candidate, rejecting the position in order to support Allende's campaign.

contrast, Allende's recovery of art for the people was joined to a recuperation of the populace's "authentic" interests based on a newly found consciousness of their social plight which sought to find its expression through a unique visual form. The development of a project for the reclamation of popular and national identity from bourgeois and 'foreign' capitalist's interests, went hand in hand with seeking a more egalitarian artistic expression and exhibition that fused categories and literally reached out to the masses.

Yet the tent also occupied an ambiguous position between an impermanent, mobile exhibition space, which in its precariousness countered formal cultural institutions, and a popular entertainment ring.<sup>109</sup> While the tent alluded to popular forms of gatherings found in Chilean rural regions, it contained echoes of uncritical entertainment where the participation of viewers was still invoked in the form of passive contemplation. Even though the use of a tent as an exhibition space sidestepped the problem of resorting to a traditional institutional setting and allowed for more innovative ways of display, its own 'popular' character tended to confuse populist propaganda with a search for popular and national identity. During Allende's government, the "people," the "popular," and "populism" often merged in the cultural discourse proposed by him, creating a slippery area of trespasses between art of the people, made by the people, or for the people within popular contexts or artistic ones as well as within regional traditions and national settings. Against capitalistic forms of individuality and private ownership, the popular art forms and populist cultural endeavors pursued under Allende's government attempted to collectivize the experience, the distribution, and even the making of art, curiously echoing the conceptual approaches taken by Langlois and Vicuña. Yet this discourse was characterized by its heroics and by the placement of art to the service of "the people."

The importance given by Allende's government to the working class as the basis of the nation, a popular substrate of national labor that was appealed to in a populist manner, flowed into the arts and its organization as well. A Committee of Plastic Artists of the Popular Unity ("Comité de Artistas Plásticos de la Unidad Popular") was formed after Allende's assumption as president, a worker's type union of artists that organized several mass-related events. One of the most prominent was the 1970 "El pueblo tiene arte con Allende" (The People Have Art with Allende), a series of simultaneous exhibitions mounted in tents in eighty cities of the country. The exhibitions featured series of works in serigraphy made by thirty Chilean artists that were sold at inexpensive prices. The serigraphies illustrated the "forty measures" that Allende proposed to implant once he came to power, measures concerning urgent social problems in the nation which particularly addressed the working class, mothers, and their children. In these serigraphic folders, not only was art placed under the service of politics, but its methods and forms were used to "illustrate" a particular political agenda.<sup>110</sup> If the masses had to be re-

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<sup>109</sup> The stress on popular images and phrases to describe Allende's political aims can be seen in a quote by Arturo Fontaine A., which notes that "the Chilean revolution was defined by the President as socialism with the taste of "empanadas and red wine." Fontaine, 70. The Chilean socialist project would thus not only have a unique national flavor to it ('empanadas' being a typically Chilean meat pie), but the reference to a popular dish also alluded to its populist (and nutritional) basis.

<sup>110</sup> The concept of "illustration" in Chilean art, particularly of art in the service of illustrating history and political desires, was consistently used in the early 1980s by Justo Pastor Mellado, who has expanded this concept to explain the decay of painting and the development of graphics in Chilean art. The concept



educated, the best way to do it seemed to be through an art form that was serial and reproducible.<sup>111</sup>

Justo Pastor Mellado has been the only critic to notice that the exhibition occurred at the same time that the IV Graphic Biennial was taking place inside the Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago. In several of his writings, the author has noted how these simultaneous displays reflected the class struggles that were being carried out in the realm of culture at the time, with the Chilean oligarchy holding on to the sanctified institutional settings and art forms while Allende's socialism took over public spaces.<sup>112</sup> Mellado's theory further proposed that serigraphy, understood as a "de-classicizing" technique due to its serialism, was opposed to the more traditional forms of graphics displayed in the museum. His last point is important to understand the re-conceptualization made by Chilean artists of graphic practices during the late 1970s and early 1980s. As will be argued in the next chapter, graphic practices from photography to woodcuts and silkscreens, passed from representing the "people" to a different idea of the "marginal," based in part on the "minor" position occupied by graphics in art.

The directness of Allende's plan of reaching out to those previously marginalized in the cultural realm was enacted letter-for-letter in the projects' characteristic itinerancy, particularly their emphasis on connection and mobility. Among the enterprises of cultural outreach was the 1970's "Tren de la cultura" (Culture Train), a caravan of artists that

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immediately acquired force within Chilean historiography and criticism, and has become part of (official) art historical discourse.

<sup>111</sup> Political propaganda during Allende's campaign was especially innovative as it was manifested in the street murals made by the "muralist brigades" and the development of workshops to make posters and graphic works in the capital's marginal and poorest neighborhoods. The most well known muralist brigade was the "Brigada Ramona Parra," which Roberto Matta visited and worked with between 1971 and 1972, and with which José Balmes participated in 1973. The photographs taken of this last collaborative project were presented in the 1973 Paris Biennial. For an account of the implementation and brief life of the silkscreen campaign in Santiago's marginal areas, see Justo Pastor Mellado, "Ruinas anticipadas. Modernidades combinadas y desiguales," *Documenta 12*, Magazine no. 1, *Modernity?* (2007), in <http://magazines.documenta.de/frontend/article.php?IdLanguage=13&NrArticle=268> (last accessed December 2008).

<sup>112</sup> See Justo Pastor Mellado, *La Novela Chilena del Grabado* (Santiago: Editoriales Economías de Guerra, 1995) and *Dos Textos Tácticos* (Santiago: Editorial Jemmy Button INK, 1998). While I agree with Mellado's theory on the politicization of graphic techniques and the use of serigraphy to reach larger popular audiences, he tends to bypass the importance of the parallel mural tradition that had been building up consistently in Chile since the 1940s and achieved its most politically militant moment in the early 1970s, regarding it as merely "illustrative" of ideology. This is done by Mellado in part to support his own thesis regarding the prominence that certain graphic arts would achieve in the latter part of the 1970s surrounding the work of Eugenio Dittborn (whose work I will discuss in Chapter Three), who stands in a prominent position along with Balmes within Mellado's own art historical account. While Mellado does recognize a relation to graphic arts present in the mural tradition, he regards it as indebted to the Cuban graphics associated with the 1950s Revolution. Yet as the history traced by Ernesto Saul in 1972 shows, the mural tradition had an important and continuous history in Chile, which David Alfaro Siqueiros' visit in 1946 only helped to strengthen, and which the influence of Cuban graphics, posters, and "vallas" (billboards) reoriented in the 1960s. According to Saul, while in Cuba posters and "vallas" were a magnified version of graphic arts, in Chile the reverse process took place, with murals coming close to the graphic arts through their impermanence, getting rid of "technicalities" and desire of "posterity." See Ernesto Saul, 42-47.

visited cities and remote towns along the south of the country.<sup>113</sup> Taking art to the streets and remote regions without much access to it, making art part of the everyday public life, was not just a campaign slogan but a literal materialization of it: if the people did not come to the oligarchic mausoleums of art, then art was taken to the streets and, through silkscreen reproductions, to the interior of modest homes. The cultural expansion of Allende government sought visibility (of its programs and of its own popular intent) and to make visible the previously marginalized (the “popular” as that belonging to, and being, the people) through the construction of modernist public buildings,<sup>114</sup> the exhibition of popular and traditional art forms within institutional spaces,<sup>115</sup> and the participation of the popular masses in the consumption of art. As the fusion between populace and popular came closer, and art and life intercepted each other, class struggle was translated into a cultural confrontation for dominance and visibility.

This campaign of “popular” expansion was echoed in the international, Latin American focus taken by the cultural institutions that came to being under Allende’s government, a “pan-Americanist” interest manifested in their exhibition and publication programs. The newly created IAL, Instituto de Arte Latinoamericano (Institute of Latin American Art),<sup>116</sup> under the direction of Miguel Rojas Mix, had as specific aims the diffusion of Latin American art and the consolidation of its study in Chile, being strongly

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<sup>113</sup> The “train” was supported by the government’s Department of Culture and the painter Guillermo Núñez. As director of the Museum of Contemporary Art (M.A.C.), Núñez also organized the exhibitions “The Forty Measures of the Popular Government” and the “Cuba-Chile Encounter” (which I will discuss in what follows) among others.

<sup>114</sup> The most prominent example was the UNCTAD building, constructed for the 1972 congress of the United Nations that was held in Chile. After the meeting, the building was renamed “Centro Cultural Metropolitano Gabriela Mistral,” in honor of the Chilean Nobel prize winning poet, and harbored several exhibitions and cultural events. See Archivos de Sergio González, Miguel Lawner, José Medina, “UNCTAD III Santiago de Chile 06/1971-04/1972,” *Documenta 12*, Magazine no.1, *Modernity?* (2007), in <http://magazines.documenta.de/frontend/article.php?IdLanguage=13&NrArticle=424> (last accessed December 2008). As Miguel Lawner explains, the building’s construction counted with the participation of several artists “by creating artworks that would form a structural part of the architectural project.” Lawner, 3. Mellado has traced the history of one of the paintings by Gracia Barrios made specifically for the building that “disappeared” after the coup, yet was recovered more than twenty years later. After September 1973, the building was taken over by the military and renamed as “Edificio Diego Portales,” replacing the symbol of female culture for a strong patriarchal figure who had shaped the Chilean Constitution. For an account of the fate of Gracia Barrios’ painting “Multitud III” (1972), see Justo Pastor Mellado, *Historia de una Obra Recuperada* (Santiago: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2001).

<sup>115</sup> The Museum of Contemporary Art aligned itself with Allende’s government and became one of its main platforms. The titles of the exhibitions organized by M.A.C. are eloquent in their popularizing and political intentions: “Los grabadores de La Granja” (The Engravers of La Granja), “Las Brigadas Muralistas” (The Muralist Brigades), “Museum of Solidarity” (Museo de la Solidaridad), and “Apoyo a la lucha del pueblo brasileño. No a la Bienal Gorilla” (Support to the Fight of the Brazilian People. No to the Gorilla Biennial).

<sup>116</sup> The Institute was founded in December 1970 as a merger between the Institute of Extension of Plastic Arts and the Latin American Center of Universidad de Chile. The Institute’s first exhibition was “Homenaje al triunfo del pueblo” (Homage to the Triumph of the People), also set in a tent in a popular neighborhood, celebrating Allende’s victory in the presidential elections. In a similar effort Galería CAL (“Coordinación Artística Latinoamericana,” Gallery of Latin American Artistic Coordination) opened its doors in August 1971.

influenced by Allende's idea of forming a "continent-populace."<sup>117</sup> Through publications on Latin American art, exhibitions and the production of catalogs, the Institute sought two interrelated goals: to strengthen the role of Chilean art within the continent and improve the knowledge of other American cultural examples, thus joining the Chilean scene to a larger cultural panorama characterized by its modernity.

The development of multiple programs focused on Latin American art at the time, attests to the importance given by Allende's government to expanding pan-American relations and ideas related to the socialist revolution. Miguel Rojas Mix played a crucial role in the development of the Latin American programs within the University of Chile. Between 1970 and 1973 Rojas Mix was the Director of the program of study "Latin American Art and Culture," and from 1972 to 1973 he directed the editions "Cuadernos de Arte Latinoamericanos" (Notebooks of Latin American Art) and "Artistas Latinoamericanos" (Latin American Artists), publications focusing on contemporary Latin American art.

Such desires were validated and proved possible as the Institute brought together important academics and critics from Argentina and Brazil such as Aldo Pellegrini and Mario Pedrosa.<sup>118</sup> Their presence and knowledge had the immediate effect of internationalizing the Chilean art scene, or at least of creating an instant space of contact with more "advanced" Latin American examples. The creation of "Museo de la Solidaridad" (Museum of Solidarity) in May 1972, under the efforts of Pedrosa and the Spanish critic José María Moreno Galván, for example, permitted the exhibition for the first time in Chile of significant international contemporary works of art since its collection was formed by works donated by international artists in support of Allende's government and the Chilean socialist project.<sup>119</sup> Yet as Pedrosa stated in the 1972 declaration of the Committee of Artistic Solidarity and in his letter to Allende which was

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<sup>117</sup> The idea of a continent-populace ("pueblo continente") was developed in a series of public addresses Allende made in several Latin American countries such as Argentina, Ecuador, Colombia, and Peru. For the complete address see Salvador Allende, *América Latina, voz de un pueblo continente: discursos del presidente Allende en sus giras por Argentina, Ecuador, Colombia y Perú* ([Santiago de Chile]: Consejería de Difusión de la Presidencia de la República, [1971]). Here the "people" no longer meant the inhabitants of a nation, but a community of similar identities joined through a socialist or revolutionary project. This idea had a long history in Latin America, from Simon Bolívar's dream of a large united American continent manifested in the First Pan-American Conference at Panama in 1826 to José Vasconcelos' "cosmic race" of Iberoamerica unified by common history of colonial violence and hybridity. In a more contemporary note, the "School of Pan-American Unrest" by Mexican artist Pablo Helguera is built upon these ideas, while Hugo Chávez socialist project has also been associated with such dreams of a unified cultural continent under a socialist banner.

<sup>118</sup> Pedrosa was exiled in Chile after escaping from the Brazilian military regime. He had curated several São Paulo Biennials and was an important critic in the international art system.

<sup>119</sup> The art works were collected by Pedrosa and Moreno Galván, who had started an artistic parallel to the "Operation Truth." The latter refers to a commission of journalists that attempted to counter the bad publicity and distortions Allende's government was receiving from opposing media, whose news were received and reiterated by international press agencies. See "Operación Verdad recorrerá América," *Puro Chile*, February 14, 1971, quoted in Miguel González Pion and Arturo Fontaine Talavera, eds., *Los Mil Días de Allende* (Santiago: Centro de Estudios Públicos, 1997). Nevertheless, Allende's government and its official media outlets were attacked by the opposition of committing the same sin of distorting facts and limiting freedom of expression, a situation which worsened when Allende intervened the press.

included in the first catalog of the museum, the institution also posited Chile as the “representative of the whole underdeveloped world” and “its sacred revolution against submission.”<sup>120</sup> In other words, the museum presented Chile as a representative of the third world in which the first truly democratic form of socialism was being developed and executed. Despite its “peripheral” status in the world order, Chile was an example for other nations according to Pedrosa, as it was carving its own place in history in its anti-imperialist battle, and therefore was deserving of donations and international attention. Chile was ready to occupy a more prominent position in the international stage, and its socialist experiment was its calling card.

The uniqueness of the “Chilean way” in both its social commitment and artistic expression was ascertained in the catalogue for the 1971 exhibition organized by the IAL titled “La imagen del hombre” (The Image of Man), which brought recent experiments in sculpture to a single environment (fig.1.6).<sup>121</sup> Though the works emerged from academic backgrounds and were still considered ‘sculptures’ by their makers and critics, their placement within the exhibition space, the ephemeral and transitory qualities suggested by the works’ materiality and, in the case of Víctor Hugo Núñez (1943), the merging of distinct artistic genres (from ballet to theater and sculpture), made them an experiment in installation art and interaction with the spectators.<sup>122</sup> According to Rojas Mix’s catalog essay, the artists’ aim was not merely portraying “a plastic image,” but “establishing a relation between plastic art, music, dance, theater, and even literature.”<sup>123</sup> The ‘*gesamtkunstwerk*’ or total work of art thus proposed was defined by Rojas Mix as an “event,” a happening that “tried to keep the image as a live process of participation”<sup>124</sup> that included the spectator in its emergence.

Nevertheless, the only example of such a radical combination of genres was Núñez’ interactive installations conceived as sculptural “spaces” in which other activities took place involving the ‘presence’ of spectators (rather than their complete involvement in the production of the work). Most of the other object-sculptures presented still adhered to stronger sculptural conventions, as in the case of Ricardo Mesa (1931-2000) and Hugo Marín (1929), following a ‘humanist’ tradition.<sup>125</sup> For even while the works took their

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<sup>120</sup> Mario Pedrosa, “Carta,” *Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende: donación de los artistas del mundo al gobierno popular de Chile/Comité Internacional de Solidaridad Artística con Chile, Instituto de Arte Latinoamericano, Universidad de Chile* ([Santiago]: El Comité: El Instituto, 1972), no page number.

<sup>121</sup> The participating artists included Luis Araneda (1939), Francisco Brugnoli, Mónica Bunster (1941), Marta Carrasco (1939), Ricardo Galván (1947), Mario Irarrázabal (1940), Hugo Marín, Ricardo Mesa, Víctor Hugo Núñez, and Carlos Peters (1947).

<sup>122</sup> There are reproductions with views of the installation and individual works in the exhibition catalogue *La imagen del hombre* (Santiago: Anales de la Universidad de Chile, 1971).

<sup>123</sup> In Miguel Rojas Mix, *La imagen del hombre* (Santiago: Anales de la Universidad de Chile, 1971), 68.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* The original Spanish word used by Rojas Mix was “acontecimiento,” which could roughly translate as a ‘happening.’

<sup>125</sup> In her review of Brugnoli’s 1971 work, the critic Ana Helfant noted that “humanism” was the most used word at the time, and that “each revolution and each revolutionary artist is offering humanism in kilograms or tons depending on whether they have better or worse propaganda or public relations’ technicians.” Helfant, “Exposiciones,” *Revista Eva*, November 5, 1971.

materials from the everyday, being built up mostly by urban detritus and industrial scraps, and presented an aspect of formlessness that intended to “penetrate into the order of the real: into the order of quotidian existence,”<sup>126</sup> the “objects” still presented a tableaux-like appearance that was grounded, as Rojas Mix explained, in the three-dimensional representation of the human figure. Figuration was embedded in each of the works presented, from the life-size, flattened out, cut-out figures in wood and cardboard made by Carlos Peters to the colorful papier maché female forms of Marta Carrasco, even though this was a “poor” human figure, residual and decayed, comical rather than triumphant. In this sense, the ‘relational’ or intersubjective experience that critics like Rojas Mix saw in these works was connected more to a symbolic content, an association with other human bodies through its material representation and the sensuality of matter than to any actual participatory element.<sup>127</sup>

The use of everyday materials was not new to the art world and Rojas Mix was aware of this problem. The author was emphatic in distinguishing the local from other international forms of “Pop art” which also attempted to achieve the goal of merging life and art in a sculptural fashion, as he tried to establish the uniqueness of the Chilean “neo-figurative” movement displayed in the exhibition. For the author, if Chilean art was to become exemplary of the new times and socialist possibilities, its artistic expressions should also be clearly distinct from their international predecessors.

Rojas Mix’s argument regarding the uniqueness of the Chilean neo-figuration was based on the artists’ double commitment to themselves and to society, their contemporaneity being based on the artists’ relation to their concrete surrounding reality. This social bent went beyond the North American “documentary” relationship with reality, which according to Rojas Mix was characterized by its “cold and impersonal” appropriation of the world of things, man being just one more object among them, as exemplified in Segal’s cast sculptures.<sup>128</sup> Lacking a “dialectical relationship” between man and his world, the North American “new images of man” were neutral and delved in the world’s “banality” without being able to transcend it.<sup>129</sup> Instead, the Chilean

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<sup>126</sup> Rojas Mix, 69.

<sup>127</sup> Already in 1971 Ana Helfant wondered where all this new “humanism” would lead to, ironically envisioning for the future a “great show [where these artists would be] adoring the goddess Matter, like the Aztecs adored the sun god, with their human sacrifices and everything.” Helfant, “Exposiciones.”

<sup>128</sup> Rojas Mix, 71. It is interesting to note that Rojas Mix made no reference to European experiences with popular imagery and action, such as Nouveau Réalisme in France or the actions of Fluxus, even though he had spent three years in Europe and particularly Germany with an Alexander von Humboldt grant to gather the material that would form part of his books *La imagen artística de Chile* and *Lateinamerika im Spiegel der europäischen Kunst*. At least theoretically, the focus of the Chilean art scene shifted from European models to American ones which, as will be discussed in what follows, ended up being equally rejected by local artists.

<sup>129</sup> Rojas Mix, 70-72. The reference to the 1959 exhibition “New Images of Man” signaled for Rojas Mix the North American turn from Abstract Expressionism after World War II and the emergence of a new generation of artists confronting a changed cultural landscape characterized by ‘things.’ In a corresponding footnote, Rojas Mix also made an important distinction between Dada and Pop art’s use of the banal. For the author, while Dada discovered the “vitality” and “expressive” possibilities of “anonymous” everyday things, Pop art banalized their expressiveness, turning them mute. As will be discussed in relation to Leppe,

sculptors' use of reality's materiality was joined to a social intention manifested in their 'literal' attempts to provoke the spectator into questioning his or hers values and understanding of their world through the inclusion of active art forms (in the case of Núñez) and their anthropomorphic content, allowing them to participate "in the continuous development of consciousness"<sup>130</sup> and transform reality. Unlike its "cool" North American version, the Chilean "vanguard" was not merely presenting reality but contributing to change it by being attuned to the general transformation of society in which "revolution" would displace "conformity."<sup>131</sup> Thus, the main difference between these two vanguards was one of content rather than form, as well as one of context and of the artists' participation in social change through their work.<sup>132</sup>

Such a commitment to society was related by Rojas Mix to both the current political situation in Chile as well as to a larger pan-American endeavor. In 1970, Rojas Mix had published "La imagen artística de Chile" (The Artistic Image of Chile), a book that reflected on the representations of Chile, and by extension of Latin America, produced by European travelers, cartographers, and artists of the national landscape, its inhabitants, and fauna from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>133</sup> According to Rojas Mix, the fantastical and savage visions produced by the early European travelers, the "exotic" conception of America's inhabitants and landscape, and the scientific expeditions with a more precise ethnographical intent had not been superseded in the present. Rather, America was still observed and valued under "Western" stereotypes that had their roots in these previous representations. Yet due to the contemporary 'consciousness' of a "common destiny" marked by the notion of "revolution" (which started with the Cuban Revolution and had Che Guevara as its guiding image, as exemplified in an illustration found in his book), the different Latin American nations were joining in a "new attitude" that aimed to

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the distinction between (and often the merger of) Dada and Pop was paramount to the critics' interpretation of his work and its development.

<sup>130</sup> Rojas Mix, 73.

<sup>131</sup> Rojas Mix, 74. Rojas Mix text is one of the first to explicitly refer to this sculptural movement as an artistic "vanguard" parallel to those abroad.

<sup>132</sup> As will be seen in later chapters, the term "avant-garde" would be appropriated in the early 1980s by certain critics in an attempt to establish the "newness" and originality of the "escena de avanzada" without mentioning the precedence of these sculptural manifestations or simply discarding them as mere illustrations of a political discourse. Only in Galaz and Ivelic's text were these movements given prominence, creating an internal art historical dispute regarding the emergence of objectuality in Chile. One of the aims of this dissertation is to question the prominence given to the "avanzada" as original and the ways certain theoretical discourses helped create its surrounding mythology. The importance given to Leppe in the following chapters is related to explaining these conflicts and establishing the contradictions present in such readings.

<sup>133</sup> Miguel Rojas Mix, *La imagen artística de Chile* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, S.A., 1970). I will return to this text when I refer to Ronald Kay's 1980 *Del espacio de acá* in Chapter Three, since it precedes Kay's text in both its subject and theories, particularly surrounding the role of the image and of photography. It is noteworthy that Rojas Mix work has been completely ruled out of Chilean art historical narratives with the exception of a brief mention in Patricio M. Zárata, "El comportamiento de la crítica," in *Chile 100 Años. Entre Modernidad y Utopía*, 68-90.

“liberate itself from dependency.”<sup>134</sup> While the image of Chile had long been joined to the history of America, being at first undifferentiated from its representations, in the present their histories were united in a common social bond secured through the idea of revolution, a destiny waiting to be fulfilled away from foreign interests.

Rojas Mix’s reference to Cuba as the guiding light in this revolutionary, anti-imperialist path which Chile was beginning to follow under Allende, was materialized in two exhibitions and related events that took place in the two nations between 1971 and 1972. These had started with the 1971 “Encuentro Chile Cuba” (Chile-Cuba Encounter) which took place in La Habana, Cuba, and was followed in 1972 by both the “Encuentro de artistas del Cono Sur” in Santiago (Encounter of Artists from the Southern Cone) and the “Encuentro de plástica latinoamericana” (Encounter of Latin American Plastic Arts) in La Habana. The shows were concrete steps into securing tighter relations between Latin American nations, joining Chilean art to a revolutionary tradition, and strengthening a militant attitude that found its expression in “new” art forms.

The first encounter’s exhibition consisted primarily of current graphic arts and painting. These reflected the informal and protest art tradition exemplified by Grupo Signo and its acolytes in the case of Chile,<sup>135</sup> and the graphic and “posters” associated with Cuban political propaganda and Pop art, as represented by Raúl Martínez and Félix Beltrán. Marked by evident political work that opposed North American imperialism as could be seen in the titles of many of the works,<sup>136</sup> the first encounter proved useful to

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<sup>134</sup> Rojas Mix, *La imagen artística de Chile*, 19. The echoes of the contemporary theories of dependency in these discourses are obvious. Since the early 1950s and through the 1960s the theories of dependence developed in connection to the economic researches done by the CEPAL (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) as a form of explaining the conditions of underdevelopment of Latin American nations. The theories postulated a relationship of subordination of peripheral countries to developed Western centers of power, an unbalanced relation which subjected the former’s economy to the development of the latter, so that the production of peripheral nations (mostly of raw materials) was stripped of its surplus value. Different versions of possible solutions were offered, among them the creation of stronger states, promoting internal demand, and a social revolution. See Fernando H. Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependencia y Desarrollo en América Latina* (México: Siglo XXI, 1969) and Teotonio Dos Santos, *Dependencia y Cambio Social* (Santiago, Chile: Cuadernos de Estudios Socio Económicos, Universidad de Chile, 1970).

<sup>135</sup> The artists participating in the exhibition “Cuba-Chile” which took place in July, 1971 at the Instituto de Arte Latinoamericano at Casa de las Américas in La Habana, Cuba, were in graphics (Chile): Juan Bernal Ponce (1938-2006), Eduardo Bonati, Valentina Cruz, Delia del Carril (1885-1989), Dino Di Rosa, Julio Escamez (1925), Eduardo Garreaud (1942), Patricia Israel (1939), Alberto Pérez, Nelson Leiva (1938), Aníbal Ortiz Pozo, and José Venturelli. Cuban graphics were represented by: Félix Beltrán, Pedro De Oráa, Mario Gallardo, Raúl Milián, Raúl Santos Serpa, and Antonio Vidal. In painting, the Chilean representation consisted of works by José Balmes, Gracia Barrios, Roser Bru, Ricardo Irarrázabal, Carmen Johnson, Elga Krebbs, Ilya Manes, Roberto Matta, José Moreno, Guillermo Núñez, Carlos Peters, Mario Toral, Ramón Vergara Grez, Iván Vial, and Eduardo Abela Alonso. Cuban painting was represented by René Ávila, Adigio Benítez, Alberto Carol, Salvador Corratgé, Fayad Jamis, Carmelo González, Ernesto González Puig, Manuel López Oliva, Raúl Martínez, Luis Martínez Pecho, René Portocarreño, Mariano Rodríguez, Juan Vázquez, and Lesbia Vent Dumois.

<sup>136</sup> Balmes’ two entries were titled “Vietnam Hurt (Moment VIII and IX),” while Barrios presented “America, I do not invoke your name in vain,” and Matta submitted “So that Liberty is not Transformed into a Statue.” The Cubans alluded to explicit revolutionary figures in titles as “Che” (Fayad Jamis) and “Qué viva Martí!,” or presented works that directly addressed North American interventions as in Félix Beltrán’s “Vietnamese Guerrilla-man.”

ideologically connect the two nations in a similar anti-imperialist struggle while creating an interchange of ideas and traveling exhibitions.<sup>137</sup> The latter had a particular effect on Chilean painters such as Balmes and the development of propagandistic mural painting, which adopted the Cuban graphic-inspired flat areas of color and use of simplified symbols.<sup>138</sup> The success of this collaborative project among nations and the link it forged between art and politics, not only led the organizers to expand this experience to a larger international arena, but it also led to the definition of a new form of visual opposition and political commitment, as was manifested in the document entitled “Declaration of La Habana” produced at the encounter.

The “Declaration” called for a meeting this time of all Latin American artists and the creation of a novel art that expressed the necessities of the “people,” liberating it from the clutch of the bourgeoisie and capitalistic, neo-colonial interests. As Rojas Mix explained in the catalogue of the first encounter, America had for long forsaken its own identity, as its cultural realm was dominated by a bourgeoisie that preferred the imitation of European art and was satisfied with “good reproductions” rather than with the production of what they had considered to be only “bad originals.”<sup>139</sup> The liberation from this situation of cultural dependency espoused by the “Declaration” and Rojas Mix could be brought forth through the artists’ investigation of their surrounding realities and the creation of unique American values, an action that would inevitably reconnect the artists to their people and reinforce their responsibility as creators of a new consciousness.

In the 1972 “Encounter of Plastic Artists” which took place during May in Chile, the plan of solidarity and common struggle stipulated during the “Chile-Cuba Encounter” went beyond the mere inclusion of more nations in the exhibition roster.<sup>140</sup> The show was accompanied by the creation of commissions that discussed several topics of concern to all Latin American nations, ranging from the ideological meaning of art, the current situation of Latin American art, the relation between art and the mass media, art and popular forms of creation, as well as the layout of a common cultural strategy.

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<sup>137</sup> A more extensive exhibition of Cuban painting and posters was organized by the IAL in 1972, featuring Cuban modernist painters and works from the 1920s onwards. In the texts that accompanied the show, both Adelaida de Juan and Rojas Mix argued that within the Cuban painting tradition, “posters” and “billboards” (vallas) occupied a prominent position in the present. See Adelaida de Juan and Miguel A. Rojas Mix, *Dos Ensayos sobre Plástica Cubana* (Santiago: Cuadernos de Arte Latino Americano, Editorial Andrés Bello, 1972).

<sup>138</sup> Balmes directly participated in the production of murals of the “Brigada Ramona Parra” in the 1970s, having previously produced several posters relating to Allende’s presidential campaign. The appropriation made by Cuban artists of Pop art’s strategies of flatness and repetition taken from a capitalist, commercial society, and their reuse in order to convey a communist message was manifested in the graphic-inspired mural paintings made in Chile between 1971-1973, where earlier illusionistic modes of representation were rapidly avoided. In this sense, the development of socialist murals in the early 1970s was less a product of Orozco’s social realist example than the mechanical-looking surfaces of Cuban graphic arts.

<sup>139</sup> Miguel Rojas Mix, “Chile,” in Adelaida de Juan and Miguel Rojas Mix, *Encuentro Chile Cuba* (Santiago: Editorial Andrés Bello, 1973), 17.

<sup>140</sup> The “Encounter of Latin American Plastic Arts” in May, 1972, counted with the participation of artists from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Chile, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico, Uruguay, and Venezuela.



Each of the panels conformed by artists from diverse nations wrote reports on their topics and the actions to be followed. In them, they stressed the need for artists to participate in the revolutionary process by working collectively and in tandem with socially oppressed groups. These efforts should be joined to the occupation of previously neglected cultural areas dominated by imperialism, such as the media and its technological advances. The role of artists as social actors was emphasized in each panel while the “authenticity” of the new Latin American art and its legitimacy were associated with the revolution against capitalism and dependency. Avant-garde novelty was joined not only with formal qualities (the 1971 Declaration had explicitly marked the new as “uncompromised” if sought for its own sake), but to the expression of an identity which was defined in opposition to foreign, imperialist forms of representation. The artistic vanguard was thus defined as anti-imperialist but also as composed by those who “defy the conceptual limits of the governing culture.”<sup>141</sup>

In this sense, it might be argued that the revolution in Latin American arts promoted in the encounters would not come through forms but rather by means of its social content, and furthermore that its “identity” was still tied to its opponent external influences. Dependency was inverted, but not fully unsettled. Yet it is interesting to note that for the first time Chilean artists and the public were exposed to the contemporary artistic vanguards of the Americas. Artists coming from a variety of genres from painting (the Argentinean New Figuration was represented by Luis Felipe Noé, and Ernesto Deira, while social protest was exemplified in Antonio Berni) to Conceptual installations (exemplified by Grippo, León Ferrari, Eduardo Costa) mingled with renowned Chilean artists and a new generation of younger artists and students from the University of Chile in particular.

The historical avant-garde’s violence against art and its institutions, and the problem it posed to traditional artistic limits, was thus redirected into the politization of art which would be manifested both in a critical stance during the process of creation itself and in direct militancy. As the Argentinean painter Luis Felipe Noé stated in a catalogue accompanying a 1973 exhibition at IAL: “The revolution does not occur in art, art is not going to make the revolution. Art is the revolution when the revolution is art and the revolution is art when art is revolution.”<sup>142</sup> The concepts of artistic avant-garde and political vanguard were closing its ties in textual discourse and in practice, becoming mirrors of one another. Not content with just re-presenting social injustice in works of art as had been the staple of the previous generation, whether it be in the form of informal brutal gestures as in Grupo Signo or the Cuban graphic tradition, the “new” avant-garde spirit which was taking form during the encounters was attempting to literally join art and

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<sup>141</sup> “Significación ideológica del Arte,” in *Dos Encuentros: 1. De artistas del Cono Sur, Santiago, Chile, 1972, 2. De plástica Latinoamericana. La Habana, Cuba, 1972* (Santiago: Cuadernos de Arte Latinoamericano, Editorial Andrés Bello, 1973), 8.

<sup>142</sup> Luis Felipe Noé, “El arte de América Latina es la Revolución,” in exhibition catalogue *El arte de América Latina es la Revolución* (Santiago: Cuadernos de Arte Latino Americano, Editorial Andrés Bello, 1973), 32. Noé continued: “Latin American art will be all that which tends to forms us as a people. Colonial art is all that testifies that we have been formed as a people.” Noé, 33.

life in a political battle carried out in the everyday world.<sup>143</sup> And in the Chilean art scene, this meant updating itself through a political path.

The stress placed by Allende's government on Latin American identity, solidarity, and collaboration was thus coming to fruition on a large cultural scale. While the IAL assumed a strategic role in the development of the actions proposed by the encounters, coordinating its future exhibitions and publications, the Art School of University of Chile which supported it institutionally was extremely politicized at the time and followed Allende's overall plan of "social mobilization."<sup>144</sup> Under the direction of Balmes, the school was the center of artistic experimentation and social commitment in Chile, with teachers and students involved more and more in politics and direct forms of action on society.

It was in this politicized context that Carlos Leppe entered the School of Fine Arts of Universidad de Chile in 1971 and began producing objects and installations.<sup>145</sup> I have delved for long on the emergence of objecthood and a precarious form of installation art in Chile, as well as the opening of the national art scene to other Latin American examples, for two reasons. On one hand, when Carlos Leppe first began exhibiting, the language of criticism was unable to deal with the form of objectuality he proposed except through a reading of his objects as "Pop" art and a form of neo-dada. Conceptual art as a category and a full fleshed artistic practice was still something far way in the theoretical horizon of critics like Romera and even Rojas Mix, the updating of Chilean art being thought as attainable through a political path in the latter's case rather than a strictly formal one as in the former.

In this context, it has usually been argued by Chilean art historians that the break produced by the dictatorship in 1973 fractured the continuity of these earlier "humanist" and political experimentations with sculpture and objecthood, while undoing the socialist experiment in society at large. This break would have created an artistic and categorical vacuum of sorts, disrupting the artistic traditions and revolutionary aims forged so far, creating a ground zero of representation that would be reorganized by the dictatorship and contested by a new artistic vanguard in which Leppe and Eugenio Dittborn feature prominently. By positioning this new 'avant-garde' scene as an unprecedented conceptual movement that emerged after the coup, this discourse creates a conceptual 'tabula rasa' as well, which has allowed it to reproduce itself as the historical and artistic canon in

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<sup>143</sup> The similarity between what was being advocated in the encounters and the Argentinean politization of art during the sixties is notable. For a description of the relationship forged between art and political vanguard in Argentina, see Ana María Longi, "Vanguardia y Revolución," in *Arte y Política* (Santiago de Chile: Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2005), 116-125.

<sup>144</sup> Among the immediate effects the encounters had on Chilean art was the continuation of the expansion towards other Latin American avant-garde movements, exemplified in the IAL exhibition of the Argentinean painter Luis Felipe Noé, titled "El arte de América Latina es la revolución." In a self-interview within the accompanying catalogue, Noé reaffirmed the status of the Latin American artist as conditioned by dependency while pointing to a revolutionary process as the only way out, a revolution that was cultural and social. In the arts this meant differentiating a Latin American production from international art forms that gave itself its own name and forms, as a way of stepping out of the colonial situation.

<sup>145</sup> Leppe had left for Europe in 1968, at age sixteen.

Chile.<sup>146</sup> Yet even though the violence introduced by the military regime did cut short evident political manifestations and disjointed the artistic scene as it had been organized by the University of Chile, there were veins that continued developing in a more horizontal manner which had roots in the past. As will be argued in the following chapters, the works of Leppe, Dittborn, Parra, Altamirano and others usually gathered under the term “escena de avanzada” pointed to another narrative in Chilean art that is fraught with tensions between traditions, as well as continuities and innovations, a path that engaged the body and its location as a contested site of identity.

On the other hand, the pan-American project developed during Allende’s government has also been thought by Chilean art historians as completely broken after the coup. Yet the consequences of this break in terms of the insularity and self-referentiality within the local art scene and in the conceptual trends it developed in the late 1970s, as well as its relation to the national retirement into its own borders, have not been sufficiently explored. If the coup dismantled a certain identification of art and the nation with radical revolutionary politics, this was also a localized action that took specific forms and developed through particularized imagery and discourses. It is the exploration of these images, discourses, and the field they composed that will be explored in the next chapters, my interest being centered on the ways the body and the national territory emerged as particular sites of contention in terms of the definition of a new identity, and how artists positioned themselves within this field, contributing to its creation. In this sense, the project of searching for an identity which during Allende’s years in power was tied to Latin America was not eliminated but inverted into an inward quest. Identity was a continuing current in Chilean art that took a different form as the social context transformed, one that was tied to the body and its location in space.

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<sup>146</sup> Only two discourses have attempted to counter what is in large manner Nelly Richard’s creation. Already in 1983 Justo Pastor Mellado began countering the epic discourse of the “avanzada,” questioning its preeminence, a path he has pursued to this day. In the 2000’s, the philosopher Willy Thayer has argued for the inoperance of the “avanzada” as an innovative artistic experiment, siding its effects with those of the dictatorship. For Willy Thayer’s response to Nelly Richard’s defense of the novelty and political efficacy of the avanzada, see “Crítica, nihilismo e interrupción. El porvenir *Avanzada* después de *Márgenes e Instituciones*,” in *Arte y Política*, 47-62.

## Chapter 2. Absurd Objects: Carlos Leppe and Art for Chickens

Carlos Leppe's 1974 "Happening de las gallinas" (Happening of the Chickens) has been constantly used in art historical accounts dealing with this period as a first antecedent of the new art developing in Chile after the military coup. Made only one year after the demise of Allende's socialist government, and seemingly installing a new artistic practice in the Chilean scene, Leppe's performance underscored a changed political ambience that was rapidly turning inwards. While the dictatorship began closing down borders, limiting social interactions, and detaining all opponents, making of the defense of the fatherland from foreign contamination a primary goal, Leppe mourned a nostalgic feminized home to which there was no return. The ambiguously gendered bodies and landscapes that the artist began articulating through performances, objects, and photographs spoke of an altered social body, alluding to a broken, maternal source which rang a political note. Against the increasingly patriarchal models set up by the dictatorship, Leppe imagined a space of ambiguity, confusion, and contamination experienced by gendered bodies. As the title of his 1974 'happening' suggested, his was a work with roots in other parts, and if there was an "original" element in Leppe's early works, it was his questioning of primordial essences and lack of origin-ality.

### 2.1. Carlos Leppe's Kitsch Objects

Leppe's works during his initial student period in 1971 were heterogeneous, even though they centered on the production of objects.<sup>147</sup> His earliest known works are clay sculptures, stout terracotta female figures painted in rose colors and silver, sometimes adorned with feathers.<sup>148</sup> The exuberance of the female forms and their broken quality alluded to archeological remains, resembling small fertility idols with Paleolithic references. Yet the strident pink and metallic colors introduced an element of fleshiness and artificiality that contradicted the objects' excavated and handmade appearance. If it was life and fertility that these maternal female statuettes invoked with their roundness, the industrial paint splashed upon their rough surfaces suggested another temporality, one

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<sup>147</sup> The only art critic and historian who has noted the importance of Leppe's work prior to 1974, and its relationship to printing, is Justo Pastor Mellado. Writing in 1998, in the framework of a "comeback" exhibition of Leppe's paintings after nearly ten years of artistic absence, Mellado mentioned in relation to the role of graphics as countering the Chilean pictorial tradition, that "Leppe is one of the makers of the surrealist object. I am talking [of the time] before 1973. From there he passed to corporal actions and to installations and spatial interventions." See Justo Pastor Mellado, "Cartas," in *Cegado por el oro*, exhibition catalogue (Santiago, Chile: Galería Animal, 1998), 73.

<sup>148</sup> The terracotta objects bore a material resemblance to those exhibited in the 1971 exhibition "La imagen del hombre" (The Image of Man), particularly in their material rejoicement and run-down appearance. The female-shaped sculptures were made in tandem with acrylic cages encasing pieces of wood and representations of clouds or other symbolic elements of the landscape, such as stones. These works will be addressed in the following sections.

of technical advances that countered artisanal modes of production. The allusion to the past and its crossing with the present created an archaic, slightly outdated aura surrounding the objects that Leppe continued to explore in his next series of sculptures.

In the first months of 1973, shortly after the production of the broken terracotta female figures, Leppe made a series of small wooden coffins with drawers. As if meant to contain the dead and ruined clay bodies, the coffins were empty, their rectangular openings ready to receive their human contents. The small scale of these objects nevertheless dislocated their ominous aspect, hinting at their difficulty in housing actual human bodies unless they were minute ones. The introduction of infancy in terms of scale made the coffins' size comical and yet disturbing, giving them an absurd and uncanny appearance. Furthermore, the scale related the coffins to toys and childhood, invoking the realm of memory and the past.

Through the incorporation of drawers, Leppe's coffins made an explicit reference to everyday pieces of furniture found in a domestic setting, such as wardrobes, joining the funerary to the home. As containers, coffins are a primary form of utilitarian furniture, insofar as they stack away bodies while preserving them from their surroundings in a temporary manner. Through their forms and function, coffins could also be connected to the reliquary as a form of preservation, preserving in the latter case parts of a sacrosanct body no longer present.<sup>149</sup> Leppe's objects had an aura of sacredness, as if his boxes contained the fragmented remains of a holy body from whose parts beneficent powers are believed to emanate. The corporal fragments that make up the relic could further be read as acting like the surrogates of a whole entity, bringing them closer to the realm of the fetish.<sup>150</sup> As a substitute and an artifice, the fetish object's materiality stands in for a unified body that is absent in the present, bringing together in a displaced form of embodiment the presence and power of another object or force.

More than its funerary character, it was the artificial nature and overwhelming materiality of the objects that Leppe presented in his 1973 exhibition that the art critic

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<sup>149</sup> Two years later, in April, 1975, Leppe presented at the gallery of Carmen Waugh in Santiago the sculpture "Armario" (Wardrobe), a large wooden and glass case containing old objects. The work was part of a collective show that presented the works of artists who had received a prize in 1974. Leppe was included for having won the competition "El Sol," connected to the creation of an illustrated calendar. His entry then had been an ornate and colorful polyester shoe mimicking the French baroque style. From the tip of the shoe a painted toenail emerged, accentuating the fetishized character of the image. Interestingly, Eugenio Dittborn also participated in the contest, winning the third prize. I will refer to his work in the third chapter. For a review of "Wardrobe" see Antonio R. Romera, "Crítica de arte: trece artistas premiados," *El Mercurio*, April 20, 1975.

<sup>150</sup> I use William Pietz' characterization of the common themes surrounding the fetish object that can be found in the varied discourses which employ it, from psychoanalysis to Marxist economic theory, because it opens up the readings of the fetish beyond a "phallic" replacement and, more importantly, focuses on broader functions and *embodied*, material relations. According to Pietz "Four themes consistently inform the idea of the fetish: (1) the untranscended materiality of the fetish: 'Matter,' or the material object, is viewed as the locus of religious activity or psychic investment; (2) the radical historicity of the fetish's origin: rising in a singular event fixing together otherwise heterogeneous elements, the identity and power of the fetish consists of fixation, along with the resultant effect; (3) the dependence of the fetish for its meaning and value on a particular order of social relations, which it in turn reinforces; and (4) the active relation of the fetish object to the living body of an individual: a kind of external controlling organ directed by powers outside the affected person's will, the fetish represents the subversion of the ideal of the autonomously determined self." In William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," *Res* 9 (Spring 1985): 5.

Antonio Romera disliked when he reviewed the show and described the artist as a descendant of Dada. According to Romera, the ‘absurdity’ of Leppe’s objects was joined to a kitsch character that associated the works with a form of “neo-Dada.”<sup>151</sup> Mentioning the excess and artifice of the Baroque, Romera emphasized the bad taste manifested in Leppe’s objects, and connected them to Pop Art’s popular imagery. Against the elitist taste of the bourgeoisie and upper classes, Dada’s postwar successor Pop art appealed to the absurd and the everyday by using ordinary middle-class images from consumer culture, substituting mass-produced objects for the pure formal qualities of art, thus attacking what according to Romera “have traditionally been the plastic arts.”<sup>152</sup>

For Romera, even when Leppe was dealing with the subject of death, his objects were charged with “mockery” and a disdain of good taste, as exemplified by the work “De la guerra del 39” (Of the War in 39). The sculpture was composed of two small black boxes connected through opened drawers. These coffin-like structures were joined at the sides through open drawers reaching out toward each other, as if they were two arms extended to touch one another in death.<sup>153</sup> Like ghosts of people, the inanimate objects seemed animated, displayed in a slightly anthropomorphic form while suggesting a human action involving touch. According to Romera, there was a sense of irony in the objects which emerged, not so much from their absence of common sense but through the ridicule made of artistic conventions.<sup>154</sup> By undoing art’s authority and tradition through the presentation of disparate everyday elements in absurd juxtapositions, Leppe’s “collages” were an attack on both beauty and the modern tradition of aesthetic purity.<sup>155</sup> As Leppe’s works navigated between the frontiers of objecthood and sculpture, incorporating the world’s materiality, Romera concluded that “painting (in the case that we accept this as painting) is no longer a gratuitous play of forms, like in the abstracts, and is even less the apprehension of beauty, as in academic artists, [and] not even an anti-museum [form of] art, but the ridiculing and the rejection of beauty and pure visuality.”<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Antonio Romera, *El Mercurio*, October 28, 1973. While Romera did not explain who or what he defined as neo-Dada, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg are the most evident examples in their collapse of high and low culture and the incorporation of the object into the realms of painting and sculpture.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> 1939 was the year of the arrival of Spanish refugees to Chile, among whom were the painters José Balmes and Roser Bru who had traveled in the ship Winnipeg, escaping from General Franco’s regime; 1939 also marked the beginning of the Second World War. But the date and its ambiguous reference, “the 39 war,” could also refer to Chilean history and the war between the Chilean nation and the Peruvian-Bolivian Confederation between 1837-1839 which ended with the Battle of Yungay and the defeat of Peruvian army in January 1839. The year therefore retained a double meaning: alluding to memory both close and distant, to the local and the international, to a situation of emergency, to the arrival as children of two of the prominent painters who revitalized the academy, as well as to the configuration of Chile’s modern territory and its calculated expansion.

<sup>154</sup> According to Romera Leppe’s “kitsch” works were attempting “to destroy a myth, the myth of art.” Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. Romera identification of Leppe’s objects as somehow still belonging to painting is problematic and he seems to have sensed this contradiction as he called them alternatively paintings, collages, sculptures,

The limits of painting, the preferred medium of a modernist artistic tradition and in Chile the only medium upon which a history of art could be written, were no longer clearly defined in the objects Leppe presented, modern purity tarnished by their in-betweenness and confusion of aesthetic categories. Romera was not too far from Michael Fried's own characterization of Minimalist sculpture in the 1960s, insofar the Minimalist object had inserted an alien component of literality, and therefore of theatricality, in the self-referent fabric of modern art.<sup>157</sup> In their direct relationship to physical reality, both Minimalist sculptures and Leppe's objects invoked the tangibility of life itself rather than its representation or negation, though in radically different ways. While the Minimalist object as defined by Donald Judd continued in a slightly altered, three-dimensional form the purity sought by modernist painting, only this time involving the spectator in an extended time-space relation, Leppe's objects came closer to what Fried identified as a "Surrealist sensibility" in literalist forms of art.<sup>158</sup> This closeness to Surrealism was manifested in the way Leppe's objects joined diverse realities in a tactile and strange manner as well as the anthropomorphic form they took.

While Romera recognized that the anthropomorphism of Leppe's objects was joined to an ironical and even scatological sense of humor, he failed to see the more sinister implications of this act.<sup>159</sup> As they combined the human and the nonhuman, the animate and the inanimate, the coffins evoked the uncanniness of Surrealism, a joining of the familiar and the strange that in Leppe's case brought the impulses of life in relation with death.<sup>160</sup> "La manda de mama Benita" (The Offer of Mother Benita), was an old

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and objects. This ambiguity was tied to Romera's need to explain to his bourgeois readers of *El Mercurio* the development of modern art and the contemporary presence of anti-aesthetic looking objects that denied any straight-forward categorization, as Leppe and Langlois' sculptures did. For Romera the tradition of rupture that propelled the development of modern art was exclusively pictorial, joining Manet to Cézanne and the latter to Malevich, and it was only through painting that an artist could access the realm of art (and Romera's own critical purview). This modern impulse of breaks had been finally brought to a close with the Dadaist ready-made, as exemplified by Man Ray's *Cadeaux*, a destructive impulse that was being finished in the neo-Dadaist object. Interestingly, Romera mentioned Duchamp in passing as a painter (his moment of artistic rupture being his "Nude Descending a Staircase"), rather than as the artist most closely associated to the ready-made.

<sup>157</sup> Fried nevertheless was more concerned with the inclusion of the spectator into the work that Minimal sculpture proposed, as opposed to the closure of modernist works. See Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood," in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968), 116-147; originally published in *Artforum*, no. 5 (June 1967): 12-23.

<sup>158</sup> Fried, 130.

<sup>159</sup> According to Renato Yrarrázabal, who reviewed one of Leppe's early exhibitions, Leppe was portraying a variety of poetic states of death in small doses, what Leppe would call "the poetic dosification of death" ("Dosificar la muerte poéticamente"). In Renato Yrarrázabal, "Carlos Leppe: el mundo de los objetos," *El Mercurio*, 26 de octubre 1975.

<sup>160</sup> The presence of Surrealism in Chile was a recent event. Even though Roberto Matta fell under this category, he developed his work mainly outside of Chile, in New York and Paris, and only occasionally visited and exhibited in his motherland. Matta's direct influence could be seen in a Surrealist form of abstraction in painting that developed under Nemesio Antúnez and Ricardo Irarrázabal, among others. But this was a local form of Surrealism based on dream-like images with a native imaginary, such as the presence of mountains (which has led several critics to call the movement "telluric"). It was only in the

black stroller in which a doll rested with a flower wreath on its head, the title of the work alluding to the transactions or “offers” made by Catholic believers to a saint asking for a favor in exchange of a sacrificial act. Whether the doll was merely a child’s toy dressed as a “little angel” (an “angelito,” dead children dressed in their best clothes and posed as if sleeping or covered with garlands when they were mourned), or a symbolic offering and sacrifice, it equally turned the everyday objects into a sinister image of the ordinary. Performing the surrealist strange juxtapositions of found objects, a coupling of disparate realities that might unsettle their apparent identity and fixed meaning, Leppe’s objects also acted as psychic signifiers pointing to an unconscious dimension, one charged with images of mourning, the past, and the feminine in particular.<sup>161</sup>

The mixture of the absurd and the macabre in the coffins and related funeral objects recalls the “unheimlich” of Freud, that which is most familiar and yet is alien to the subject.<sup>162</sup> The “unheimlich” further alludes to the return of the repressed, the presence of otherness within the everyday, the strangeness of death and old objects becoming ciphers of a gone past in Leppe’s case. By formulating a de-familiarization of the quotidian, Leppe’s miniature objects fused images of infancy and death with an ambience of old-fashioned familiarity related to a female world. In “Collage” (fig. 2.1) for example,<sup>163</sup> a severe-looking women’s long white dress with buttons in the torso and embroidery closing off the neck and cuffs was presented hanging from a coat hanger in front of a series of candelabra with lit candles of different sizes. As if it were a makeshift altarpiece where the emptied out dress stood for a symbolic absent body, this still-life with burning candles created an ambience of mourning and loss close to a ‘vanitas’ painting. Yet in this case the remembrance of the past and the reference to the transience of life was associated with the collection of old objects, somewhat out of fashion as the dress attested to, and reminiscent of an older female generation. Whether they were boxes, humanized coffins, wardrobes, or reliquaries, the objects invoked a domestic,

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early 1970s that a more pronounced and directed interest in the international Surrealist movement took place in Chile, a result that can be attributed to the efforts of Antúnez and his institutional authority as director of the Museum of Fine Arts between 1969 and 1973. Such efforts could be seen in the 1972 exhibition of Surrealism that took place in the museum, following the June 1968 exhibition titled “Surrealismo, Homenaje a Magritte” (Surrealism, Homage to Magritte). In 1970 Antúnez participated in the exhibition “Surrealismo en Chile: Exposición de obras de surrealistas chilenos” (Surrealism in Chile: Exhibition of works by Chilean Surrealists), between July 3 and 22 at Universidad Católica and his paintings followed Surrealistic traits, including figurative dream-like scenes. Antúnez centered his endeavors as the museum’s director from 1970 onwards to bring what he considered “new” and “young” art to Chile, such as the work of Cecilia Vicuña discussed above.

<sup>161</sup> In his review of the 1975 group exhibition at Carmen Waugh Gallery and speaking of Leppe’s *Wardrobe*, Romera emphasized the “funeral” quality of Leppe’s work and the aura of the past, of the “outmoded” that it evoked: “Leppe brings us the mystery of disappeared hours through the presence of objects that are no longer valid. Nothing seems to grow older than the small and insignificant things that formed the surroundings of disappeared beings. Everything that Leppe touches seems to acquire a funeral air.” In Romera, “Crítica de Arte: trece artistas premiados.”

<sup>162</sup> Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* 17, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogart Press, 1953), 220.

<sup>163</sup> A reproduction of the work can be found in the article by Antonio Romera, “Carlos Francisco Leppe: “collages” esculturas,” *El Mercurio*, October 28, 1973.



intimate environment, a world of memories evoked through no longer useful objects placed together like enigmatic ruins.

A relationship to the past was established in Leppe's 1973 exhibition through the summation and preservation of things that might aid memory, but which at the same time are stripped of their earlier private context, denying their specificity and history. The absence of a precise origin and the impossibility to reconstruct an anterior presence or wholeness returned in the sculpture "Armario" (Wardrobe) of 1974, where multiple objects referring to a middle-class world were stocked within a glass and wooden piece of furniture. The accumulation of everyday memorabilia, mainly printed reproductions such as religious prints with liturgical texts placed along pieces of cloth, an old ragged doll, a woman's purse, a sacred heart, and outdated coins, was marked by nostalgia, evocative of old-fashioned domesticity and a female environment whose specific source was uncertain.<sup>164</sup> If these objects were absurd and their juxtaposition strange, it was less an effect of their radical difference than their belonging to an irretrievable past whose reconstruction in the present was only possible through its fragments.

The objects' funeral imagery could be tied to Svetlana Boym's description of modern nostalgia as "mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values."<sup>165</sup> Hermetic and silent, Leppe's coffins, cribs, and wardrobes attested as muted ruins to the presence of loss and death within the domestic sphere, the disappearance not only of the bodies that gave life and meaning to those objects but the dawn of the world that made them possible. Leppe described his 1973-1974 works as "objects *without kingdom* that vindicate themselves through accumulation,"<sup>166</sup> suggesting the objects' impotence in restoring that lost time and place, their inability to reconstruct the "clear borders" of a primeval domain, offering instead saturation and repetition as a substitute. If the space itself could not be recovered and if the distance separating the subject from it was temporal as well as physical, the emptiness left would be filled *ad nauseum* with remains from that past. A *horror vacui* invaded Leppe's 1974 objects, an excessive presence of things and surrogate bodies whose very physicality attested to an underlying absence they were trying to cover up.

Nostalgia as a form of mourning the loss of an imaginary place, as a manifestation of "homesickness," turned Leppe's bourgeois interior artifacts into both scars and precarious monuments of that past. Instead of promulgating a 'new' art, Leppe's useless items of a forgotten interior stood in opposition to the combative and epic works of the avant-garde that had been supported by the IAL or the Art School of the University of Chile where everyday, "low" forms of mass culture were valued for their ideological connotations and popular appeal. Yet if in October 1973 Leppe's objects were characterized by an ironical stance and their Surrealist mode of production, invoking an antiquarian shop filled with bric-a-brac or, as Romera put it, evoking the "Marché-aux-

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<sup>164</sup> The question of origins and its relation to a female reference will be addressed in the following chapters as a fixation with the mother that was expanded in Leppe's works of the late 1970s.

<sup>165</sup> In Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 8. I am interested in the idea of a return to a mythical location that offers stability for the nostalgic subject, a place where an (idealized) identity is purportedly to be found.

<sup>166</sup> In Renato Yrarrázabal, "Carlos Leppe: el mundo de los objetos." My emphasis.

puces rather than an object that has been manipulated by the artist,”<sup>167</sup> by March 1975 when *Wardrobe* was presented at Carmen Waugh Gallery, a more somber connotation was attached to them. Between Leppe’s 1973 and 1975 exhibitions of objects, a right-wing driven military coup overthrew Salvador Allende’s government. A military junta was installed as well as an indefinitely prolonged state of siege that curtailed the project of creating radically new political and aesthetic forms in Chile as well as a return to any form of the past. Leppe’s nostalgic “homesickness” was inadvertently transformed into “homelessness” as the new government rapidly began a process of ‘cleansing’ and reconstruction of the nation.

## 2.2. Art of the Chickens

The military coup that took place in Chile on September 11, 1973, had immediate consequences for social life in the nation. The dissolution of congress and the constitutional tribunal was followed by the implementation of curfews, restrictions to people’s rights to gather and wander through the city after 12 P.M., and censorship of the press. The dissolution of all political parties of the left or associated with Marxism, as well as the surprise arrests of any person associated with leftist political tendencies, and unofficial searches in homes, were among the policies immediately implanted by the military junta to suppress contending forces and keep the population under control.<sup>168</sup> Originally composed of four generals, Gustavo Leigh (Air Force), Augusto Pinochet (Army), José Toribio Merino (Navy), and César Mendoza (uniformed police forces), the junta declared that it was its mission to “eradicate Marxism” from the nation. While the military intervention had at first been proclaimed as “temporary” and assured that a democratic government would be re-installed, the Junta soon manifested its ‘foundational’ intentions through a longer plan of reconstruction for the nation.<sup>169</sup>

In the artistic and cultural realm, the military began dismantling the university system, particularly the areas considered subversive and sympathetic towards socialism. In the University of Chile classes were suspended and “purges” of faculty, students, and curriculums were exerted by the military, while civilians favorable to the junta government and members of the military itself were appointed as deans and professors. Balmes would go to exile, beginning an exodus of artists that continued well into the 1980s. The artistic circuit was also decimated. During 1973 alone, nine galleries closed

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<sup>167</sup> Romera, “Crítica de Arte: trece artistas premiados.”

<sup>168</sup> Decree Law No. 77 issued in 1973 by the junta prohibited left-wing parties.

<sup>169</sup> As has been noted by Patricio Quiroga Z., the coup had been “instigated by the right and the ultra-nationalist, not to overcome a grey and sour, unhappy occasion, but to eradicate the presence of the left in the political system and neutralize the DC [Christian Democracy party].” According to Quiroga, this situation led to the immediate conception of the coup as a “foundational moment.” Quiroga quotes the right-wing newspaper *El Mercurio* from Monday September 16th, 1973, which argued in favor of the “foundational character of the intervention” (“carácter fundacional de la intervención”). See Patricio Quiroga Z., “De la Contrarrevolución a la Revolución Capitalista, 1973-1976,” in *Actual Marx Intervenciones*, no.1, *Desbandes y emergencias en la época del capitalismo mundial*, posted 2003, <http://netx.u-paris10.fr/actualmarx/quirog1.doc> (last accessed May 1, 2010).

their doors, followed by the termination of five more galleries the following year.<sup>170</sup> The Museum of Contemporary Art was shut down temporarily and several exhibitions at the Museum of Fine Arts were immediately cancelled, among them most notably a scheduled performance by the artist Francisco Copello (1938-2006).<sup>171</sup>

Titled “Madhouse” (*Pieza para Locos*), the piece was scheduled to be performed on September 12 and 13, 1973 (fig. 2.2).<sup>172</sup> The only records of the performance are photographs from the rehearsals that took place in August at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Chile where Leppe was still working as a student.<sup>173</sup> The performance

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<sup>170</sup> For a detailed description of the artistic circuit following 1973, see Ernesto Saul, *Artes Visuales. 20 Años, 1970-1990*, 142-145. Before the appearance of the Art Gallery of the University of Chile in 1954, which became the sole institutional space that constantly exhibited contemporary Chilean art, commercial galleries were practically nonexistent in Chile and usually developed as part of antiques or framing shops. The 1960s was a period of expansion in terms of commercial galleries, starting with Carmen Waugh’s example in 1955 and followed by the galleries of Marta Faz (1960), Galería El Patio (1965), Galería Central (1966), Sala Libertad (1966), Galería Fidel Angulo (1968), and C.A.L. (Centro de Arte Latinamericano) in 1971. This growth can be attributed or at least connected to the concomitant development and maturation of Chilean arts first spurred by the material abstraction of Grupo Signo and later by Balmes’ students.

<sup>171</sup> Francisco Copello was born in Chile to Italian immigrants. After studying art in Italy, Copello went to live to New York in 1967, working first at The Pratts Graphic Center and then developing his own printing workshop. Between 1970 and 1972 he was part of Robert Wilson’s workshop, Byrd Hoffman Foundation, otherwise known as Byrd Hoffman’s School of Byrds. Copello returned to Chile at the end of 1972, living for some months in his family country estate in Argentina and then moving back to Santiago where he received permission by Nemesio Antúnez, then director of the Fine Arts Museum, to make the piece. After the military coup, Copello travelled first to Brazil, invited to the XII Biennial of São Paulo and did not return to Chile until the late 1990s.

<sup>172</sup> Even though the performance at the Museum was cancelled, Copello had been at work since May in the production of a calendar for 1974, which included photographs taken by Luis Poirot in Santiago and the port city of Valparaíso. In the photographs, Copello and other Chilean collaborators imitate and mimic canonical Western paintings such as Cézanne’s *The Card Players*, or pose as characters and personas from popular entertainment and literature, from pimps and transvestite prostitutes to more heroic male characters. The calendar remained unfinished and was completed in New York with the help of the photographer Wren de Antonio. In this photographic collaboration, Copello’s work precedes that of Leppe who would begin working in 1975 with photographer Jaime Villaseca.

<sup>173</sup> A biographical and highly surreal account of the performance was written by Copello in his autobiographical book *Fotografía de Performance/Francisco Copello* (Santiago de Chile: Ocho Libros Editores, 2002), 58-60. Copello devotes a significant amount of writing in the same chapter to disparage Leppe, who he met as a student and who, according to Copello’s narrative, borrowed indefinitely Copello’s notebooks, ideas, an even his false eyelashes and dresses. Whether or not Leppe borrowed the objects remains an object of speculation, for Leppe has never referred to the episode, yet there are evident formal similarities in Leppe’s performances starting in 1974. I translate two paragraphs from the book because of their relation to Leppe’s soon to come work. “The art student Carlos Leppe, who from the moment he knew I was working in a performance, titled “Madhouse,” comes to the rehearsals, revealing the psyche of trickery. He solicits my notes, creative material about live art mixed with experiences of the surrounding Surrealism. He envelops me in his arachnid web, throws me parties, and praises my chauffeur and the Impala car that waits for me outside, always attentive to my desires. He even declares himself a decided fan of “Little Star of Delirium,” the queen of the transvestite world.” Copello, 64. About the ill-fated, Ingres-inspired dress that Leppe would have worn in *Hanger*: “[Nelly Richard] includes photographs of the artist Carlos Leppe in a destructive mimo-drama, using the countess’ dress I gave him as a gift, torn and bursting because of his obese corpulence.” Copello, 63.

was based on Goya's 1812 painting *The Madhouse* and the chaotic unfolding of Allende's socialist experiment. In part a response to the convulsed landscape offered by the riots, protests, and long waiting lines for rations of food in the capital, and in part a result of an euphoric feeling of revolution and social change that was clashing with national and external opposition, Copello's experiences in Chile during Allende's last days were the starting point for a collaborative and highly improvised project with dancers and actors. Each of the ten performers incarnated one lunatic from Goya's painting and starting from a congealed pose taken from the work, they improvised their movements relying on the construction of a character or a malady.<sup>174</sup> Goya's asylum was recreated through a series of disconnected actions by half-naked, bizarrely dressed and heavily made-up men and women in feathers, Roman togas, and motorcycle jackets, posing as kings, queens, and mendicants, moving slowly or standing still, drinking, attempting to declaim, going nowhere, with one of them carrying a reproduced image of Christ as a poster hanging from the neck.

The performance was composed of a series of *tableaux vivant* rather than a full-fledged narrative or sequence of events, creating a moving collage of disparate images. The animated collages conveyed an ambience of delirium, anxiety, and excess alluding to the troubled atmosphere of the nation. The incoherent narrative of the performance and the theme itself pointed to a confined, isolated space of personal fantasy and frenzied actions unrestrained by reason, a transposition of the social ills consuming Chilean politics and the claustrophobic, dead-end space where they thrived.

The importance of the piece is multifold since it establishes a problem of precedence between Copello's work and Leppe's within which the question of influence is included. For the differences between the two are more clearly manifested in terms of style. On one hand, Copello was directly influenced by Robert Wilson, on whose piece "Overture" he had participated in 1972 when it was rehearsed in New York.<sup>175</sup> Copello derived from Wilson the creation of pictorial, poetic images and the construction of a *tableaux vivant* with actors mutely and slowly performing incoherent actions, a pictorialism that would be absent from Leppe's more structured and conceptual narrative works.<sup>176</sup> Furthermore, the relation of each artist to their bodies also varied, as Copello focused on a more expressive, mime-like approach to conveying emotions and

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<sup>174</sup> The participants included Pía Barros (writer), María Celia (dancer), Sara Luna (dancer), Cristián Michelson (dancer), Vicky Larraín (dancer), Graciela Figueroa (an Uruguayan dancer who was in Chile dancing for the Municipal Ballet and Modern Ballet School of the University of Santiago since 1971), René Mancilla, Hugo Rodas, and Fernando Torm (composer and multimedia artist, had participated in *The Lives of Performers* in 1972). Graciela Figueroa and Vicky Larraín had participated in different performance works of Chilean artist Juan Downey in Washington D.C. and New York.

<sup>175</sup> For a description of Copello's participation in Wilson's troupe, see Copello, 48-51. Another possible reference could be Robert Rauschenberg's collaboration with Carolee Schneemann titled "Site" of 1965, in its pictorial references.

<sup>176</sup> In terms of method Wilson's influence was also manifest, as Copello allowed his performers great freedom in developing their participation and focused on the perceptions of their bodies' movements. For a description of Wilson's school, see Frantisek Deák, "The Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds," *The Drama Review: TDR* 18, no. 2, Rehearsal Procedures Issue and Berlin Dada (June 1974): 67-73. Dance was another important component in Copello's performances, as well as a ritualistic approach to the performance.

personalities, as can be seen in his 1974 *Calendar* photographs where he impersonated characters and reveled in their corporal expressiveness, while Leppe's body became a site of action and external aggression, often exerted by the surrounding installation's objects. Nevertheless, the operatic, musical element present in Copello's *Madhouse* performance, particularly in its elaborate costumes and eloquent poses, the melodramatic self-fashioning of the artist, as well as a relish for marginal types, outcasts and transgender personas, were themes and forms that Leppe would also incorporate into his performance work.

Leppe's knowledge of Copello's 1973 performance/rehearsal is important for the latter was the first theatrically-based action in a visual arts context that had been presented in Chile and it established one precedent, however aborted or ill-fated, for future performances.<sup>177</sup> Nevertheless, Copello's overall influence in the development of Performance art in Chile must be looked at in perspective, for the performance was only accessible to students at the University of Chile and was not presented in its finished form to a wider audience, receiving no comments in the press. Furthermore, Copello was known in Chile primarily through his graphic work rather than the performances he developed abroad,<sup>178</sup> and his absence from the local scene specially after the 1973 coup determined in great measure the lack of knowledge other Chilean artists had of his posterior work.<sup>179</sup> In this sense, when Leppe presented a year later the performance "Happening de las gallinas," not only the term "happening" seemed new to the local cultural scene, but he could claim an originality that was not disputed either by art criticism or later art historical narratives.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> This is of special importance in relation to a gender-based development of performance art that was particularly strong and pungent in the hands of homosexual artists such as Copello, Leppe, and the duo "Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis" (The Mares of the Apocalypse) formed by writer Pedro Lemebel and Francisco Casas during the last years of Pinochet's regime and the early 1990s. The other precedent would be the October, 1974 performance "Tentativa Artaud" directed by Ronald Kay, which will be commented in the next chapter. Enrique Lihn's performative poetic events from the 1960s and 1980s should also be noted.

<sup>178</sup> Copello's graphic work had been exhibited occasionally in Chile since 1968, mostly in the context of Biennials (such as the Graphic Biennial in Santiago, 1968, and the Valparaíso Biennial, in 1973), having his first solo show of prints in 1969 at the Chilean-North American Institute of Culture in Santiago.

<sup>179</sup> Copello's situation was not unique. While Copello's performances in Europe and the United States of America remained obscure until the late 1990s, Juan Downey's work would not be well known to the Chilean public in spite of his continuous engagement with the nation and participation in each video festival since 1981. The situation would change in 1987 when the Juan Downey Festival took place. In Downey's case, the video festival dedicated and named after him, *Video Porque TeVe*, was organized by a friend of the artist, the curator and art critic Justo Pastor Mellado, who has to this day worked to bring his videos into the fore. Copello's work has not suffered the same fate, and his own autobiographical book *Fotografías de una performance/Francisco Copello* attests to the artist's need to validate his own work through a form of historical writing. In this sense, it is important to note regarding these two examples that a strong system of alliances and animosities has governed the Chilean art scene since the 1970s, deeply affecting what gets seen, discussed, or even "recuperated" in recent art historical accounts.

<sup>180</sup> There is not a single art historical account of contemporary Chilean art that does not point to Leppe's 1974 "Happening de las Gallinas" as the beginning of Performance and Body Art in Chile, while at the same time obliterating Copello's work from their narratives.

In July 1974, Leppe's "Happening de las gallinas" (Happening of the Chickens) took place at the gallery of Carmen Waugh in Santiago (fig. 2.6).<sup>181</sup> Conceived by Leppe as a sculptural setting in which an action would take place, the invitation to the event was an envelope wrapped in a black ribbon, providing a funerary note to the exhibition's opening.<sup>182</sup> The setting for the happening consisted of a low square platform located near the entrance of the gallery, whose walls remained pristine white. On top of the platform stood a chair with no cover containing a wooden subdivision where an egg had been placed. Several black stands held identical white plaster casts of life-size chickens, one on each stand, the chickens facing in different directions. The floor of the gallery was strewn with dozens of plaster casts of chickens and eggs, some of them in groups and others standing alone.<sup>183</sup> At the back of the room and set against a wall stood a wooden wardrobe with a cello strapped on of its sides. One of the wardrobe's doors was ajar displaying three opened drawers that visually resembled steps leading to an altar-like shelf. The shelf presented old photographs, one corresponding to the artist as a child in the park, standing near his seated mother who, in her best Sunday clothes, smiled at the camera. Several plaster eggs stood near the photographs, while more eggs filled the opened drawers.

Dressed in his everyday clothes and with a scarf tied to his neck, Leppe entered the gallery and sat quietly on the chair in the platform where he placed a funeral garland of flowers on his neck. On top of a stand near the artist, a record was playing a continuous loop of the bolero "El día de mi madre" (The Day of my Mother), composed by the popular songwriter and singer Ramón Aguilera.<sup>184</sup> After remaining immobile and in silence for a long period, Leppe proceeded to rapidly eat some of the boiled eggs that had been part of the exhibition's cocktail, in order to attempt expelling them into the seat, as if giving birth to an egg himself and then dying in the process.

Unlike earlier action-based art works produced in Chile, in which the notion of process had been the guiding thread of the project and involved the participation of the artist and a few collaborators, as in Vicuña's earth project within the museum, the staging of the work and exhibition of the artist as an object to be viewed distinguished Leppe's happening from prior experiences. The novelty of the event was not only felt in the press

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<sup>181</sup> Leppe's installation and performance are documented in *Cuerpo Correccional, Chile Arte Actual* (pages 191-192), and the exhibition catalogue *Cegado por el oro*, among others. Among the galleries that had survived the coup was the gallery of Carmen Waugh, which had been open since 1965 and had a solid reputation exhibiting consecrated artists such as Antúnez and Balmes. During the 1960s Carmen Waugh also had a gallery in Argentina, an important nexus with new art across the frontier.

<sup>182</sup> "Exposiciones. El público, una escultura," *Revista Ercilla*, July 31, 1974.

<sup>183</sup> It is interesting to note that Allan Kaprow's "Chicken Happening" had been first staged in 1963. While the similarities among Kaprow's and Leppe's happenings are evident from their titles and the inclusion of chickens as part of the installation where they took place, in Kaprow's case, most of the chickens were alive (probably coming from George Segal's farm, who also participated in the event), with the exception of a gigantic chicken made out of wood, wire mesh, and paper. If Kaprow was a direct influence in Leppe's work, then the latter's happening reified and objectified the first. Kaprow's first happening had taken place in George Segal's farm in 1958, and had involved sitting in chickens' stalls.

<sup>184</sup> Known as the "king of the onion," a popular phrase alluding to kitsch cultural forms that provoke and allude to melodramatic emotions (thus making listeners or viewers cry), Aguilera's music pertained to "the popular song" movement in Chile pervasive from the 1940s onwards.

reviews that covered it, which characterized the “happening” as “unusual,” “strange,” and “polemic,” but in the relative involvement of the viewers as well. During the opening, the gallery was filled with spectators who began handling the plaster casts of chickens and eggs while Leppe remained seated. One of the viewers, Ana Helfant, a renowned art critic, threw one of the plaster chickens into a wall, starting off spectators into taking the plaster casts with them as they left the gallery.<sup>185</sup> Leppe’s desire to integrate the spectator into the work, to involve the viewer as a participant of an action, prompted the use of the term “happening” to define his performance,<sup>186</sup> even though there was little spontaneity in the event, which seemed instead more connected to the theater.<sup>187</sup> But if for Kaprow happenings had emerged out of painting, in Leppe’s case the action seemed dependent on theater and sculpture. If the installation was conceived as a stage, Leppe’s action consisted in standing within it as a sculpture, a living object to be observed and, unlike the eggs, visually consumed.<sup>188</sup> The notion of consumption was reinforced by the artist’s own devouring of the eggs and the public leaving the gallery with them, an involuntary ‘gift’ from the artist and a spontaneous gesture from the audience that destabilized proper art-visitor conduct.

The notion of overflowing boundaries was schematized in the installation itself. The funereal elements of the Happening were countered by the profusion of references to life and birth. From the garland of flowers called ‘always-alive,’ commonly used to decorate the tombs of the dead as symbolic of the continuity of memory and transience, passing to the overwhelming presence of identical cast eggs and chickens, the notion of ‘reproduction’ marked the installation.<sup>189</sup> The egg as a symbol of the cosmos, a sign of

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<sup>185</sup> Photographs of the happening and the actions of the viewers were taken and displayed as part of the exhibition one week later, corroborating the importance of the audiences’ participation as part of the work and providing documentation of the event.

<sup>186</sup> Leppe’s performance marked the first time in Chilean art that the word “happening” was used in the local scene. This was 1974, more than ten years after Allan Kaprow had popularized the term to describe the set of actions and environments he produced since 1959. The association that Kaprow made between ‘happenings’ and ‘action painting,’ particularly of happenings growing out of Pollock’s performativity into assemblages and then into environments, is not without importance in the discussion of its appearance in the Chilean art context. For it has been the primary argument sustaining Gaspar Galaz and Milan Ivelic’s work defending the primacy of painting as a source for experimental art in Chile. I position myself against this theory of “coming out of the frame,” since performance in Chile as I argue here evolved out of objecthood and sculpture, not painting. Furthermore, Kaprow’s texts became more readily available in the Chilean scene only in 1977, when a different set of artists published them. I will return to this point in the next chapter, when I refer to another model of performance available at the time.

<sup>187</sup> An unsigned review in the women’s magazine *Revista Paula* noted: “it was as if a voice had said “be free and act’.” In “Un happening fuera de serie,” *Revista Paula*, August 22, 1974, 31.

<sup>188</sup> Describing his happening as a theatrical setting and a place for participation, Leppe would comment at the time “I am part of the sculpture and the public who came to see it also is... the exhibition does not have titles or indications. I want people to feel themselves integrated into the work, to participate in it.” Leppe quoted in *Revista Ercilla*, “Exposiciones. El público, una escultura.”

<sup>189</sup> It is interesting to note that the painter Rodolfo Opazo, whom Leppe mentions as an important referent during his studies at the University, was making in the early 1970s oil paintings of white, ovoid shapes in surreal, highly schematized landscapes and architectural settings. See for example, Opazo’s 1973 catalogue *Rodolfo Opazo* (Bogotá: Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango del Banco de la República, 1973).

fertility, and in Christian iconography of life and resurrection, suggested the formation of a new existence. This idea was supported by the multiplied eggs and profusion of chickens, alluding to a “natural” form of reproduction. This multiplication was not only echoed in the bread served, oval in shape, as a Christian reminder of a body sacrificed to bring ‘new’ life, but also in the more monotonous repetition of shapes in the casts, which had been serially produced. The Christian symbolism embedded in the work resonated with the nation’s current political context. In March 11, 1974, the military junta announced its “Declaration of Principles” which established the government’s goals and main positions. In it the junta aligned itself with the “Western Christian civilization,” a relationship emphasizing the moral and spiritual (over the material) that became more pronounced in later years.<sup>190</sup>

The serial aspect of the installation also created a particular relation to the home as a template of identity. A series implies the existence of a matrix, a source of generation, and an origin. A matrix can be a mold, as in the casts, yet it also refers to a mother, a ‘mater.’ The placement of the eggs inside shelves, another form of containment and symbol of a womb, joined the domestic connotations of the furniture to the idea of a home as a form of origin and a ‘natural’ locus of inhabitation. The presence of the wardrobe, containing not only eggs but also private objects, such as photographs related to personal memory, further accentuated the reference to the domestic. The audio that played continuously a popular, tear-enticing song was thus not merely a kitsch element of popular entertainment but a sign of femininity and the domestic within Leppe’s installation. Referencing motherhood and procreation, the song also alluded to a nostalgic origin, which the objects inside the wardrobe confirmed.

The lyrics evoking feelings of longing suggested an irretrievable past and the loss of a desired object. By combining a domestic setting with a mourning action, Leppe’s “happening” suggested a state of homesickness based on a relationship of belonging, a desire to return to a location in the past, and a working out of grief. What exactly was being mourned was left unsaid, though implied through the objects. For if the ‘home’ can be connected to a ‘mother-land,’ to an original body or enclosure that embraces, contains, and re-produces life, and the wardrobe is a utilitarian object that safeguards and stores, the chickens and their ‘offspring’ expanded these associations to a female body as a site of reproduction and original identity. Nevertheless, the insistence of the generative sign, as manifested in the surplus of chickens and eggs, created a site of anxiety and claustrophobia regarding these origins and the mourning process.

While critics of Leppe’s work have usually analyzed “Happening de las gallinas” in relation to the artist’s later performances, emphasizing the exhibitionist qualities of the

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<sup>190</sup> This importance was reflected upon in later art works of Leppe and Dittborn, specially surrounding the image of the Virgin Mary. But while Marxism was read as “immoral,” the regime’s alignment with a sacred mission of Christianity was curiously doubled-edged. For only one month later, the junta placed Sergio de Castro as head of the Economic Ministry, a man who had been part of the Chicago School of Economics and would focus on the creation of a free market in the following years along with Jaime Guzmán Errázuriz. Milton Friedman would visit Chile repeatedly from 1975 onwards, advising the junta to implement a “shock treatment” to the economy, a plan that proved to have catastrophic effects during its first years. It is interesting to note that the coupling of a capitalistic economic model and a Western Christian ideology conflated the missionary project of economic progress with its historical Catholic counterpart, as if the history of colonialism in America was repeating itself under new guise.



work (Galaz, Ivelic) and the “mother function” (Richard) as connected to the ‘fecundity’ theme overriding the installation, the context in which the happening occurred has been left in the dark.<sup>191</sup> For chickens not only allude to procreative energies. In everyday speech, a chicken stands for timidity in conduct, fear, and cowardice. Unlike other animals that defend their young, chickens are associated with avoiding doing something out of fear.<sup>192</sup> Insofar as the ideas of fright, domesticity, and emotionality have been traditionally attached to femininity, they are opposed to ‘male’ action and public (exterior) being. Hiding behind the symbolic skirts of the mother, the interior or the home can become a place of refuge and isolation from public, and therefore political, activity. On June 17, 1974, the junta declared that all executive powers would rest from that moment onwards on its president, General Augusto Pinochet. He had literally become the father of the nation, and a castigating one as the March Declaration of Principles established that the armed forces and police under the regime’s directions would “vigorously exercise the principle of authority, and will severely punish any outbreak of undisciplined behavior or anarchy.”<sup>193</sup> The enshrinement of the chickens upon the podiums, suggesting fear and veneration, as well as maternal sacredness, endowed some of the casts with an aura of individuality that their abundance due to serial production materially denied. Reproduction involves anonymity, a lack of individuality, and the monotonous repetition of the same in which personal will is absent. If the puritanical whiteness and precarious molds of the chickens attested to the figures’ virtuousness and fragility, they simultaneously invoked a state of immobility and passivity suggestive of domestication and possibly fear.

It is interesting that the work’s allusion to a state of fear and a prompting to action was translated in the angry and euphoric reaction of some of the event’s participants who seemed to release their political energies in other ways. If not overtly political, Leppe’s “happening” installed an ambience of mourning and loss originating in a break with a primordial scene or home as a matrix of meaning. And this original place was gendered, as it involved a female characterization of the past longed for and of the space where mourning was taking place. The home was directly associated with sentimental femininity and female memories, evoking a body of revered fertility whose offspring were nevertheless immobile chickens. In this way, the association with femininity, from the reproductive and life-sustaining capabilities of the female body to the containing qualities of domestic furniture and the maternal body, also pointed to a problem of gender distribution of actions and spaces. The home was rendered a female shrine, passive in itself yet shattered and desecrated by others.

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<sup>191</sup> According to Richard, Leppe’s setting announced a “preliminary reference to the Maternal Function [that is] at present predominant in your work (...) then (1974) anticipated by the multiplying sign of the egg in contiguous relation to the chicken/ by the connotative sign of fecundity.” In Nelly Richard, *Cuerpo Correccional* (Santiago: Francisco Zegers editores, V.I.S.U.A.L., 1980), 19.

<sup>192</sup> During Salvador Allende’s government, his opponents (particularly women) would throw maize seeds at the military, enticing them to do something about the situation.

<sup>193</sup> “Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation,” in United States Institutes of Peace, Truth Commission Digital Collection, Truth Commission: Chile 90, in [http://www.usip.org/library/tc/doc/reports/chile/chile\\_1993\\_pt2\\_ch2.html#B](http://www.usip.org/library/tc/doc/reports/chile/chile_1993_pt2_ch2.html#B), posted 2008 (last accessed May 2, 2010).

On the other hand, the reference to nostalgia as a longing for a location and time past, which was related by Leppe to the act of mourning, joined yearning to “performance” as a political and restorative action. Leppe’s ritual of grief was conducted as a withdrawal from the external world, as suggested by the domestic. Yet by performing an act of birth and death, the artist was repeating an original loss, reliving and working through the trauma of separation from an original, maternal body. Leppe’s own presence in the performance invoked an absence, a vacancy, a body that was no longer there, and an inevitable death.

Leppe’s body could be therefore understood as a substitute for an absent one and his live performance a reiteration and a rehearsal of that loss. Leppe’s nostalgia for the past could be read as a defense mechanism against the changes forced upon the nation by the military junta. But this was also a gendered home, as the female body was invoked by the Leppe’s Happening and its objects, a body which could be constructed as a site of resistance, difference, and political action. The body, its presence and its action, could also become a place of dissent and instability, particularly in a context where traditional gender roles were being firmly delineated.

In September 1974, Pinochet declared Chile to be “an island of tranquility” in the midst of a violent world. This sense of internal security came partly from the creation of the DINA a few months earlier, a secret security service that took care of establishing the “degree of dangerousness of prisoners,” and served as an intelligence body with unlimited powers.<sup>194</sup> The DINA needed no official warrant to search homes, make arrests, or interrogate subjects, operating under closed doors in houses it had expropriated to serve as centers of detention and torture.<sup>195</sup> Under DINA, covert kidnappings and disappearances of political opponents and left-wing partisans became customary and increased in number, terrorizing the population with psychological and physical repression. The presence of ‘undesirable’ corporalities within the body politic was a sign of menace to the regime and its notion of mastery over its national dominions, a contaminating agent referred to as a “Marxist cancer” that had to be literally eliminated or expelled from its borders.<sup>196</sup> The manifestation of domestic ‘incorrect’ bodies thus was associated by the junta with a politically transgressive element, one that countered the secure boundaries of a sought-after unified national body. Political opposition was conflated with an otherness that was later theorized as foreign, alien, and therefore dangerous to domestic security and its homogeneity.

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<sup>194</sup> DINA stands for “Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional” (National Intelligence Agency). Its creation was publicly announced in the 521 Decree, on June 14, 1974, though several of its clauses were not made immediately public but rather were published in the official media which had limited circulation. DINA’s legal activities lasted until 1977, when it came under international scrutiny, particularly after having been involved in international murders.

<sup>195</sup> For a brief description of DINA’s operations see Carmen Hertz, “Desaparición forzada de personas: método de terror y exterminio permanentes,” in Nelly Richard, ed., *Políticas y Estéticas de la Memoria* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2000), 47-51. Ironically, some of the houses used as clandestine torture centers had previously been the offices of left-wing political parties.

<sup>196</sup> Ten years later, Pinochet referred to the role of the military regime as trying to “extirpate the Marxist cancer.” In Augusto Pinochet, *Pinochet: Patria y Democracia* (Santiago, Chile: Editorial Andrés Bello, 1983), 33.

If in “Happening de las gallinas” Leppe had mourned over a lost object and longed for a return to a home through the presentation of surrogate objects, his works of 1975 would bring to the foreground the problem of presence and the physical manifestation of the body as a site of instability in a society that was building itself through the disappearance and corporeal regulation of its members. While the individual body was officially rendered by the regime as a problematic and even anarchic site of social illness and potential immorality,<sup>197</sup> specific images and ideas surrounding the ‘proper’ body politic were also manifested. And the most conflicting image delved around the nurturing body of the mother(land).

### 2.3. The Threat of the Body, the Threatened Body

1975 was the International Women’s Year.<sup>198</sup> Throughout the course of the year the Chilean military government made public speeches and programs celebrating the role of women in society at large and the nation in particular. The acts varied from the issue of a new stamp edition and the appearance of ‘feminine’ supplements in periodicals, to conferences and the reconstruction of maternity rooms in public hospitals, as was the highly advertised case of the maternity ward at Hospital Salvador in Santiago.<sup>199</sup> The language that permeated the government’s homage exacerbated the female sex capacity to give birth and therefore to bring forth life, remarking on women’s nurturing qualities as well as their resilience in times of conflict.<sup>200</sup> By means of biological metaphors grounded on the idea of sustenance, ‘woman’ became in official discourse the primary supporter and bearer of the nation, identifying with the latter through their common sufferings. In this way the female body was associated to the body of the state and its

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<sup>197</sup> Pinochet would argue that “Marxist Leninism is an intrinsically immoral and false doctrine.” See Pinochet’s message of September 11, 1975, published in “La distensión y la “moral comunista,” *El Mercurio*, September 26, 1975.

<sup>198</sup> March 8 was declared International Women’s Day by the United Nations that same year.

<sup>199</sup> *El Mercurio*’s editorial of April 25 stated that the reconstruction of the maternity rooms was “the monument that the Chilean woman deserved. See “Homenaje a la mujer,” *El Mercurio*, April 25, 1975.

<sup>200</sup> In recent years there has been a large amount of scholarship devoted to the role of women under Pinochet’s regime. Because of female support and resistance to the regime (specially the mothers of the disappeared, in a manner similar to the Argentinean case of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo) and the increased agency they acquired due in part to changing economic conditions, women were an important segment of the population to address. 1975 was a catastrophic year in terms of the economy and poverty levels, leading many women to work outside the home. Furthermore, the neoliberal system that would be implanted in the country allowed more women to become part of the work force. To name only a few examples, see the essay by Jacqueline Adams, “Art in Social Movements: Shantytown Women’s Protest in Pinochet’s Chile,” *Sociological Forum* 17, no. 1 (March 2002): 21-56; for an analysis of changing gender roles under the military regime in rural areas, see Heidi Tinsman, “Reviving Feminist Materialism: Gender and Neoliberalism in Pinochet’s Chile,” *Signs* 26, no. 1 (Autumn, 2000): 145-188; for a general overview on feminist movements in Latin America see Jane Jacques, *The Women’s Movement in Latin America: Feminism and the Transition to Democracy* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

'people,' both of which had been 'injured' in the recent past, suffering from the 'privations' and "ill-treatment" of Marxism.<sup>201</sup>

Several art exhibitions devoted to the female sex took place in Chile that year. "The Eternal Feminine," "The Figure of the Chilean Woman in Painting," and "Women in Art" were among the most publicized and large-scale shows mounted in relation to the worldwide celebrations.<sup>202</sup> Each exhibition included several well-known names within the Chilean art scene, mostly male painters and sculptors, and focused on displaying the 'essence' of femininity and its immutable spiritual values. In his introduction to the exhibition "Woman in Art" at the Museum of Fine Arts, the politician and later director of libraries, archives, and museums under the military government Enrique Campos Menéndez stated that Chile was at the "spiritual vanguard" of the world, its female artists seeking in their own femininity what were also art's most noble goals: beauty and truth.<sup>203</sup> The Platonic model sustaining Menéndez' words underscored not only the conservative streak that was to play a central part in the official art exhibitions during the dictatorship, but also its idealized conception of womanhood. The female body was not only the source of life and good, but its innermost aspiration was related to reaching and manifesting female beauty and rightness, the contemplation of which was the supreme purpose of art itself.

In April 1975, an open call to participate in a gallery-sponsored contest was announced in the press. Titled "Senografía" (Graphing-breast), the competition presented itself as a "different contest for sculptors" which had the female breast as its theme.<sup>204</sup> While the organizers did not associate directly their enterprise with the international women's year, the explanation for their choice of subject - the female breast as a symbol of "important virtues and forces: security, prosperity, and fertility"<sup>205</sup> - used tropes similar to those paraded by the government.

Leppe submitted to the contest the photographic installation "El perchero" (The Coat Rack) of 1975, receiving the second prize (fig. 2.4).<sup>206</sup> The work consisted of two identical wood and bronze life-size coat racks with three wooden hangers, displaying three black and white, life-size portraits of Leppe on each rack. In one of the racks the lower body of Leppe in three different poses wearing a woman's dress was exhibited, each pose revealing three levels of dressing and undressing with portions of the dress cut

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<sup>201</sup>"Homenaje a la Mujer."

<sup>202</sup> The exhibition "El eterno femenino" (The Eternal Feminine) took place in the Cultural Institute of Providencia, while "The figure of the Chilean woman in painting" was held at the Cultural Institute of Las Condes between October 23 and November 22. Because they were overseen by their respective municipalities, the activities of both institutes were conservative in comparison to private galleries at the time.

<sup>203</sup> *El Mercurio*, September 25, 1975.

<sup>204</sup> *El Mercurio*, April 20, 1975.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>206</sup> "El perchero" is fully documented in *Copiar el Edén: Copying Eden. Arte Reciente en Chile*, ed. Gerardo Mosquera (Santiago: Puro Chile, 2006) and *Cegado por el oro*, while the original photographs appear whole in *Cuerpo Correccional*. In *Copiar el Edén*, the work's title is translated as "The Hanger."

out to expose specific body parts. Conversely, the second rack presented the upper body of Leppe that corresponded to each of the other three photographs, though this time the upper body was placed “heads-down,” as if the body literally ‘fell’ or hung from the rack.<sup>207</sup>

The photographs had been printed on long papers and were folded over the horizontal bar of each hanger, as if they were pieces of clothing neatly hanging. Yet as critic Justo Pastor Mellado has noted, the photographs hung frontally, parallel to the rack instead of facing the sides as in a normal hanger. Mellado has associated this device to the model of the tailor and the practice of sewing, clothes being the result of the body’s mold. While the photographs’ frontality denied the hanger’s everyday effectiveness as an utilitarian object and piece of furniture, it also served to objectify Leppe’s body turning the hanger into a device for display. Moreover, the two sides of the photographs had been stapled together on the borders with bronze pegs, flattening out the folds into a pleat that was further covered with a thin transparent plastic. The compression of the photograph reduced its three-dimensionality, allowing Leppe to cast himself as an image, the representation of an object to be observed.

Leppe’s choice of photography as a medium of self-presentation was not merely aesthetic but ideological. Staging his body as an image and as an object that literally hung from a rack allowed Leppe to allude to the photographic act as a form of “specular objectification,”<sup>208</sup> making of his corporeality and display a spectacle. Leppe’s portraits, taken by the photographer Jaime Villaseca, with whom he would collaborate until the late 1970s, invoked on one hand photography’s transformation of the external world and the human subject into a ‘picture,’ a bi-dimensional representation of an object.<sup>209</sup> By further presenting himself in a series of hanging images displayed on a clothes’ rack within a gallery that was also a furniture shop,<sup>210</sup> Leppe invoked photography’s ability to turn the world into a spectacle of itself, not just an object but a sign to be consumed. Displayed as a work of art or as another item to be observed, known, and bought, Leppe was exhibiting

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<sup>207</sup> Mellado has related this disposition to the effects of sewing and torture. See Justo Pastor Mellado, “Eugenio Dittborn: la coyuntura de 1976-1977,” in Justo Pastor Mellado webpage, <http://www.justopastormellado.cl/edicion/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=212>, posted March 3, 2005 (last accessed May 2, 2010). Using the model of the tailor, Mellado attempted to relate and connect the practices of Leppe and Eugenio Dittborn, whose works are discussed in the following chapters. Though the element of torture was central to Leppe’s work, I disagree with Mellado’s “sewing” interpretation insofar Leppe’s *El perchero* installs a “cut” rather than a “suture” as Mellado would have it.

<sup>208</sup> The term is used by Abigail Solomon-Godeau in her essay “Just like a Woman” in which the author analyzes the photographs of Francesca Woodman. See “Just Like a Woman,” in *Photography at the Dock* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 245.

<sup>209</sup> Amelia Jones has noted that photography “freezes the body as representation,” and that “[T]he photograph, after all, is a death-dealing apparatus in its capacity to fetishize and congeal time.” In Amelia Jones, “The ‘Eternal Return’: Self-Portrait Photography as a Technology of Embodiment,” *Signs* 27, no. 4 (Summer, 2002): 949. Yet at the same time that photography ‘congeals’ the subject and the present, Jones notes that the portrait, and particularly the self-portrait, “is eminently performative and life-giving” insofar the subject acts out or performs his or hers representation. I will return to this point later, in order to establish a difference between Leppe’s and Dittborn’s work on the body.

<sup>210</sup> The gallery “Módulos y Formas” had just begun its activities as a furniture shop and art gallery.

his body as a spectacle, a substitute of his actual body, something to be looked at and possessed vicariously. But the artist was also displaying his corporeality as a site of meaning, operating along the lines of the fetish and the gaze.

The fetish has been traditionally read under Freud's lens as a surrogate for the phallus that the maternal body fails to actually produce and thus seems 'lost' or absent to the child.<sup>211</sup> From this understanding numerous interpretations have followed, connecting a particular object, the phallic substitute, to a site of desire and loss. But following Freud's interpretation of the fetish leads to a contradictory aspect of Leppe's corporeal self-presentation. If the lost penis is associated to a maternal female body or phallic woman, then Leppe's reenactment should indeed have been a cause for disappointment. For it was not a maternal substitute that was presented but its denial: a male body disguised in women's clothes.

The cuts made to the upper portion of the dress further intensified the denial of satisfaction of the (male) gaze. The body parts made visible through the torn pieces were Leppe's nipples (only one in the photograph on the right, and both nipples at the left, while appearing covered at the center), which due to the tightness of the fabric seemed to emerge inflated, acting as a surrogate of the female breasts. The photographs of the lower body revealed in turn the lower part of Leppe's legs covered with bandages, and in the photograph set at the installation's center it was the artist's genitals covered with white gauze that were displayed. Leppe's own gesture was one of revelation, pulling upwards the dress to expose his legs and then appearing with arms extended upwards exhibiting his body almost completely nude, except for the bandaged nipples and genitals.

The six photographs thus unveiled the lack of female (maternal) genitals while hiding Leppe's own male organs. The circular cut-out imitated in a schematic form the shape of a female breast, pointing to its absence and its male replacement. By marking the female breast's lack and negating its biological function through its male substitution, Leppe was countering the fetishist impulse, nullifying and yet confirming the little boy's desire to see the mother's penis. In this sense, ambivalence regarding what specific object was offered to the gaze was installed in the midst of the body's photographic appearance, invoking a certain homosexual gaze that, in the context of a military regime, was contrary to normative ideas regarding male sexuality.<sup>212</sup> If masculinity was closely associated by the regime with the military exertion of authority and control upon the national body, the display of a male corporeality as an object to be gazed upon and even used by others (as in a hanger) signaled a denial of that form of patriarchal control.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Freud stated that: "When I announce that the fetish is a substitute for the penis, I shall certainly arouse disappointment; I hasten to add that it is not a substitute for any chance penis, but for a particular quite special penis that once was extremely important and has since been lost." In Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 21: 152.

<sup>212</sup> While the military regime did not invent the patriarchal system of social relations that dominated Chile until the 1970s, it did emphasize the 'masculine' authoritative character of its own composition. In this sense, the military reproduced the oligarchy's own position in society, imitating the rural "patrón," the property owner and father figure of national haciendas.

<sup>213</sup> This exertion of power would be increasingly manifested in a sovereign impulse to control the nation's borders as will be discussed in later chapters.

The contradiction that resulted from Leppe's transposition of gender was based on the transgression of boundaries separating the male from the female according to genital organs and socially sanctioned dressing codes. Both genitals and dress operate as visual codes or assumed external manifestations of an identity, a 'naturally' biological one in the first case, and a layered "cultural" one in the second. The photographic portrait would supposedly capture and reiterate this externalization of identity through its indexical impression of the real, creating a direct physical impression of it.<sup>214</sup> If traditionally the portrait has been understood as revealing not just rank or physical traits but the interiority of the sitter or at least to provide access to it through a physiognomic resemblance,<sup>215</sup> this access to the portrayed subject is only achieved through the outward manifestation of visual signs, leaving the viewer with a series of marks, poses, and indexes of that subject as its documentation. But in the case of the genitals as natural or 'evident' markers of sexual identity, the relationship between the two normative sexes was inverted in Leppe's photographs, insofar as he displayed what he lacked, the mother's organs (in his inflated breasts), and hid his own male counterparts. The one part of the body that the fetish could be the substitute of was the only part fully denied a visual component to the gaze. Gauzed, Leppe's penis was visually "castrated,"<sup>216</sup> the 'real thing' truncated, positing a break in the display of masculinity advocated by military discourse.<sup>217</sup> In this sense, the visual access to the physical evidence of gender was doubly denied, the 'real' thing deferred to the photographic gaze.

If the pose is intrinsically a part of the portrait as a form of self-construction, cross-dressing also functions as a manipulation of those socially sanctioned visual codes that assign to a gender its proper attire and thus permit the viewer to 'read' gender from vestimental practices. As a component part of transvestism, cross-dressing poses gender confusion and a challenge to visual immediacy by invoking the fragility and porosity of such external signs of gender while *enacting* the crossing of the boundary.<sup>218</sup> The shiny

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<sup>214</sup> For an analysis of photography and the notion of the 'index' in the art of the 1970s in America, see Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 1," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 196-209; originally published in *October*, no.3 (Spring 1977): 68-81.

<sup>215</sup> For an analysis of the physiognomic model in the interpretation of the portrait in Western art history, see Harry Berger, "Fictions of the Pose: Facing the Gaze of Early Modern Portraiture," *Representations*, no. 46 (Spring 1994): 87-120.

<sup>216</sup> Galaz and Ivelic have read Leppe's "El perchero" as an act of 'concealment' of Leppe's sexual identity and as "castration," pointing to it as the "intensification" of the sexual theme in his Body Art work. Even though they point to the problem of gender identity, Galaz and Ivelic do not venture into the significance of this act, its implications in regards to the (male) gaze, and a developing politics of identity. In this sense, Richard's later discourse regarding gender around Leppe's work, begun only in 1977 and made public in *Cuerpo Correccional* in 1980, was crucial in discussing issues of gender in Chilean art.

<sup>217</sup> The 'cut' has also been read by Nelly Richard as a hyperbole of the excision from the mother, an original form of castration in which the child is separated from the mother. I will return to this interpretation later, connecting it to the mother-land as an original form of body.

<sup>218</sup> Marjorie Garber has analyzed the figure of the transvestite and cross-dresser in relation to a form of nationalism in particular in "The Occidental Tourist," which focuses on the Madame Butterfly real-life story and its theatrical version. In the essay, Garber states that the transvestite indicates a "category crisis," which she defines as "a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits

satin dress from a distant past accentuated the theatricality of Leppe's transvestism and its connection to a lost home as a source of nostalgia, as it represented an idealized female body that Leppe's own bulging corporeality blatantly resisted. Leppe's elongated neck and head turned backwards so that only the nose's contour and chin could be seen acted as another form of disguise and effacement of (male) identity, contradicted only by the hairiness of his chest and legs.<sup>219</sup> In Leppe's work, cross-dressing was exhibited as a sham, a failed mimetic impulse to become an-other gender, an act incapable of fulfilling the desired appearance of the male phallus.

Nelly Richard argued in 1980 that Leppe's 'mimetical' impulse as presented in "Hanger" was a form of "pantomime," a simulacrum of identity that revealed a double sexuality.<sup>220</sup> Though Richard's argument did not follow through the initial reference to either masquerade or transvestism, she focused on the theatrical component present in the work that "acted" out a preordained sexuality, yet revealed it as double, "subordinate," divided and "discordant." Her reading furthermore focused on "castration," which she interpreted as castration from the mother's body, an emasculation awaiting paternal punishment, and as a more general state of excision from another body that "fractures your subjective unity."<sup>221</sup> Under this light, Leppe's works could be read as not only positing an ambiguously gendered body but acting out a separation from another one, which I would argue, was a specific mother-land.

The notion of theatricality suggested by Richard leads to the question of the performance of gender as a way of constructing identity. The photographic set implied an acting sequence, a development of actions that led to the 'uncovering' of the denied male body parts, suggesting an idea of 'becoming' within the act of revelation (or lifting up to skirts). This act of 'becoming' or transformation was performed in the series of poses that Leppe adopted for his self-presentation, the pose implying an accommodation of the subject to a projected image or expectation, whether of personal or external origin.<sup>222</sup> As

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of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another. The presence of the transvestite, in a text, in a culture, signals a category crisis elsewhere." In Marjorie Garber, "The Occidental Tourist," in *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, eds. Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger (New York: Routledge, 1992), 125.

<sup>219</sup> If, as Freud suggested, "face" and "penis" can be displaced in dreams as symbolic signifiers, in Leppe's performative photographs, both were denied full access. In the second part of "The Interpretation of Dreams," Freud asserted that "all elongated objects, such as sticks, tree-trunks and umbrellas (the opening of these last being comparable to an erection) may stand for the male organ." Sigmund Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams Part II," *Standard Edition* V, 354.

<sup>220</sup> The theatrical component was exacerbated by Richard's own language when analyzing the work: "costume," dramaturgy," "theatrical," "comedian," "scenery," and "masquerade" are some of the words used by Richard in *Cuerpo Correccional*. See Nelly Richard, *Cuerpo Correccional*, 43-47. Richard's discourse only metaphorically related Leppe's work to the context of the dictatorship, and it must be noted that she did not write about Leppe's "Hanger" at the time of its exhibition, but five years afterwards, when her own discursive horizon had been influenced by French Poststructuralism, Lacan, and Feminism.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> While the portrait, and particularly the self-portrait, suggests an apparent revelation or acting out of the subject's interiority (and in the case of this self-portrait, of the author, Leppe), the pose also involves



Judith Butler has argued by drawing on J.L. Austin's notion of performativity within speech act theory, the repetition of a given gender role gives it its social authority as a convention, by creating an appearance of normalcy or naturalness.<sup>223</sup> Yet at the same time, the very iteration of the role reveals its cracks and instability, its character as a social construction, for a gender role must be repeated in order to exist.<sup>224</sup> Repetition functions as a form of giving substance to the gender role or, as Butler argues, "there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results."<sup>225</sup>

The contingency of gender on a relation with others and on a set of social norms or preconceptions was evoked in the repetition of the 'mask' or role Leppe was enacting, since it failed doubly at revealing any form of completeness. In this sense, 'being' female or 'being' male appeared less as essences than as socially, physically, and psychologically interrelated states. Leppe's incomplete becoming 'woman' suggested a denial of the constitution of the subject as a whole, a revelation of the artist's body as fragmented, effaced, and in a state of frustration. The sequential action of 'lifting up skirts' was also a formal device of framing particular body parts, similar in its method to the photographic cropping of reality. As a visual strategy of separation and anticipation, Leppe's lifted velvety dress closely resembled the 'raising of the petticoats' in early photography, particularly Auguste Belloc's stereographs where the petticoat or sheet acted as a frame to a close-up view of the female body and its genitals. Acting as the theatrical curtain that opened up into a similar 'original' scene, the dress was played upon as simultaneous disguise, veil, and container, marking boundaries and limits upon the artist's body.

The theme of cropping and framing was reiterated formally in the three photographs, through the circular cutouts on the dress' upper portion, the cropped feet and portions of the dress on the sides of the printed photographs, and the white marks made by the taped gauze on Leppe's body. But the motif was also incorporated into the physical photographs themselves insofar as they were folded over, cutting the image repeatedly at the waist, fragmenting the body in two. As the fold helped sever the upper region of the body from its lower one, it not only suggested the symbolic separation of the baseness of the corporal from a loftier spiritual side of the human being incarnated in the head, thus replicating and mapping a Cartesian dichotomy onto the body, but it

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idealized and conventional images involving the sitter and his or hers desire to be re-presented in a particular way.

<sup>223</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1962). The performative linguistic formulation allows its user to bring into being the thing or action that is said in the speech act. In Butler's argument, identity is not fixed nor natural, but constructed through its (linguistic) reiteration.

<sup>224</sup> Butler defined gender as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being." Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 33. As has been noted by several scholars, one of the problems with Butler's theory is its relapse in a form of essentialism that reduces identity to the repetition of socially sanctioned performances, gives priority to discourse in its constitution (or makes discourse inevitable), and reinstates a "sovereign" subject.

<sup>225</sup> Butler, 25.

manipulated this duality by inverting the position of the head and further effacing it.<sup>226</sup> While the feet remained on the ground on one side of the hanger, the head seemed to ‘fall’ downwards on the other side at the same time that Leppe’s strained neck and pushed back head supplanted a frontal view of it. If the head were to act as a phallic reminder, this was a deflated rather than an erect one, its tip cut off from sight. It is this fragmentation and erasure that I will turn to as a joining of the politics of the body and the politics of the state in a site where identity was negotiated.

A separate photograph showing Leppe standing with arms crossed over his waist, the two nipples exposed through the circular cut-outs, and with his eyes bandaged with a black cloth, suggested a more somber connotation to the act of feminization of the male body (fig. 2.5).<sup>227</sup> It is now known that during the dictatorship political detainees were bandaged while they were being tortured, so that in the case of their survival they would not be able to identify their abusers. A common aspect of the torture of political detainees was brazing their nipples, attacking the sexual organs with electricity, heated utensils, razors, and sometimes concluding with rape, beatings, or execution. As if waiting at the scaffold, Leppe’s effacement of vision implied a negation of visual knowledge that the exposed nipples repeated inversely to the forced exhibition of the body. This double condition of sight and blindness invoked a mutilated body that cannot or must not see, its vulnerability made evident in the cuts and impairment of vision.

Yet as Leppe’s own eyes were constantly denied in the photographs by covering or turning the face away from the viewer, the spectator was forced to look upon the artist’s body and recognize its frailty. The implication of the viewer’s own unimpaired sight as a witness was tied to the act of ‘revelation’ suggested by the performative aspect of the installation and its own materiality. On one hand, the bandages and gauzes covering parts of Leppe’s body accentuated the aspect of a hidden wound that the ‘act’ of uncovering simultaneously negated since the wounds/genitals were substituted or masked. On the other hand, the bronze pegs surrounding the photographs literally trapped and enclosed the body while disclosing it for view in transparent plastic. The installation was thus transformed into a spectacle and a cage: exhibiting and enclosing, showing and hiding.

The allusion to Chile’s situation at the time cannot be left understated. People were ‘disappearing’ in plain daylight and yet the media did not ‘see’ or recognize what was occurring.<sup>228</sup> The image constructed by the military dictatorship of a free, democratic

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<sup>226</sup> The grotesqueness of the body presented thus came as much from Leppe’s own overflowing of the dress or masquerading, as from the exaggeration of its body parts and their debasement. Most writers on Leppe’s work stress the role of “excess” in them, yet none to my knowledge has connected this exaggeration to a Rabelais-inspired form lowering, as analyzed by Mikhail Bakhtin. While I am not suggesting Leppe’s work is a manifestation of carnival, his emphasis on bodily excretions and body parts, on masquerades and inversions does relate to a certain world-turned-upside-down point of view. This position contests a Christian division of reality into spirit and matter and its fixed boundaries.

<sup>227</sup> The photograph has only been published in Richard’s *Cuerpo Correccional*. Nevertheless, the author fails to mention that particular photograph in her writing, as if the image were too evident, too explicit in its connection to vision denied.

<sup>228</sup> Similarly, the amount of censorship in the nation cannot be forgotten. In December 1975, the military junta announced that it had increased its powers to suspend for six days any form of media that distorted the ‘facts’ in their reports.

nation had been severely attacked by international organisms in 1975, the most notorious cases being the circular sent to the ambassador of Chile in Belgium in March denouncing the torture of a journalist captured in 1974 and the creation at the United Nations in February of a special 'ad hoc' group devoted to document the condition of human rights in Chile, presenting a report in which they denounced the tortures committed by the government.<sup>229</sup> The official response of the military junta was one of emphatic denial, arguing that Chile was subject to an international campaign to discredit it and that what was happening inside the nation was an issue in which foreigners could not meddle.<sup>230</sup>

In the series of rebuttals and disavowals regarding the condition of human rights in Chile, the military junta made constant use of both a language and imagery centered on notions of nationalist isolation, geo-political borders, and sovereignty that were deeply entwined with ideology.<sup>231</sup> Speaking of the infiltration into the nation of 'foreign' Marxist ideas which had to be fought in order to have peace while rejecting the interference of other countries in its internal affairs, the government was metaphorically and literally closing its frontiers to international action and any divergent political opinions. While Marxism and its 'arm' the Communist party were seen as corrosive elements poisoning the nation's youth, a harmful agency that was contaminating the whole continent as well,<sup>232</sup> the nation had to protect itself against these alien influences. The nation was defined as a closed down, homogeneous space that had to be defended against diseased elements, its borders kept under tight vigilance.

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<sup>229</sup> The United Nations had manifested their concern for the situation of Human Rights in Chile in the Resolution 3219 of November 6, 1974. Due to continued reports of human rights violations, the Assembly decided on February 27, 1975, to create a special commission to study the cases. The final report was published in 1976, but a progress of the group's report was filtered in September 1975, causing the rage of the Chilean government and a subsequent Resolution on the Protection of Human Rights in Chile during the 2433<sup>rd</sup> plenary meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on December 9. See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Fifty-eight Session, Supplement No.4* (E/5635), chapt. XXIII, in United Nations Treaty Collection, [http://untreaty.un.org/cod/repertory/art68/english/rep\\_supp5\\_vol3-art68\\_e.pdf](http://untreaty.un.org/cod/repertory/art68/english/rep_supp5_vol3-art68_e.pdf) (last accessed April 25, 2010).

<sup>230</sup> An article titled "Respuesta a informe de comisión ONU" (Answer to the UN Commission Report), reported that Ismael Huerta, the Chilean ambassador to the U.N., had "categorically" denied that any kind of torture was being committed in Chile. In the document sent by the ambassador to the General Secretary of the United Nations, he further stated that the Chilean government was respectful of the rights of the "national territory's inhabitants and only because of the situation of emergency lived and the government's desire to restore normalcy." In "Respuesta a Informe de Comisión ONU," *El Mercurio*, October, 1975. For the final report of the United Nations see, United Nations Economic and Social Council, "Study of Reported Violations of Human Rights in Chile, with Particular Reference to Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment," Report of the Ad Hoc Working Group (E/CN.4/1266 1 February 1978, Annex I-V).

<sup>231</sup> See for example, the article titled "¿Aislamiento de Chile?" (Chilean Isolation?), mentioned in the introduction, where the Chilean government's "renovating ambition," described as deeply "nationalist and anti-communist," is crushed by a "disfavorable international ambience" that was nevertheless, according to the Chilean military, too slow to react before disasters such as the situation occurring in South Vietnam. "¿Aislamiento de Chile?," *El Mercurio*, April 6, 1975.

<sup>232</sup> This view was expounded by the commander in chief of the Uruguayan army, Julio Vadora, in a meeting of American armies that took place in October. "Montevideo: Se inició reunión de ejércitos americanos," *El Mercurio*, October 21, 1975.

## 2.4. Visible and Invisible Cages

The cage and the showcase as forms of tying the visible and the invisible were reworked in a more forcible manner in Leppe's November exhibition at Galería Imagen. The show consisted of 4 drawings, 5 collages, 2 graphic works on cardboard, and 7 sculptures that acted as its focal point. The sculptures consisted mostly of large transparent acrylic boxes mounted on wooden or metallic pedestals and closed off with bronze pegs, containing a series of amorphous bronze or natural objects such as stones, feathers, and animal skins. The titles of the works verged between surreal references to the landscape and memory ("Landscape in Repose" and "First Monument"), and ominous suggestions of constraining physical situations ("The Abduction" and "Collective Sentence"), giving the exhibition a funereal countenance.

In contrast to the baroque saturation of kitsch objects that Romera had continuously criticized as characteristic of Leppe's works, the November exhibition was aseptic and polished, marked by its formal restraint in terms of materials and the objects displayed. The show was first received by critics and theorists as a mixture between Surrealism and Conceptual art and was praised for its "classical simplicity" and "formal serenity."<sup>233</sup> The first art historical category was connected by critics to the 'oneiric' qualities of the objects displayed, the relations established between opposed elements (water, metal, and stones in one work, wood and bronze in another), as well as its titles ("Essays on a Home-based Surrealism," "Six Monuments for a Cord," and "Characters Destined to Simple Observations," for example). The 'conceptual' category was in turn tied to the 'austerity' and apparent neutrality of the simple repeated shapes and objects presented. Leppe's own statements regarding the show contributed to the idea of artistic maturation and therefore, serenity acquired: "The show is over. No more spectacles to entertain people. Now I need my work to be understood as full of rigor, intelligence, and concept."<sup>234</sup> It seemed as if the flamboyant skin had been shed to reveal an artist in full command of his (conceptual) craft.

The use of series and words in the graphic works apparently confirmed the conceptual nexus. Serialism was present mostly in collages and ink on paper works where forms such as black shoes were iterated in rows throughout the paper's surface in a grid. In other graphic works, words or photographs repeated the content of printed images, doubling verbally and visually the presence of the things represented, from landscapes to imaginary constructions. The sculptures in turn closed hermetically upon objects whose geometrical and slightly ovoid contents were stacked, tied, and displayed as eerily inert materials inside the transparent rectangular cases.

Nevertheless, Leppe's stripping of the objects to apparently neutral elements, geometric formations, and serial dispositions disclosed more than ties to Conceptual art. Few critics noticed or were able to express the unsettling references to the Chilean

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<sup>233</sup> Esteban West, "Carlos Leppe: espacio 1999?," *Revista Qué Pasa*, December 11, 1975, 56-57.

<sup>234</sup> In "Carlos Leppe. Más allá de la materia," *Revista Ercilla*, December 10, 1975. Nevertheless, a month earlier Leppe had stated in an interview that the variety of mediums he used responded to an expressive need: "the problem was not the material but the concept to which one wants to arrive at. Each idea developed needs to be solved in a different way." In Sonia Quintana, "El arte: un mundo en que habita Carlos Leppe," *La Tercera*, October 26, 1975.

situation in the objects displayed or the titles used.<sup>235</sup> The distorted shapes in graphic works like “Monumentos en reposo” (Monuments in Repose) of 1975 (fig. 2.6) evoked human or animal hearts displayed within cases in taxonomical fashion, their veins and fibers barely perceptible,<sup>236</sup> while the limp wooden cubes hanging from miniature scaffolds in the sculpture “Paisaje a la nostalgia” (Landscape for Nostalgia) of 1975 (fig. 2.7) suggested in its Giacometti-like structure the impending quietness of death.<sup>237</sup> In “Sentencia colectiva” (Collective Sentence) of 1975 (fig. 2.8) nine egg-like forms placed in a square formation had their tips cut off at perfect angles, decapitated and fenced in by the glass and metal boxes.<sup>238</sup> Barring from touch, yet inclusive in terms of sight, the cases installed an aura of self-sufficiency and asphyxia surrounding its contents. If Surrealism was the most noticeable influence in Leppe’s objects, the distortion to which they were submitted was less a playful strategy of defamiliarization and rediscovery of the “marvelous” in the everyday through the use of contradictions, than the staging of veiled yet transparent forms of secluded oppression.

The pedestals, sculptural bases, and showcases simultaneously displayed and contained the abstracted ‘landscapes’ and severed ‘monuments,’ separating them from their surroundings and demarcating their limits. The boundaries were further secured through rows of visible bronze screws, scaffolds, and wooden planks, keeping the objects visually exhibited yet physically trapped. As if the bronze ovoids or the stacks of stones were going to escape, Leppe treated his objects as prisoners of the transparent glass cages, giving them orifices through which to breathe yet never allowing them to fully touch the other elements of the miniature ‘landscape.’ The catalog’s own design had been planned so that a square cut-out in the hard cardboard black cover exposed an image of piled stones, a formation that might be part of any mountainous place, referring to a common Andean landscape (fig. 2.9).<sup>239</sup> But by turning the cover over to the first page, the effect of the peephole or framing was disclosed: the first image was only a fragment of the work “The Abduction,” the stones separated from the imagined natural landscape and now exposed in a showcase as objects to be known and strangely conserved.

As Richard signaled in the exhibition catalog, the elements of Leppe’s landscapes established an “essential coercive relation.”<sup>240</sup> According to the critic, Leppe’s forms

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<sup>235</sup> As was mentioned earlier, censorship in the media had recently intensified.

<sup>236</sup> “Monumentos en reposo” is documented with a reproduction in the exhibition catalogue, *Leppe* (Santiago: Galería Imagen, 1975), no page number.

<sup>237</sup> “Paisaje a la nostalgia” is documented in the article by Esteban West, “Carlos Leppe, ¿espacio 1999?” *Revista Qué Pasa*, November 11, 1975.

<sup>238</sup> “Sentencia colectiva” is documented in Leppe’s catalogue, no page number.

<sup>239</sup> The original work that can be seen through the catalogue’s cover cut-out is “El rapto” of 1975.

<sup>240</sup> Richard’s text is one of her earliest published art criticisms and it is interesting to note in her use of language how far away she was from the post-structuralist and later on feminist vocabularies and rhetoric which she would quickly adopt in the late 1970s. It is also important to remark that Richard did not include any reference to this exhibition in her work *Cuerpo Correccional*, as if the cages and objects interfered in some way with her 1981 reading of Leppe’s performative work. Nelly Richard, untitled text in the exhibition catalog *Leppe* (Santiago: Galería Imagen, 1975), no page number.

were “subjected to pressures and tensions” exerted by boxes, binds, and screws, placing the objects in “parenthesis” as the relation to their original natural setting was broken. Richard argued that the landscape’s “continuity” was thus fractured and in this way the objects’ liberty was “intercepted” and their potential ‘destinies’ impeded.<sup>241</sup> Richard’s metaphoric use of language (“Leppe’s objects intertwine with the Impossible the intercepted bind of their freedom”) could be understood as subtly alluding to the arbitrary imprisonments and detentions performed by the military, speaking of a general social situation of oppression transposed by Leppe into dialectic relations between natural and manufactured elements.<sup>242</sup> While I agree with Richard’s interpretation of the break and the limitations provoked by the cages, I would like to take further the idea of fracturing, framing, and their relation to the landscape, by relating them to the series of photographs included in the exhibition that Richard did not mention in her text. For in the latter the claustrophobic environments created by the transparent cages and the recurrence of similar forms being enclosed and confined, were directly connected to the body as a site of contention.

In the exhibition’s catalog, Richard convoked a ‘Surreal’ quality of defamiliarization, arguing that Leppe’s ‘surreal’ objects were subtracted from an original ‘landscape,’ displaced from that site, and further abstracted from their new surroundings by the transparent cages. Yet the landscape as a concept and form of representation in art has embedded in it an idea of fragmentation and framing, no matter how all-encompassing it may attempt to be. From “vedute” to panoramas and Chinese horizontal scrolls, the history of the landscape and its physical representation has been tied to a limited spatial view (and viewing possibilities) of a larger ‘natural’ extension, circumscribed to a portion of land or territory that can be seen in a single view. In this sense, Leppe’s choice of the word ‘landscape’ to name several of the exhibition’s works recreated the act of framing and separation of elements from their “natural” environment embedded in the artistic notion of a landscape in order to create a ‘view.’ This demarcation was then doubled by Leppe in the form of the showcase, a simultaneous form of enclosure and revelation, and a transparent cage in which knowledge is visible yet inaccessible to touch.

The notion of the landscape in art also involves that of a scene or scenery, a ‘picture’ of the natural world.<sup>243</sup> The land is read or viewed as a ‘scene,’ a small theater where natural elements become its main actors and projections. What interests me here is

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<sup>241</sup> The concept of “intercepting” would reappear in Richard’s texts on Leppe’s works in the 1977 catalog for the exhibition “Reconstitución de Escena” (Scene Reconstruction). Mentioned in relation to the work “The Abduction” and connected to a form of ‘repression’ and ‘retention,’ the reference to the 1975 Galería Imagen exhibition would be completely omitted from then onwards in favor of another 1975 work, “El perchero” (The Hanger). See Richard, “Texto: Richard,” in *Reconstitución de Escena* (Santiago: Galería Cromo, 1977), no page number.

<sup>242</sup> If, as Richard argued in 1986, artists during the dictatorship had resorted to self-censorship to evade official reprimands, it could be argued that her metaphorical language elided the same problems in the artistic realm, assuring their distribution.

<sup>243</sup> In Spanish, the word for landscape is “paisaje.” The term derives from the Latin “pagensis,” the one who lives in the countryside, and is tied phonetically and graphically to the French “pays” from which the Spanish “país” is derived.

the notion of the landscape as both a physical space (to be observed in ‘one single view’) and also as the *image* of that space or representation. Furthermore, the landscape is as term tied etymologically to a physical tract, a piece of ‘land’ or earth and its natural forms, bringing to the fore associations between the sight or “scape” and ownership and sovereignty. It was in the slippery regions where nature, images, and domains become entangled that Leppe would situate his work, at a moment when the military government was pursuing several forms of reaffirming its sovereignty over the national territory and its landscapes.

Throughout 1975, the military government had made it a priority to continue the “colonization” of the country that had been started by the Spanish conquering fathers, especially towards its northern and southern borders. Plans to re-colonize the southern region (“zona austral”), mostly inaccessible by ground transportation due to the number of canals, fiords, and virgin forests present in the area, were proposed and carried out by encouraging economic ventures and physical occupation. The plans to ‘colonize’ the southern regions (now the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> regions) were presented in February of 1975.<sup>244</sup> Only a week later, the government granted exemption from excise duties to the nation’s “extreme zones,” with the regions furthest north and south benefiting from the measure. In May, the problems of recent southern ‘colonizers’ was fully displayed in an article that argued for the need of improved infrastructure in order to populate the southern area of Aisén and “exploit” its natural “riches.” This form of internal colonialism was carried out at the expense of the indigenous population living there: the extreme corners of the nation were qualified as ‘virgin’ lands waiting to be explored, populated, and developed by modern colonizers.

The notion of “pure” lands awaiting development was manifested even in urban zones. Deadlines were established concerning the cleansing and use of abandoned, unlabored lands in the capital and other national urban areas. The latter were regarded as potential zones for illegal camps, spreading poverty and delinquency in the cities, indigent zones that were considered sources of political dissidence.<sup>245</sup> As the nation was envisioned by the military junta as a land to be controlled and made productive in accordance to the newly designed capitalist models of economic development, the hindrances left by the communist government had to be erased from its surface and the remaining lands put to good use. Ideology was thus spatialized in the ‘development’ narratives of the regime, translating discourses of industry and political security into questions of sovereignty and land ownership.

The references made to the government’s ‘colonizing’ plans can be tied back to Leppe’s exhibition at the close of the year, particularly in the series of collaged and manipulated photographs of Leppe titled ‘portraits.’ In them, the images of constraint and the references to the landscape as a secluded space to be observed and known, a place to be colonized, were further explored as the landscape was inscribed in the artist’s body as a zone of contention and physical dominance.

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<sup>244</sup> See the article “Plan para colonizar la zona austral,” *El Mercurio*, February 15, 1975.

<sup>245</sup> Illegal camps were labeled the “legacy” of Allende’s government by the official press and due to their connections to union and workers’ movements, and therefore to ‘socialist’ ideas, they were deemed highly risky areas of political opposition. See “Herencia del gobierno anterior: Conchalí lucha contra campamentos,” *El Mercurio*, October 22, 1975.

The collages consisted in the reproduction of the artist's face to which grid-like structures were superimposed or subtracted, including perforations or the layering of threads and other pieces of photographs. In one of the works titled "Retrato con hilos" (Portrait with Threads) of 1975 (fig. 2.10), taut strings emanated from a focal point near Leppe's nose ridge and eyebrows, connecting it to other punctures along the photographic surface, its borders, and the transparent plastic plate it had been covered with.<sup>246</sup> The patterns produced by the lines and orifices simultaneously attested the bidimensionality of the photographic surface (its 'picture' status) and its volumetric objecthood (reiterated by the acrylic plate), generating a graphic, grid-like regulating effect on the surface of Leppe's face reproduced visage that involved a physical compromise of its materiality as well. The artist's image was subsumed by the linear marks and the acrylic plate, contracted and hemmed in, attacked as an object and as a spatial entity, as if the portrait was a map. In Leppe's self-portrayal the prevailing notion was one of physical and visual constraint, a layering in which what was trapped was also revealed to an external gaze.

The directness of Leppe's gaze in the self-portrait helped construct a distance, a depth between observer and observed that the plastic layer echoed, fleshing out what could be otherwise considered a planar, congealed pose. As a form of self-fashioning, the self-portrait can be understood as a performative form of constructing self-identity that also invokes the presence of another observing body which returns the portrayed subject's gaze.<sup>247</sup> This intertwining of gazes suggested a double form of identity formation based on the specular relationship established between the "I" of the photograph and the "other" of the gaze that stares back at it, recognizing it and thus giving it form. Thus, the sitter does not merely reveal his or hers interiority or 'character' to the observer, but rather that both sitter and viewer actively participate in the subject's construction. The transparent cage in Leppe's portraits acted in this sense as a screen, a source of separation and physical contiguity, a point of touch and a barrier between two gazes and two bodies.

Moreover, the strings that covered and joined the photograph to its plastic coating, submitted this intertwining of gazes to a physical relation. Incarnating vision, the strings emanated and returned to Leppe's eye line, locking sight into a series of straight lines. Graphic and objectual, visual and material, the strings wove a pattern of connecting threads that ultimately imprisoned the body as an image and an embodied object. Objectified as a thing to be seen, and pinpointed as a thing to be marked and punctured, the photographic collage recalled the body's materiality and presented it in a state of violent entrapment.

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<sup>246</sup> "Retrato con hilos" was reproduced in the article by Jorge Marchant Lazcano with photographs by Jaime Villaseca, "Carlos Leppe. Acrílico+Plástico+Metal+Fotografía+Nylon+Barro+Luz Fluorescente," *Revista Paula*, November 2, 1977, 40.

<sup>247</sup> I am drawing here from both Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jacques Lacan's theorizations on perception and subject formation. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty's "The Intertwining-The Chiasm," in *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis and ed. Claude Lefort (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 130-155, and Jacques Lacan's "What is a Picture," in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), 105-109.



By turning his body into a site that can be reproduced as a surface and a physical space open to external control, Leppe was literally marking his body as a site of occupation. If invisible political threads were pinning down the national territory, marking its borders, claiming lands, and regulating its interior spaces (and therefore its contents, including physical locations and their inhabitants), Leppe's collages and objects attempted to reorganize the narratives of development and national territories by linking them to the artist's own body as inscribed in a material landscape. While the state was reimagining its Body politic through territorial codes, equating 'colonized' lands to social order and reasserting its authority over the nation's interior, Leppe was exhibiting this landscape as caged and the bodies within it as physically restrained.

As has been mentioned above, the body of the nation as envisioned by the military government was also a gendered body.<sup>248</sup> The territory as a place to be explored and its material wealth capitalized on was imagined as a female body where masculinity had to assert itself. The nation's borders, margins that could be political, social, or territorial, had to be protected against exterior influences on one hand and indelibly fixed on the other, leaving no doubt as to who was in command of its interior (the infamous phrase issued by Pinochet in 1981: "Not a single leaf moves in this country without me moving it" reflects this will to power and absolute control).<sup>249</sup> But because boundaries suppose a meeting place with the exterior, a place of contact with what is to remain beyond the borders, they are places particularly vulnerable to outside influences. Leppe's cross-dressing in "The Hanger" could be read as one manifestation of the borders' instability, pointing to their susceptibility of being trespassed and the anxiousness such cross-overs produce. And as the caged landscapes and marked photographic portraits suggested, physical spaces and the bodies inhabiting them were especially porous to such contaminations.

It would take Leppe nearly two years to produce his next installation of objects and photographs, an exhibition which appeared at the same time of Eugenio Dittborn's "Final de Pista" show, which will be analyzed in the next chapter. The coincidence of both exhibitions and the relations established between them in terms of their conceptualization of the body will be linked to a growing discussion in Chile surrounding the role of reproduction in the arts and the appearance of several works dealing with borders, marginality, and corporality between 1975 and 1977. The latter date has been usually described by Chilean art historians as the birth of the "avanzada" or avant-garde scene, signaling it as an original moment in the creation of Chilean Conceptual art. But as will be discussed in the next chapter, 1977 was a year in which a series of earlier investigations on the body and spatiality took a particular turn that was marked by a graphic reference which in 1979 and 1980 was reconceptualized by two writers as a photographic one. This move allowed for the re-connection of Chilean art to an international form of the avant-garde which seemed to receive its christening with the 1977 exhibition at Galería Época of Wolf Vostell's work. Nevertheless, 1977 was also a year in which some art critics returned to the term "humanism" to describe these

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<sup>248</sup> In Spanish, the term used to refer to the nation is female, "madre patria," the motherland, rather than male ("fatherland" is usually translated as "patria" or "madre patria," thus either excluding the gendered pronoun or switching it back to the female noun, in a curious form of linguistic transvestism).

<sup>249</sup> The phrase was published in *Revista Ercilla*, October 13, 1981.

conceptual and graphic works while speaking of a reappearance of the body in the arts, contesting the apparent disembodiment of the subject performed by the French poststructuralist-influenced Chilean critics and yet suggesting that between 1973 and 1977 the body had been submerged from view. It is to these contending narratives and their precedents that I turn to now, focusing on the intersections between the works of Carlos Leppe, Catalina Parra, and Eugenio Dittborn up to 1977.

### Chapter 3: Topo-graphical Bodies: Mapping the Body in Eugenio Dittborn and Catalina Parra

Both the artist Eugenio Dittborn and the art critic Nelly Richard noted in 1980 and 1981 respectively that the year 1977 marked a boundary and acted as a point of convergence in the Chilean art scene.<sup>250</sup> A series of exhibitions took place that year in two galleries, *Época* and *Cromo*, followed by the production of important catalogues and publications, which signaled a turn in the direction of the conceptualizing trends begun in the early 1970s towards graphic referents and procedures. The works presented that year by Dittborn and Catalina Parra in *Galería Época* seemed to critics and artists alike to mark a radical departure from academic conventions and artistic canons, manifested in a particular animosity towards painting and an embrace of mechanical means of reproduction, serial images, and photography. It was as if Chilean art had suddenly turned conceptual, an impression greatly supported by Wolf Vostell's exhibition at the same gallery.

According to Richard, a reformulation of photographic practices took place in 1977 by a young generation of artists like Parra and Dittborn, who turned to photography's referential qualities as a sign, going beyond its aesthetic parameters.<sup>251</sup> Shifting from the connotative to the denotative realm of meaning, these artists were able to deconstruct images and analyze how photography as a medium of mass communication could make evident the codes, rules, and ideologies underlying the

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<sup>250</sup> Nelly Richard, *Una mirada sobre arte en Chile/octubre de 1981* (Santiago: no publisher, 1981) and Eugenio Dittborn, *Estrategias y proyecciones de la plástica nacional sobre la década del ochenta* (Santiago: no publisher, 1980). In his text, Dittborn produced a list of "pioneer" artists and exhibitions which starts in 1977 and ends in 1979, followed by cut-outs from the catalogues of each to which Dittborn added on his own visual comments. My interest in Dittborn's list lies not so much in how he posited himself as one of the earliest pioneers of the changes in Chilean art or the layout of strategies he supported and which he saw reflected in the works of other artists (as has been argued by Justo Pastor Mellado), but what he was obliterating in his discourse. There is no mention of Leppe's prior objects, photographs, installations, or even the 1974 happening, and no reference to any corporeal or photographic antecedents in the prior decade. Dittborn's list reinforces the idea of a clean break with the past, a new beginning marked, as Richard was arguing, by the emergence of photographic strategies. Even though all the works have references to the body, Dittborn's textual interventions manifest his own conceptualization of it. It is as if by 1980 the body underwent a complete dematerialization in Dittborn and any overt references had to be subjected to a form of containment. The list included Dittborn's own "Final de Pista" show of 1977, Parra's exhibition "Imbunches" (1977), Leppe's "Reconstitución de Escena" (1977), Altamirano's "Santiago de Chile" (1977), CADA's 1979 art action "Para no morir de hambre en el arte," and Juan Domingo Dávila's exhibition "Pinturas." Three written works were included: Richard's comments on Dávila's paintings, Kay's reflections on Dittborn's work and Zurita's book of poems, *Purgatorio*, all from 1979.

<sup>251</sup> Richard, *Una mirada sobre arte en Chile/octubre de 1981*, 15.

production and distribution of information.<sup>252</sup> Richard saw in these procedures the development of a Chilean avant-garde scene, what she termed in 1981 “escena de avanzada” (advanced scene). Richard later described this scene as one “of transformation of the mechanics of production and subversion of cultural codes of communication,”<sup>253</sup> regarding it as a collective effort against all norms and modes of expression, including artistic ones. This effort was further tied to the solidarity with the oppressed and victimized reality of the nation, giving it a political connotation.<sup>254</sup>

But as will be argued in this chapter, there was more to the change in the Chilean scene than a technological shift. What was not fully theorized in Richard’s work was how the representations of the body in art also underwent a change, both material and conceptual, in a growing dispute regarding identity. The body passed through a process of flattening and collapse into the page as it was distorted and blown-up or cut up into fragments, redrawn within maps, cartographies, grids, and planes, conceptualized through cuts and stitches, and subjected to strategies of mechanical reproduction. The line became an important metaphor and visual mark, delineating borders and frontiers, as well as territories where a series of contested bodies emerged. Bandits, outlaws, natives, and other marginal figures took center stage in graphic works that tied the question of the popular subject to that of the territory and the nation. In this obsession with the border and the marginal, there was a conflation performed between the material procedures of artistic production and the images, an assimilation of techniques to forms of (self) representation.

The body was presented in the works of Parra and Dittborn as geographically marked, but in an ambiguous way. The body was pictured as a site of conflicting projections where the border came to signify an unstable position of belonging. In art and criticism an unconscious theory of the border began to form, which emerged at a time when conflicts regarding national borders were escalating and a series of policies regarding Chileanness were issued by the government. In the latter, art occupied an important position as a form of politically advancing certain ideological narratives about the nation, particularly regarding its unity and prosperity.

This theory of the border was greatly based on the writings of Ronald Kay, which focused on the work of Dittborn between 1976 and 1980.<sup>255</sup> For Kay the history of

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<sup>252</sup> Henry M. Sayre described in his essay “The Rhetoric of the Pose” a similar situation in the interpretation of photographic practice within the United States of America in the 1970s. Sayre focused on the formal treatment given to photography by institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York during the late 1970s under the curatorship of John Szarkowski. I will return in the following chapter to the use made by certain discourses in Chile of Szarkowski’s position. See Henry M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 35-65.

<sup>253</sup> Richard, *Una mirada*, 12.

<sup>254</sup> It is interesting to note that five years later, Richard polished her own views of Chilean art at the moment when the groups she advocated had stopped working or were turning to different strategies of production and even achieving international notoriety as in the case of Dittborn. Richard reverted from the emphatic victimization theory to one of elliptical and hermetic languages used to oppose the regime.

<sup>255</sup> From 1976 to 1980, Kay produced the theoretical framework that would eventually support Dittborn’s oeuvre and its later critical reception, opening ground for the artist’s development.

photography in the nation and Latin America was one of a minor genre that had taken over the preeminence of painting in describing the native landscape and thus defining identity. Drawing from Walter Benjamin's idea of an "optical unconscious" brought to light by photography, Kay developed a theory of the documentary intervention of photography in the New World, where it had functioned as a means for mastering a social and physical body. According to Kay, what photography revealed was more than just the appearance of a subject, but the social conventions and forces that molded its emergence. For Kay, topography as another graphic source had served a similar function of dominion, domesticating the landscape and its inhabitants, a connection that allowed him to tie the development of contemporary graphic arts as manifested in Dittborn's work to a history of colonization. In Kay's view, what Dittborn was exposing in his drawings was the trauma of that process of visual, physical, and territorial conquest.

Yet even though Kay's interpretation of Dittborn's work placed more emphasis on the body, his indebtedness to Benjamin's theories on mechanical reproduction made him underestimate the power of the present and the direct references to a contemporary setting in Dittborn's work. As will be argued in this chapter, the conceptualization of art in Chile went hand in hand with a larger rejection of patriarchal authority and a desire to make visible the power relations manifested at the level of the body as a material entity subject to domination and regulation through spatialized tactics. Whether these confrontations with authoritarian symbols and spaces took the form of masters of painting recuperated by the military government which were then mocked and debased by artists, marginal urban subjects relegated to official oblivion historically and physically, or the boundaries of the national territory as a site of political instability and social menace, it was the *materiality of the body and its apparent denial*, a disavowal ruptured by the emergence of body parts, which constantly resurfaced in the works of Dittborn and Parra. If in formal terms three-dimensionality was abandoned in favor of planar graphic constructions, if the body was pressed, cut up and stitched back again, it was to return as an excessive supplement, a site of contested identities positing phantasmagorical and formless presences. The obsession with the body and the stereotype of the popular in the works of Dittborn and Parra was not just the result of the appropriation of the media's language as argued by Richard, or a repetition of an "original" trauma as in Kay, but rather it was turned into a strategy for revealing the instability and anxiety behind that repetition in terms of finding and securing a fixed identity.

The changes mentioned above and which seemed to coalesce in 1977, had been breeding in the works of these artists since the early 1970s. It was not only a change in mechanics of production which altered the direction of art in Chile towards a conceptual approach to the object, but a combination of elements including the arrival of Kay and his wife the artist Catalina Parra from Germany, the theories developed by Richard and Kay around the art works of Dittborn in particular and the "escena de avanzada" in general, and a focus of artistic practices on the body (social, political, personal) as a space of social control. This chapter will explore how the relationships between the artists that exhibited at Galería Época in 1977 and their earlier works pointed to a conceptual approach to the body and the territory, placing graphic arts and their problems of mechanical reproduction in the foreground of artistic discussion for the next five years in Chile.

### 3.1. A Genealogy of the Graphic Matrix: Eugenio Dittborn's Drawings and the Body under Pressure

A few months before Leppe burst onto the art scene with his "Happening of the Chickens," Dittborn presented an exhibition of drawings in the Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago, which received critical acclaim. Titled "22 acontecimientos para Goya pintor" (22 Occurrences for Goya, painter), the exhibition consisted of twenty-two black and white drawings made with ink that took the eighteenth century Spanish painter Goya as their subject matter.<sup>256</sup> The drawings were characterized by their humor and the absurd and often violent situations in which a distorted looking Goya in a top hat found himself, amid personages that seemed taken from comic books. The dream-like atmosphere invoked by the subject matter and juxtaposition of incongruous elements found its opposite in the technical precision of the drawings. Critics of the time noticed the works' derivation from technical drawing and engineering, associating them to "an absolutely current language" based on commercial illustration and popular culture, though none drew any conclusions about its presence in an official artistic setting.<sup>257</sup> Exhibiting in the context of the museum, Dittborn's work seemed to combine evocative references to a European pictorial tradition and to drawing as the basis of academic art, with popular imagery and mechanical means of production used as references to a contemporary form of production.

Few critics at the time mentioned the fact that Dittborn started his career as a painter. Only some made passing references to the artist's sojourn during the last years of the 1960s in Spain, Germany, and France, where he studied lithography, serigraphy, and painting.<sup>258</sup> This biographical detail is important for two reasons. First, Dittborn was trained in painting and he would always remain attached to it, making it a recurring subject and medium in his graphic work.<sup>259</sup> Before his departure in 1965, Dittborn had been a student of Balmes at the School of Arts of the University of Chile, exhibiting between 1963 and 1965 informalist looking paintings with dense pictorial surfaces, characterized by abstract imagery scraped over or surging from rough crusts of paint. *Red*

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<sup>256</sup> The exhibition took place in April 1974, when Dittborn was 31 years old. The title is difficult to translate, since "acontecimientos" are not only "occurrences" but also "happenings" and "events." I follow the translation of the exhibition found in the catalogue *Fugitiva* (Santiago: Fundación Gasco, 2005). I have also maintained Dittborn's original punctuation and capitalization of his titles, since the words' spelling and the contradictions they present in terms of grammar are central to their meaning.

<sup>257</sup> Esteban West, "Crítica de arte," *Revista Qué Pasa*, April 12, 1974, 2. West was the only art critic who criticized Dittborn's drawing technique, arguing that it tended towards monotony and lacked a "tactile sense that this class of drawings demands." While unspecific as to what "this kind of work" exactly was, it is interesting to note that West referred to "tactility" as the missing element in Dittborn's works. Most critics celebrated Dittborn as a young artist with an "overflowing imagination" and sense of irony. See, for example, E.P.L., "Goya: el invitado de Dittborn al presente," *Revista Eva*, May 22, 1974.

<sup>258</sup> Dittborn studied lithography in Madrid, serigraphy and lithography in the Hochschule für Bildende Kunst, in Berlin, and painting at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris.

<sup>259</sup> To this day, Dittborn's best known works, the "Pinturas Aeropostales" (Airmail Paintings), started in 1985, are based on graphic mediums and strategies of production, yet the artist has insisted in calling them paintings.

*and Black*, ca. 1965 (fig. 3.1), displayed an expressionistic pictogram composed of a large oval placed horizontally on the canvas, with two roundels for eyes and two smaller vertical marks as nose at the top center.<sup>260</sup> The forms evoked a human visage, though a deformed one, the distortion of the face and its transformation into a bloated amorphous mass performing a debasing of the head. Recalling Jean Dubuffet's primeval men, the crudely scratched signs built up from a red jarred ground could be read not only as deformed primitive beings but also as a signature, a personal language and an assertion of authorship and identity through the mark.

While in terms of technique Dittborn's early paintings could be connected to a long local pictorial tradition of materiality that joined his teacher Balmes to Pablo Burchard and Juan Francisco González through impasto and the abstract properties of paint, it was both the distortion of forms to a slightly comic effect and the dryness and asperity of Dittborn's surfaces that separated him from the more fluid approach of his predecessors. Yet the importance of the sign and the graphic markings was indebted to Balmes, a figure that remained a looming shadow in Dittborn's later works and his ambivalent position regarding painting and its procedures.

The second reason relates to the shift in techniques that occurred during Dittborn's European voyage. Dittborn had won a scholarship to study in Spain, where he entered the Escuela de Fotomecánica to study lithography, a printing technique he had begun to explore in the University in Chile. Once in Madrid, Dittborn came in touch with printing methods associated with silk screening and photomechanical reproduction, which he continued to study during his stay in Berlin from 1967 to 1968, at the Hochschule für Bildende Kunst. In Europe, Dittborn embraced the regularity of patterns, geometrical forms, and grids of an education based on commercial design and a strict positivist training in drawing, one that seemed opposed to the emphatic surfaces of Grupo Signo.

It was also in Madrid and Berlin that Dittborn entered into contact with firmly rooted traditions of graphic arts devoted to satire and political commentary that emerged in his 1974 exhibition. Madrid was the home of the prestigious Academia de San Fernando, an academy for painters known for its graphic section called "Calcografía Nacional"<sup>261</sup> which included a collection of copper plates with etchings from Francisco

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<sup>260</sup> The painting was shown in a publication titled "20 Young Chilean Painters," which was organized and financed by Edith Pollner, a North American enthusiast of painting and emerging artists who had been living in Chile while accompanying her U.N. appointed husband. Among the artists included in the catalogue who had helped with the project and corresponded to the best students under Balmes, were Francisco Brugnoli and Virginia Errázuriz. In the catalogue there is a transcribed conversation between José Balmes and the young painter Adolfo Couve, which makes manifest the generational gap between the older teacher and his students. While Balmes saw an "affinity of purpose" in the younger artists' works, the reluctance of Couve to assert their similarities ("As we were carting these works to have them photographed, I thought that, perhaps, what they had in common was the trip on the truck") and his interest in confirming their independence, even from Balmes, underlines the "anxiety of influence" that Balmes and his generation represented within the School of Arts and the current local art scene. See Edith Pollner, *20 jóvenes pintores chilenos –Twenty Young Chilean Painters* (Santiago de Chile; Sociedad de Arte Contemporáneo, Universidad de Chile, 1968), where Dittborn's painting is reproduced.

<sup>261</sup> Since its foundation in 1789, the Calcografía (Royal Chalcography) has been a center for the production and collection of Spanish graphic works.

Goya's *Caprichos*, *Disparates*, and *The Disasters of War* series, graphic works focusing on war, folly, and the irrationality of human behavior. Upon Dittborn's return to Chile, Goya and Brueghel became in his works the upholders of two graphic traditions, one offering dark visions of social injustice and class divisions, stark images of the brutality of war, and grotesque comments on superstition and greed; the other offering fantastical allegories of medieval worlds turned-upside-down, comical in effect yet invested with moral commentaries on society.

Dittborn's interest in political commentary found in Chile at first another outlet. Invited in 1970 by a fellow artist to work in a mining company,<sup>262</sup> Dittborn became a militant and illustrator for MAPU-Garretón, a subgroup within the leftist Christian Marxist Leninist collectivity "MAPU" (Movement of Unified Popular Action) formed in 1969 under president Frei. As a political party, MAPU was associated with a critical approach to modernity and modernization in the country, embracing experimentation as a form of action<sup>263</sup> while seeking to represent the working class and developing a proletarian ideology.<sup>264</sup> While active in MAPU, Dittborn worked in the educational program called Operation "Saltamontes" begun by the Secretariat of Social Development of Allende's government, an office that was created to extend education to the most marginal sectors of society.<sup>265</sup> The Operation "Saltamontes" consisted in teaching marginal communities how to create their own serigraphy with materials found in their homes.<sup>266</sup> Justo Pastor Mellado has argued that this was a crucial moment in Dittborn's

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<sup>262</sup> The artist was Francisco Ariztía, a fellow student at the Universidad de Chile, who is mentioned in Dittborn's first catalogue. Ariztía was working on a mural in a mining company in the North of Chile and also worked in a cartoonish manner similar to Dittborn. Ariztía illustrated in 1985 the book of poems of Enrique Lihn titled "Paseo Ahumada," mentioned in Chapter Four.

<sup>263</sup> This is important insofar as MAPU defined itself as a young leftist party, associated to a fresh vanguard.

<sup>264</sup> During the First MAPU Congress, the ideological basis of the group was announced and defined as Marxist, proletarian, non-dogmatic, and open to cultural differences. The group sought to represent the working class and aimed at developing a proletarian ideology. Interestingly, MAPU was often criticized as being formed by an elite, because of the fact that the group had originated in the Catholic University and its members had a professional background (and defined themselves as petit-bourgeois), coming to occupy important managerial positions in the government throughout its life. MAPU-Garretón splintered away from the group in 1973, because of its closeness to the extreme left and its revolutionary approach, which aimed at creating popular sources of power away from the government.

<sup>265</sup> One of MAPU's members, Carmen Gloria Aguayo, became the director of the Office. The office fomented social action in marginal communities. See Irene Agurto Timoner's dissertation, "Política y Utopía en Situaciones de Crisis: El caso de Chile" (PhD dissertation, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1991), 134. The Operation could be interpreted as a continuation of the University Reform started in the 1960s within Allende's government program of socialization of the means of production.

<sup>266</sup> Dittborn has rarely talked about his studies in Europe or his work between 1970 and 1974, and has been careful in recounting his own "beginnings" or allowing the reproduction of his early works. For example, in an interview of 2006, Dittborn only mentioned he worked in "Saltamontes," but did not specify what he did there, or the influences he had brought from Germany and Spain. See the interview with Dittborn in Federico Galende, *Filtraciones I. Conversaciones sobre arte en Chile (de los 60s a los 80s)* (Santiago: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2007), particularly page 151, and compare to Justo Pastor Mellado's interview in the same book, in pages 132-133. In an interview of 1976 related to Dittborn's exhibition "delachilenapintura, historia," a brief reference to Dittborn's life in Europe is described: "studying graphics



career, where politics and graphic practices were joined, yet what exactly was Dittborn's role in this operation and within MAPU is unclear.<sup>267</sup> Even if the exact influence of this episode cannot be determined, I would argue that Dittborn's passage through this extreme leftist group accentuated the gap between academic artistic practices and their engagement to politics (as symbolized by Balmes on one hand and Brugnoli on another), offering an outlet for Dittborn's illustrations and graphic work in an ambience that placed an emphasis on experimentation and social criticism.

After the coup, and in part because of the ban on all leftist parties and persecution of MAPU's members, Dittborn retreated into his studio and began producing the drawings that would form part of his exhibitions between 1974 and 1976. In "22 Occurrences for Goya, painter," Goya appeared as the embodied peak of Western art history, holding the instruments of his painterly trade, his brushes, in one hand and wearing a top hat as in the well known aquatint in the *Caprichos* series published in 1799. But while Goya's self-portrayed haughty expression with tightly pursed lips was maintained, the rest of his body was distorted and the situations in which he was placed mocked this self-consciousness and painterly pride. In one of the closest reproductions of Goya's portrait, Dittborn placed the figure inside a stroller, the lowest portion of his body miniaturized to conform to an infant's space (fig. 3.2).<sup>268</sup> While seriously holding his brushes and with his palette stuck in a back wheel of the stroller, Goya's image and the painting tradition he represented was that of a proud yet dependent child with a grown man's face, unable to move yet attentively watching the world around him.<sup>269</sup>

The Goya character passed through several transformations in the drawings, from passive observer to actor, as his stroller reappeared in scenes plagued by violent subject matter. Anonymous assassins, mustached men in 1930s hats and trench coats shooting one another, wild dogs and amorphous figures running in a frenzy darting shots and vomiting pointed projectiles, or simply lying dead, were some of the figures that formed part of the abstracted landscapes and middle class interiors filling the drawings. The ambience of unrestrained violence and world gone mad was furthered by the juxtaposition of disparate elements in a single scene with often shocking actions, as in the drawing where an older crook appeared shooting a can of spray at a baby in a crib (fig. 3.3),<sup>270</sup> recalling the Surrealist fantasies of Max Ernst in their combination of child-like scenes and adult imaginings. While critics read the violence as a demonstration of Dittborn's imagination and sense of irony, few noticed the marginal character of the figures, their anonymity, excessive demonstrations of criminality, and their possible

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in his six years lived in Europe, when he took care of gardens and worked in restaurants and supermarkets." Luisa Ulibarri, "Historia de Olvidados," *Ercilla*, May 19, 1976.

<sup>267</sup> Until very recently Dittborn remained secretive about his passage through the political party. Only in the past three years he has begun to publicly acknowledge parts of that history in passing commentaries.

<sup>268</sup> A reproduction of the drawing held by Dittborn can be found in the article "Dibujos en la coctelera," *Revista Ercilla*, April 10, 1974.

<sup>269</sup> In *Revista Eva*, the Goya character was described as "a mute witness of something that happens." E.P.L., "Goya: el invitado de Dittborn al presente," *Revista Eva*, May 22, 1974, 33.

<sup>270</sup> The work is documented in a reproduction with Dittborn standing next to the work in the article "Goya: el invitada de Dittborn al presente," *Revista Eva*.

association with the present.<sup>271</sup> The underlying reference to Goya's *Caprichos* and their satiric portrayal of war and invasion was also lost on critics, even though Goya's prints had been in circulation during the French invasion of Spain and were tied to a form of political resistance.<sup>272</sup> The world where Goya had fallen was one of intensified violence taking place in a no man's land, a spectacle of cruelty and indifference set in no specific time or location.

The uncertainty of time and place was joined to an ambiguity regarding form. In most drawings, the extremities of the figures were distorted, elongated like rubber, brought to a point of extreme malleability that threatened dispersal or indefiniteness. In these cases, the figures were also severely contoured, their mutating parts corseted back by black lines. At times the figures were combined with one another by means of continuous lines, losing their clear identity, like an exquisite corpse of forms. In the drawing "No Vengan Esta Noche" (Don't Come Tonight) of 1974 (fig. 3.4) what seemed to be a mountain was a formation of piled up bodies, including a running and a snarling dog, several distorted smiling faces, pointing guns, and a mummy in the left corner of the triangle.<sup>273</sup> As the bodies metamorphosed into another and their combinations transformed the blank space of the page into a mountain teeming with pulsating lines and inflamed visages, the crowded page took on the appearance of a Brueghel-like village during a violent carnival. This carnivalesque effect suggested a breakdown of limits and a mode of disrupting spatial distinctions which were carried out, nevertheless, by the bodies as an amorphous mass.

In *Rabelais and His World* Mikhail Bakhtin proposed a reading of the grotesque body as one where corporal limits are trespassed, boundaries opened up rather than closed down, offering an image of the body as a form in constant change and organic expansion. Rather than regarding the body as a self-contained form, with clear limits and contours separating it from other objects, as in the "ideal" body that creates "an impenetrable façade,"<sup>274</sup> Bakhtin saw the grotesque body as undoing the confines between the corporeal and the world by bringing them into extreme contact to the point of one overflowing into the other. The pregnant body, the defecating body, the eating body, all suggested according to Bakhtin an organism that is not complete but in the point of becoming something else, of creating another body. The grotesque body thus proposes

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<sup>271</sup> The only exception was the article in *Revista Eva*, which stated "the work presented a catastrophic character, in the present as in the past." Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> For an account of the reception of the prints and an analysis of a contemporary review of the work, see Enriqueta Harris, "A Contemporary Review of Goya's *Caprichos*," *The Burlington Magazine* 106, no. 730 (January 1964): 38-43.

<sup>273</sup> The work has been reproduced in the catalogue *Fugitiva* (Santiago: Sala Gasco, 2005), on pages 52-53 and appeared earlier reproduced in Gaspar Galaz and Milan Ivelic, *Chile Arte Actual* (Valparaíso: Ediciones Universitarias de Valparaíso, 1988), on page 306.

<sup>274</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Grotesque Image of the Body," in *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 320.

a threat to a corporeal identity that presents itself as a distinct individual setting up physical barriers for fear of losing itself in another object.<sup>275</sup>

One of the effects of the grotesque body as understood by Bakhtin is the inversion of corporeal hierarchies. This upturning is produced by turning away from “elevated” body parts such as the head as the residence of intellect, to the genitals, the abdomen and the rectus, extremities and openings that connect the body and reach out to the exterior world. By placing an emphasis on the organs closest to the instincts and “degrading” those in the ‘upper stratum,’ the grotesque body not only inverts or turns upside down the “essential topographical element of the bodily hierarchy,”<sup>276</sup> but reshapes the relationship between objects as one of continual contact and transformation. A similar act of degrading or “lowering” was present in Dittborn’s works, insofar as Goya as a canonical artist was placed along bodies of criminals distorted in their extremities, invoking images of excessive growth and corporeal contamination. Noses, legs, hands, and the character’s faces were expanded into overwhelming protuberances, making them a subject of ridicule rather than of respect for their authority or violent behavior.

This conception of the body and its ambiguous relation to space in the drawings was indebted to different sources in popular culture. As noted by critics, the works were based less on academic conventions of closed contours and idealized forms than on technical manuals for drawing on one hand and the distortions of caricatures and comic strips on the other. While line or *dessin* was the structuring element of the drawings, expression and feeling seemed removed from their production, as they appeared at times mechanical and standardized, literally replicating the geometric patterns of technical manuals for industrial design in some passages. If the scenes’ subject matter suggested chaos and disorder, the lines giving it form appeared to control the bodies and shapes. Yet the grids also decomposed them into repetitive linear textures arranged in random patterns. While Dittborn’s linear hatchings formed static grids that flattened out the

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<sup>275</sup> Though Bakhtin did not offer an analysis of gender specifically, his work on carnival and the androgynous body performed during its festivities (as in transvestism, for example) suggest that the grotesque can also be applied to bodies that fuse gender distinctions. As was explained in the previous chapter, during the first years of Pinochet’s regime the nation was envisioned as a body whose health and limits had to be restored after contamination by foreign ideologies, the military occupying a rectifying position of masculine authority. This is part of the argument in the introduction to Alice A. Nelson’s *Political Bodies* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002). Allende’s body in particular had been mocked as effeminate in the press prior to the coup, the president’s body losing its masculine contours because of his ‘unnatural’ relationship with Marxism and its primary exponent at the time: Fidel Castro. Recent scholarship in Chile has taken the subject matter of political caricature and satire as a mode of political commentary during Allende’s government. Some studies have focused on the feminization of Allende’s body by the right-wing opposition and then later by the military regime. See, for example, Ana Henríquez Orrego, “La sátira política: análisis de diario Tribuna durante la visita de Fidel Castro a Chile,” Ana Henríquez Orrego Blog, entry posted May 25, 2007, <http://historialimagen.cl/2007/05/28/satira-politica-en-el-gobierno-de-salvador-allende-analisis-de-deario-tribuna-durante-la-visita-de-fidel-castro-a-chile/> (accessed April 1, 2010), and Angel Soto, “Caricatura y Agitación Política en Chile durante la Unidad Popular, 1970-1973.” *Bicentenario. Revista de Historia de Chile y América* 2, no. 2 (2003): 97-135. After the military regime took over, the national body was to be contained and limited in order to be recognizable as an individual ‘nation’ whose borders would be impermeable to foreign influences.

<sup>276</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 309.

figures and reduced them to optical surfaces, they were grids further pieced together in a disconnected manner, bringing attention to their artificiality and mechanical fabrication.

Critics like Adriana Valdés, Gaspar Galaz, Milan Ivelic, and Enrique Lihn have referred to Dittborn's drawing technique based on mechanical manuals as the opposite of "free hand," the academic tradition of drawing without a support for the hand.<sup>277</sup> To bring the mechanical into drawing by using rulers and plotters, resorting to what Enrique Lihn described as the "orthopedic hand,"<sup>278</sup> would be according to these critics a denial of the basis of academic tradition as the pictorial aspects of the images are rendered into decorative flat patterns. But there was more than a mechanization of the image and an allusion to industrial and commercial visual culture in Dittborn's drawings. For even if the imposition of the mechanical seemed to counter the free-flowing play of the hand and the individual mark, the distortion to which bodies were submitted through the use of lines produced a deformation of these modernist two-dimensional effects. Instead, the grids were atrophied and the effect achieved was a comic one, the body parts warped and enlarged to grotesque proportions. Dittborn's figures proposed a tension between the regulatory and the excessive, between the frame or grid and its irruption, positing the body as a material capable of disrupting those borders. As that which cannot be completely contained, the body became in Dittborn's drawings a symbolic and visual field where identities tried to be defined and drawn.

Dittborn took the mass-cultural references further in the exhibition "Goya contra Brueghel, historieta" (Goya against Brueghel, comic) which took place in September of the same year.<sup>279</sup> The inclusion in the title of the word "historieta" connected the worlds of high art represented by the two painters with popular forms, the term also suggesting in Spanish a miniaturization of history, a distortion of its epic proportions. In this diminished version of history presented in twelve drawings, Goya's character became an irascible man, sporting a gun, attacking and shooting Brueghel with guns and foul language. Like the bandits of Dittborn's previous exhibition, Goya and Brueghel were imagined as outcasts, living in the fringes of society, descending from their position as canonical figures in Western art history to an ordinary, everyday world of violence, racing cars, love affairs between pimps and chorus girls, and homicide.

Two variants of art and two art historical periods were thus confronted by death. On one side stood Brueghel, the bulwark of a Northern European tradition of realistic

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<sup>277</sup> Adriana Valdés, "Geste," *Fugitiva* (Santiago: Sala Gasco, 2005), 23. Also see, Paula Honorato, "Cita de la Historia," in *Transferencia y Densidad* (Santiago: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2000), 108-155. Mellado and Richard have also made references to this issue throughout their writings.

<sup>278</sup> Enrique Lihn, quoted in Gaspar Galaz and Milan Ivelic, *Chile Arte Actual* (Valparaíso: Ediciones Universitarias de Valparaíso, 1988), 307.

<sup>279</sup> In a review in *Revista Paula*, the exhibition title is referred to as "Goya contra Brueghel, historieta," making it the only published reference to the exhibition that appends two extra elements: a comma and the word "historieta." These change the meaning of the title, insofar it is signaled as a small "minor" (hi)story (from the Spanish "historia" to "historieta"), and translates in Spanish as a "comic strip." Dittborn has always referred to the exhibit as "Goya against Brueghel," yet it is plausible that the exhibition originally included in its title the word "historieta," since it relates to the 1976 exhibition that followed titled "delachilenapintura,historia" (ofchileanpainting,history). See, "Impresiones urbanas y Brueghel contra Goya," *Revista Paula*, November 5, 1974.

precision and fantastical landscapes, embedded on one hand in medieval fantasies and in a form of popular knowledge where moral commentary is disguised in satire. Goya on the other hand, stood in for a painterly tradition closer to a Romantic sensibility and the courts, in particular the Hapsburgs, an aristocratic circle where images of violence were in high demand during a period of great social change, producing images of human folly and savagery which became even darker during the last days of his life.<sup>280</sup>

By bringing face-to-face two symbolic fathers of art, Dittborn was envisioning art and its history as a battle between male forces. Nevertheless, this struggle took place not in an idyllic Parnassus but in the context of quotidian mass culture and a pulp fiction ambience of aggression.<sup>281</sup> This confrontation among artistic patriarchs was filled with degrading elements, from the profane language used by the characters, the ironic titles such as “Goya and clang! Homicide and fall of Peter Brueghel, the Elder (and what will become of us?),” to visual distortions and the inclusion of icons from local mass culture. Popular spectacle and consumer culture were invoked in the inclusion of characters from national comic strips such as Condorito, as well as those from Western folklore and fairy tales like Little Red Riding Hood, all cohabiting with burlesque performers. Such a *mélange* of sources was perceived by the critic Renato Yrarrázabal as manifesting a “desacralizing impulse,”<sup>282</sup> bringing “all the unworthy of entering art” into the work. Antonio Romera held a similar view, relating Dittborn’s “anti-art” stance to a search for the ugly (“*feísmo*”),<sup>283</sup> a characteristic the artist seemed to share with Leppe, with whom Romera had a mixed reception as discussed in the previous chapter.

The comic strip figure of “Condorito” in particular offered a curious counterpoint to the ‘high’ art exemplars. Condorito’s character and the comics titled after him were derived from a ‘condor,’ an Andean bird of prey that has formed part of the national shield since 1834.<sup>284</sup> With the body of a man and the head of an eagle, wearing peasant’s

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<sup>280</sup> See Peter K. Klein, “Insanity and the Sublime: Aesthetics and Theories of Mental Illness in Goya’s *Yard With Lunatics* and Related Works,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courland Institutes* 61, (1998): 198-252. The author takes *Goya’s Yard with Lunatics* and his representations of madness as point of departure to analyze the prevalent Romantic taste and aesthetic theories among the Spanish aristocracy concerning terrible scenes, hideous subject matter, and violence.

<sup>281</sup> A year later, Dittborn would say: “Art is not a culinary snack, a delicacy as is commonly believed. Art History is the conflict between the new and the old. Art breaks with the art of the past, that which has been assimilated and, because of this, doesn’t cause any kind of discomfort.” Dittborn quoted in Renato Yrarrázabal, “Dittborn: aproximación a una realidad peligrosa,” *El Mercurio*, December 7, 1975.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>283</sup> Antonio Romera, “Crítica de Arte: trece artistas premiados.” As mentioned in connection to Leppe, Romera’s comment was part of a review of the group show held at Carmen Waugh’s gallery, which had brought together thirteen artists who had been awarded prizes the previous year. Among the rewarded was Lotty Rosenfeld, to whom I will come back in Chapters Five and Six in relation to graphic gestures in everyday space and video art. Nevertheless, at the time Romera described Rosenfeld’s work as belonging to “tradition,” though he was quick to add that did not mean she was doing anything “*démodé*” or “without currency.”

<sup>284</sup> The character was developed in 1948 by the Chilean caricaturist “Pepo,” René Ríos Boettinger’s pseudonym. Pepo’s creation was inspired by the visit of Walt Disney to Latin America and the characters of his movie “*Saludos Amigos*,” particularly the absence of a representative character for Chile in the latter. Disney had created “Pedrito” for Chile, a small airplane in remembrance of the president Pedro Aguirre

sandals, patched pants rolled up ready to work, Condorito was the opposite of the condor as an emblem of power and natural force.<sup>285</sup> Rather, as the diminutive of the name suggests, Condorito is a poor man from an invented semi-urban small town, Pelotillehue, a Chilean “roto,”<sup>286</sup> humble, hard-working, and resilient, yet constantly in bad luck. With clear antecedents in native Araucanian traditions, as the ending of the town’s name suggests (“lehue” in Mapudungun meaning “place of,” “peloti” being a play of words suggesting “little balls”), Condorito was juxtaposed in Dittborn’s drawings to the foreign forefathers of Western art as a local anti-hero, accentuating the gap between the two. Two different histories of cultural development were thus suggested: one truly aggressive, masculine, and international, the other a Creole feminized version.

High and low cultures were brought together not only in the characters’ symbolic status in society and their rendering as humorous figures, but in the choice of the comic

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Cerda, a less distinct characterization (or stereotype) of the nation when compared to the colorful “papagayo” that represented Brazil, “Pepe Carioca,” and the pistol-bearing, mustached “Pancho Pistolas” for Mexico. In Chile, the 1930’s saw a great upsurge of national comics that derived their characters from popular nationalistic sources, such as middle class men. “Condorito’s” popularity can be attested by the fact that it is the only comic that is still printed today, not only in Chile but also all over Latin America, from Argentina to Mexico.

<sup>285</sup> The Chilean poet and Nobel prize winner Gabriela Mistral wrote an essay titled “Menos Cóndor y Más Huemul,” (Less Condor and More Huemul) based on the two animals present in the national shield: the condor and the huemul, a vulture and a Latin American stag. As she delved into the symbolism of both animals in terms of Chilean identity, Mistral defended the position of the huemul, an animal that was “feminized” when compared to the aggressiveness of the condor. Gabriela Mistral, “Menos Cóndor y Más Huemul,” *Recados contando a Chile*, ed. Alfonso M. Escudero (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Pacífico, 1957), 14-16.

<sup>286</sup> The most influential essay on the origin of the term “roto” is Oreste Plath’s “Epopéya del Roto Chileno,” written in 1957. In the essay, the author traces the term’s changing meaning from the Spanish conquest to the present. According to Plath, while the word had acquired recent pejorative connotations associated to lacking good manners, an uncouth demeanor, and was thus extended to the lower classes of Chilean society, originally the term was associated to Spanish travelers dressed in an exaggerated manner for their adventures in Peru and the southern part of the continent, passing later on to signify the travelers’ “courage” in setting out to such difficult lands. The term was then conflated with a ritual practice of the native Araucanos in the south of Chile called “rutu-chicu,” when the corporal hair of young boys was removed as both a sign of maturity and a preparation for war. After this etymological background, Plath developed a theory on the relationship between geography and identity, arguing that the hostility of the Chilean landscape contributed to the molding of the “roto” as a ‘rough,’ fighting individual found in different locations throughout the nation, from the desert to the mountain ranges. For Plath, human geography was intertwined with physical geography, the latter molding a person’s character, physical traits, and ‘spirit.’ The “roto” as an indefatigable fighter would thus form the basis of Chilean society. Plath nevertheless then turned to the indigenous warring nature as an underlying characteristic of the “roto,” following arguments that have been used since the 16<sup>th</sup> century to characterize the resistance offered by the Araucanos to the Spanish in the south of Chile. Such an argument was first developed in the epic poem “La Araucana,” written by the Spanish Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga in 1569, a poem memorized by children in Chilean schools. As will be discussed in the following section, the poem articulates an intrinsic relationship between the landscape and its inhabitants, a relationship that was made manifest in Dittborn’s 1976 exhibition “delachilenapintura,historia.” See Oreste Plath, *Autorretrato de Chile* (Santiago de Chile: Empresa Editorial Zig-Zag, 1957), 133-147.

strip as a narrative mode as well (fig. 3.5).<sup>287</sup> The drawings were subdivided into vignettes similar to those of comic strips and included balloons for the character's thoughts and dialogues.<sup>288</sup> But if in "Goya versus Brueghel" the artist's manipulation of dialogue and space seemed to line up his drawings within the comic strip world and Pop art referents, particularly Roy Lichtenstein's use of comic strips as a source for his paintings as noted by Mellado,<sup>289</sup> the vignettes often flowed into the contiguous image negating their individuality and self-containment. Shattering the continuity of narrative and the sequential arrangement of panels in comics, the simultaneous images presented by Dittborn owed more to Surrealism's visual strategies of bringing together disparate elements and the analysis of dreams than it did to Pop art's aestheticized use of a mass-cultural syntax or to Lichtenstein's use of the balloon as a unifying compositional element.<sup>290</sup> The collage-like effects of the drawings introduced a temporal and spatial dislocation that altered the comic's narrative logic of progress, arresting time through the creation of a constellation of fragments.

This collapse of time had multiple effects. First, the joining of the disparate as physically contiguous helped defamiliarize the subjects represented, making the ordinary strange. Dittborn stated at the time that he was attempting "to reconstruct the unconnected and isolated in reality," in works that were "politemporal (...) meaning that in the same drawing occur things with different elements, at different times."<sup>291</sup> The identity of each object was suspended and questioned, an object being able to appear as a

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<sup>287</sup> Fragments from the drawings were documented in the article "Impresiones urbanas y Brueghel contra Goya," *Revista Paula*, September 5, 1974, 22.

<sup>288</sup> An example of such a convention is found Goya's own *Caprichos*, an important referent for Dittborn's own work and later Conceptualist artists in Chile, particularly the artist's 1799 self-portrait and its legend, as will be discussed below and in Chapter 4 in relation to Carlos Altamirano. Albert Boime had characterized the comic strip as a novel pictorial narrative different from previous graphic combinations of illustration and text (as found in medieval woodcuts and illuminated manuscripts, for example) by the presence of the "balloon" as a vehicle of communication. Before the appearance of the balloon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, information was conveyed primarily through legends below the illustrations. According to Boime, the problem with the legend was its lack of specificity as to who was speaking, particularly if a large number of characters were present, confusing their identity. Instead the "balloon" would "permit action to unfold clearly while directly pointing to each speaking character." See Albert Boime, "Roy Lichtenstein and the Comic Strip," *Art Journal* 28, no. 2 (Winter 1968-1969): 155-159.

<sup>289</sup> In terms of technique, there are similarities between the two artists as well, insofar as both Dittborn and Lichtenstein turned to manual forms of production (drawing and painting) while using visual imagery produced through repetitive mechanical procedures. Mellado has stated that when Dittborn left Chile for Europe in 1965, he passed through Argentina, seeing a Lichtenstein exhibition there, which he implies, changed the course of Dittborn's works. See the interview with Mellado by Federico Galende in *Filtraciones I. Conversaciones sobre arte en Chile*, 123.

<sup>290</sup> This is part of Boime's argument regarding Lichtenstein's appropriation of the comic strip's visual conventions. From Boime's point of view, such appropriations of popular culture's syntax serve strictly formal ends, for example "making the balloon a positive pictorial element," an argument which brings back Lichtenstein's work to a modernist tradition of flatness, unity, and a painting's formal qualities. In this sense, while in Lichtenstein the painting and comic strip panel remains a whole, in Dittborn the panels are fragmented and confused. Boime, 158.

<sup>291</sup> Eugenio Dittborn, quoted in E.P.L., "Goya: el invitado de Dittborn al presente."

signifier of something else, similar to the aspect of ‘condensation’ present in dreams. Second, as Dittborn brought the continuity of narrative to a visual halt and disrupted its organization through causal links, making it possible to “read” the drawings along multiple reversible axes, he was invoking a critique of accepted understandings of history as linear progress and a sum of steps. The subtitle of the exhibition “historieta” already pointed towards a reduction of grand historical narratives through a distortion in scale and a debased fall from the official to the humorous, which the visual juxtaposition of times underlined. Finally, by placing elements from the past and present in a contrasting, clashing manner, another form of reading “history” was enabled. This was a history that did not subscribe to a rational form of development, where limits and boundaries confining forms and events were not definite, and past forms could reemerge in the present as anachronisms, repeated gestures, or ghosts.

In this negation of historical advance and defamiliarization of artistic canons, the ‘author’ as a patriarchal figure was also attacked. Displaced from the past and coming back from the dead, the resurrected Goya and Brueghel of Dittborn’s drawings pointed to a dead-end of high art, its pictorial fathers surviving only as farcical images. Literally enacting ‘the death of the author’ by being engaged in an infertile struggle of possession with no beginning or end in sight, the fathers of European art did not leave progeny but only repeated gestures of violence. If a ‘scene’ in the Freudian sense of ‘origin’ was being represented, this was a scene of repetition rather than singularity, of citations and frustrated returns. That the pre-modern Condorito, a bachelor “uncle” that takes cares of his ‘nephew’ in the comics, would overlook these bloody encounters along with burlesque dancers and sportsmen, suggested a different genealogy and setting for art, one permeated by the ‘bastard’ offspring of Western art, that other side of high culture: mass production and the ‘popular’ subject invoked by it.

A further remark on the use of Goya as a character needs to be mentioned in relation to the parallel work that Dittborn was developing in 1975 and which acted as a bridge between his production of 1974 and that of 1976. The self-portrait of Goya on which Dittborn’s drawings were based, was the frontispiece aquatint published with the *Caprichos* series in 1799 where a contradiction regarding painting and graphic arts was presented. In Goya’s self-portrait, the artist’s bust is supported visually both by his name (Francisco Goya y Lucientes) and a legend below it, a second instance of identification in which Goya introduces himself as a painter. Working as an explanatory appendix to the graphic illustration and an inscription of the proper name, the word “painter” forged an ambiguous relationship between the actual graphic medium used in the *Caprichos* as a series, and the professional activity for which Goya was trying to promote himself in this makeshift *carte de visite*. The disjunction of identity in this form of dual self-presentation through contradictory mediums was also manifested in several drawings made by Dittborn in 1974 and became particularly evident in his catalog publications from 1977 onwards,<sup>292</sup> where the artist envisioned himself as a “painter” even though he was working in graphic media.

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<sup>292</sup> In 1976 Dittborn spoke of himself as the “author” (el autor) who “owed” his drawings to several influences and sources. The contradiction between authorship, and the related modern idea of originality embedded in it, was nevertheless disrupted by the realization that most of the works were only quotes and derivations or displacements of other prior forms and meanings. By 1977, the same textual structure was



An early work related to this ambiguity is the ink drawing “Autorretrato y Sol en Diciembre o Correrías de Lauch Wallace” (Self-Portrait and Sun in December and Forays of Lauch Wallace), of 1974 (fig. 3.6).<sup>293</sup> In it Dittborn depicted himself as a painter, holding some brushes in his hand while standing in front of an easel. The image was divided into two vertical rectangular zones, with the male painter standing alone in the lower right hand corner, surrounded by empty space while staring upwards at a large splotch-like form resembling both a blob of paint and a cloud. The stain was nevertheless a photographic reproduction of a cloud, from which rays of light seemed to emanate. In the left rectangular space, a photograph of Dittborn’s wife, a drawn palette and a cut-out of a dog gave the impression of acting as a frame for the painter, similar to the image of a motor car that appeared to be moving along the picture plane’s uppermost right hand border. In the drawing similar strategies to those present in his 1974 exhibitions were used, such as the distortion and flattening of the drawn figures, and the juxtaposition of disparate elements drawn from popular culture in a single scene. Yet two elements distinguish the drawing from its contemporaries. On one hand, the mechanically reproduced image entered the drawing in the form of collage, while on the other hand, references to painting were made in the blotch and in the formal disposition of the artist as a painter. If the drawing could be read as a calling card similar to Goya’s etching, Dittborn was presenting himself as a Sunday painter, working *en plein air*, but whose models were not ‘natural.’ On the contrary, the models were all photographs or magazine cutouts, mediated images pointing to a source of inspiration derived from a contemporary form of nature: mass culture. If the painter set out like an explorer to capture an image of the world, as implied in the title’s “adventures” of the invented character Launch Wallace,<sup>294</sup> all he found was a world of imitation and copies. Instead of immediacy, the painter found seriality.

The tension between graphic arts as a medium connected to mass production and painting as a unique art, could also be felt in the confused critical responses to the 1975 “Concurso de Gráfica” (Graphic Arts Contest) exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts in June, a show which took seriality as its subject matter. The reporter María Olga Delpiano for example characterized the artists as “painters without a brush” who were “rebellious” against the canvas “exclusiveness.” According to Delpiano, these artists were letting go of the prejudice that they were only good draughtsman and instead “understood that the current epoch requires multiplicity and (...) serial production.”<sup>295</sup> Rather than criticizing the works on the basis of a history of graphic arts and its basis on multiplicity (Delpiano even referred to graphic forms as a “new art”), the reporter instead related the works appearing in the museum to the tradition of painting, yet one which was being extended

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maintained yet an important change occurred: Dittborn no longer referred to himself as “author” but the “painter” who “owed” his work to several sources.

<sup>293</sup> “Autorretrato y sol en diciembre o correrías de Lauch Wallace” forms part of the collection of Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago, Chile.

<sup>294</sup> In the 1976 drawings, there were other references to adventurers from the media, particularly the French colonial explorer Tin Tin.

<sup>295</sup> María Olga Delpiano, “Pintando con Aguja y Dedal,” *El Mercurio*, June 7, 1975.

to everyday life, “invading walls, pillow, and dresses”<sup>296</sup> through repetition and the evident appeal to mass culture and graphic design. The latter could be seen in the first prize’s reference to fashion magazines in a canvas sewn like a dress, or Iliá Manes’ work which placed a Goya-like “Maja” on top of a toothbrush, as well as Dittborn’s ink and pen drawing “La Corazonada” (The Hunch), which featured a boxer in shorts whose arm was tightly held by a matronly woman.<sup>297</sup> The works’ appeal to mass culture and found imagery thus appeared as denying the originality of high art while suggesting an extension into the everyday.<sup>298</sup> The painters without brushes were likened to graphic designers, extending their two-dimensional practices into the surrounding space.

This tension between painting and graphic works could be seen in Dittborn’s own position within the artistic field. Even though in the interviews of the time Dittborn presented himself as a draughtsman, he had also been working since 1974 in paintings.<sup>299</sup> But the modes of operation manifested in his canvases pointed less to a pictorial approach, as suggested by the stain or blob in “Self-portrait,” than an extension of his graphic means. In paintings such as “La Isla” (The Island) and “El verano” (The Summer) from the series “En las aguas” (In the Waters),<sup>300</sup> the human figures dominating the center of the canvas were either composed of flat areas of paint, stark outlines, and transformed into decorative patterns of pointillist dots of color, or their body parts were

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> The same boxer reappeared in Dittborn’s work “Japi Bertzdei Chumingo Osorio,” shown at the August exhibition displaying the works of a painting contest organized by the Colocadora Nacional de Valores. The work’s title is a phonetically distorted emulation in Spanish of the words “happy birthday.” Such a distortion of language evoked a Caliban-like appropriation of the foreign and its regurgitation, as well as its occurrence along specific class lines. For the drawing displayed a modest middle class interior, where a small family reunion had gathered to celebrate the boxer’s birthday, including the aforementioned athlete, a respectable looking woman, a partygoer with a hat blowing some candles, and Condorito. The latter work is reproduced in Galaz and Ivelic’s *Chile Arte Actual*, in page 307.

<sup>298</sup> Leppe also participated in the exhibition and in the last critical review before his untimely death, Romera wrote with praise that Leppe’s combination of Pop influences, seriality and figuration “constitute, in my understanding, a paradigm of the creative imagination in service of artistic evolution.” Antonio Romera, “Gráfica y dibujo,” *El Mercurio*, June 29, 1975.

<sup>299</sup> In early 1975, Dittborn sent two drawings and a painting to the competition “El Sol,” obtaining the third prize. His next series of paintings was titled “En las aguas” (In the Waters), but the works were not exhibited as a group at the time. Some of them appeared in group shows of contemporary painting in 1975 and 1976 at the Instituto Cultural de Las Condes. The works were finally shown as a group in 1983, along with four new paintings, which according to Dittborn had been made between May 1975 and August 1976. In a text on a publication of Galería Sur of 1983, Dittborn explained that the paintings corresponded to a series made exactly before his 1977 exhibition of paintings “Final de Pista.” It is interesting that only when Chilean art had reincorporated painting as a conceptual trend (in opposition to the “Transvanguard” styles that were emerging at the time in Italy, the United States and Chile as well) that Dittborn decided to show works which seemed too Pop, too sentimental (as demonstrated in the titles derived from popular “boleros”: “Contigo en la distancia” (With You in the Distance), and “Sabor a mí” (Taste of Me), among others). For Dittborn’s text, see the publication by Galería Sur, *Arte & textos*, no. 1 (1983), no page number.

<sup>300</sup> “La isla” and “El verano” are reproduced in *Fugitiva*, in pages 34-35 and 36-37. “El verano” was also reproduced in the article “La muestra del tesoro,” *Revista Hoy*, July 6-12, 1977, 32-33.

enlarged, disfigured, and compressed in a manner similar to the 1974 drawings.<sup>301</sup> Working with thinned and dried acrylic, which Dittborn increasingly smudged onto the canvases, the paintings seem like colored drawings, the fibers of the canvas visible like a second grid imposed on the objects.

Yet even though Dittborn emphasized the framing devices, adding a second series of painted frames and borders in the canvases and delineating his subjects, the painted bodies seemed to tend towards a state of liquefaction. Thus the series of popular subjects such as bathers and divers proudly posing in fake holiday backgrounds for an invisible camera in their old-fashioned outfits, goggles, and fins, seemed to ooze liquids from their borders, being presented in a state of decomposition while surrounded by equally distorted and often fantastical looking creatures. An overall sense of absurdity permeated the paintings, as well as a lack of glamour: these were not David Hockney's flat renditions of well-to-do bathers and pools, but humbler personages combining cartoon-like faces and deformed bodies. In Dittborn's paintings Pop art was passed through a third world sieve, or to paraphrase from Romera, the artist was creating a "baroque figuration" lacking the sleekness of the truly commercial.<sup>302</sup>

In the 1974 self-portrait, Dittborn had created an image of painting as a male bourgeois activity based on imitation. But by the end of 1975, the caricaturesque distortions of objects in his paintings, the images' origins in popular culture, the collapse of depth, and the negation of tactility through the images' submission to a graphic approach announced a deprecation of this tradition. Not only was three-dimensionality and illusion sacrificed in the paintings but the use of repetitive patterns, grids,<sup>303</sup> and photographic models to conform the bodies suggested an elimination of artistic development and creativity. Reveling in laughter and ugliness, cultivating excess through body images of the popular classes, the seriousness and grand gestures of painting were reduced to a sterile, exaggerated and artificial endeavor based less on creativity than on repetition.

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<sup>301</sup> This effect was doubly visible in "La Mano" of 1976 taken from the series "Por un solo pez" (All for one fish), where a linen tablecloth with a blue grid pattern was used as a support.

<sup>302</sup> Antonio Romera, "Crítica de arte: Concurso El Sol," *El Mercurio*, March 23, 1975. If the recourse to figuration, ornament, and the flatness of the colors brought to mind some of the visual strategies of advertisement and commercial culture, there were disturbing elements in the represented bodies and their non-descript surroundings. While the posing figures smiling dumbly at the viewer suggested a middle-class self-complacency in moments of leisure, their decomposing body parts, the use of strained faces, fumes, and caught bait, suggested instead an underlying violence performed to the body. In "La sombra" (The Shadow) a goggled thirties swimmer whose extremities were elongated as rubber bands, held in a gigantic hand the blown up leg of another swimmer straining to touch bottom, with a smiling black shadow offering a visual balance.

<sup>303</sup> The series "All for one Fish" from 1976, for example, featured sportsmen and divers subjected to a series of grids and charts. In "La Mano" (The Hand), a diver's distorted body is further decomposed and classified according to a basic vocabulary of shapes, colors, and letters, suggesting a "painting by numbers" approach. The work is documented in *Fugitiva*, in page 39.

### 3.2. Blowing-up the Limits of National Art: “ofchileanpainting,history” and Topography

The three strands of Dittborn’s work –the flattening of the body with grids, the joining of high and low culture imagery and formal means, and the using of art history as a battleground-, were brought together in 1976. In May of that year Dittborn exhibited ink and pen drawings in a show entitled “delachilenapintura, historia” (ofchileanpainting, history) at Galería Época. As suggested by the title and its dislocation of proper word order, this was an inverted history featuring in nine large scale drawings a gallery of individuals: portraits of painters, boxers, swimmers, an indigenous man, and bathers presented as the founding fathers of Chilean art. While the previous exhibitions of 1974 had turned to Goya and European history as a model, “delachilenapintura, historia” was directed at a local experience of art, focusing on the history of Chilean painting and its marginal figures.<sup>304</sup>

Such an alteration of the historical was found in the naming process involved in this narrative endeavor. The names of renowned Chilean painters from the past alternated in the drawings with invented designations that immediately set a tone of satire. Canonic painters of the Chilean landscape, such as Tomas Somerscales (famous for his marinas) and Alfredo Valenzuela Llanos, appeared alongside imaginary characters such as Don Capacho Condorcueca in individual portraits, which had the character of popular religious prints (fig. 3.7).<sup>305</sup> The latter’s last name combined the words “condor” and “cueca,” two emblematic elements of national identity, the Andean eagle and a traditional national dance from the Central zone,<sup>306</sup> as if countering through an excess of patriotism the name’s lack of a true origin. The drawing also included a subtitle in one of its vertical margins, “pintor de la patria vieja” (painter of the old nation), a reference to a period of

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<sup>304</sup> The drawings were accompanied by the small catalogue *delachilenapintura, historia* (Santiago: Galería Época, 1976), in which a false dedication written by Dittborn yet signed under the fictive name of Tomás Espina was followed by a short manifesto signed by the artist titled “La tortilla corredora” (The Running Omelet) consisting of 14 points. Though the text’s title has been usually translated as “the running omelet,” in the catalogue it appears as longer and ironical, using run-ins and colloquial expressions: “Latortilla correDoraaaaah, catorce tumbos.” Dittborn’s text ended with a long dedication to personal friends, family, as well as artists past and present, real and imagined, writers, magazines, burlesque shows, and even objects of popular culture such as the container of a cola beverage. There is a second catalogue of the exhibition, *Dittborn, dibujos* (Santiago: Galería Época, 1976), which was published and presented a few months after the exhibition took place. This second publication contains texts by Richard and Ronald Kay, and I will be referring constantly to both texts, since “La tortilla corredora” does not appear in the second catalogue and Kay mentions the photograph of Vadell which was fully published in the first publication yet appears cut off in the second. Another important aspect to note is that the first catalogue is still closely tied to caricature in terms of its interior illustrations, whereas the second shows a preference for photographic models.

<sup>305</sup> The complete title of the drawing was “Don Capacho Condorcueca, Cachivaches,” the term “cachivaches” alluding to trifles, bric-a-brac and junk that had been accumulated and serves no purpose. The work is documented in *Fugitiva* in page 60 and also appears photographed along with Dittborn at the galley in the article “Historia de olvidados,” *Revista Ercilla*, May 19, 1976, where the large scale of the drawing can be discerned.

<sup>306</sup> Cueca is a dance consisting in the chase of the female dancer by a man, whose role can be interpreted as that of a cock.

transition in Chilean history from Hispanic rule to an early Republic between 1810 and 1814, known as the early battles for independence whose leaders were immortalized in the portraits of José Gil de Castro. If “real” history lacked enough painters, Dittborn was constructing new ones out of comical combinations.

Fabulation was everywhere present and emphasized. Other drawings such as “De los 832 Kgs., Fábula” (Of the 832 Kgs., Fable), subtitled “12 Best Chilean Painters of all Eras” (fig. 3.8),<sup>307</sup> presented a gallery of half-length portraits of a fictional pictorial family.<sup>308</sup> The nominal labels under each portrait reflected ironically on painting and naming as dubious forms of representation as in the case of “quimera espejo” (Chimera Mirror), thus undermining the historical task seemingly undertaken by Dittborn. Other names revealed ties to historic local ones belonging either to the oligarchy (as in “resplandores baquedano”) or referring to popular subjects, as in “sebastian yumbel,” which as analyzed by Ronald Kay in the catalogue that followed the exhibition was a combination of a southern town’s name and its patron saint.<sup>309</sup> Even though the personages’ names were invented, they resonated with truth as they indirectly alluded to the mixed origins of Chilean art, evoking for example the passage of foreigners who had painted the landscape, as in the case of the English Thomas Somerscales, either while residing in Chile or as part of exploratory voyages.<sup>310</sup>

Most of the names were treated as interchangeable signs, pointing to a stereotyping of identity markers. In “Pioneros de la Acuarela, Encomienda” (Watercolor Pioneers, Parcel), of 1975 (fig. 3.9) European sounding last names such as Meyer, Wilson, Shutze were joined to a string of familiar diminutive first names resulting from multiple combinations of the same five letters: chito, choti, ticho.<sup>311</sup> Although the title mentioned nine pioneers, the drawing presented only three of them, the roundels of the other six portraits featuring empty as if to be filled in with endless combinations of the

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<sup>307</sup> “De los 832 Kgs., Fábula” is documented in *Fugitiva*, in page 56.

<sup>308</sup> Dittborn’s titles also tended to confuse proper word order. As demonstrated in the exhibition’s own designation, Dittborn was rearranging the syntax of the titles by introducing a “coma” that separated the phrases into two parts, with the second part marked by a capital letter. Epic, Model, Fable, Titles, and Synopsis were some of the terms that followed the comma in the individual works’ titles, breaking the continuity of the storytelling. The strategy not only altered the sense of causality of the ‘history’ evoked, but invoked a method of work consisting in re-assembling pieces of meaning. Words were treated as interchangeable signs, similar to the sources of the images and their photographic poses.

<sup>309</sup> Ronald Kay, “Proyecciones en diferente escena,” *Dittborn, dibujos* (Santiago: Galería Época, 1976), no page number. Kay called the “painter” a “profane saint,” an idea that resonates with the drawings’ similarity to religious prints and prototypes.

<sup>310</sup> The importance of foreign names in the formation of Chilean art and its landscape had been demonstrated in an exhibition at the Institute of German Culture in June 1975, which exhibited drawings and watercolors by 19<sup>th</sup> century German painters who had joined scientific explorations around the still “new” continents. The critic Romera described the artists as “traveler painters” who were the first to establish a bridge between European and local art. Antonio Romera, “Exposición de pintores alemanes en Chile,” *El Mercurio*, June 8, 1975.

<sup>311</sup> “Pioneros de la Acuarela, Encomienda” is documented in *Fugitiva*, page 57.

same names.<sup>312</sup> Identity was constructed as generic, the category of painter or watercolorist or even of ‘pioneer’ as some form of matrix or genus leading to multiple repetitions and variations, and the proper name less a stable marker pointing to an original identity between the subject named and the name than an entry into a system of classification.<sup>313</sup>

The concept of the matrix was made evident in Dittborn’s departure from the cartoonish vignettes of his latest exhibition, focusing instead on different forms of portraiture derived from photography. The bust portraits, three quarters and frontal poses of standing figures set against relatively blank spaces, with the neutral background interrupted only by arrows and graphic markers on the sides, annotations, and minor figures, all involved photographic conventions from frames to poses. “Cuadros de honor” for example, drew from roundels featuring bust portraits of important personages, while “Pioneros de la Acuarela, Encomienda” (Watercolor Pioneers, Parcel) was derived from the society pages of magazines and newspapers. This derivative aspect was underlined in the second catalogue published five months after the exhibition’s opening, where the models of the portraits were displayed, revealing their media derived sources: magazines from the 1930s, that Dittborn collected in street fairs and flea markets.<sup>314</sup> Genus and genealogy were linked in Dittborn’s works through the portrait as a visual convention at the center of classificatory systems.

Though the drawings’ figures were taken from photographic models, the identity of the original models was subjected to several processes of displacement.<sup>315</sup> The first included a change of name and the second a graphic distortion of the model’s face. In the work “Monet en Limache, Topografía” (Monet in Limache, Topography), of 1976 (fig. 3.10),<sup>316</sup> the frontal portrait of a mustached man was identified in the title as the Chilean painter Alfredo Valenzuela Llanos, yet in the catalogue a photograph of the Prefect of

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<sup>312</sup> Kay referred to this form of construction of both the name and the face as a form of “condensation,” a term derived from Sigmund Freud’s analysis of dream formation in his *Interpretation of Dreams*, which Dittborn had indirectly stated as an influence in his first catalogue text.

<sup>313</sup> I will return to the discussion of the proper name in relation to Dittborn’s 1977 exhibition and his delinquent portraits. Yet it should be noted here that in his catalogue text, Kay had included an extract from Jacques Derrida’s *L’Ecriture et La Difference* dealing with the notion of difference and repetition, indicating his knowledge of French Deconstruction methods, though he made no comment in the nearby passages on the proper name.

<sup>314</sup> Besides the texts of Kay and Richard, the second catalogue published by the gallery, *Dittborn, dibujos*, showcased fragmented reproductions of collages, photographs, texts used as models or referents by both the artist and the writers, along with partial images of the exhibited works. All the images were framed and intervened by a series of graphic markers, as if the catalogue displayed a portion of the artist’s tool box. The catalogue was presented as if it were part of a gallery opening, and received negative commentaries from the press mostly on its hermetic language (particularly from Nena Ossa, who became director of the National Museum of Fine Arts, and the critics associated with *El Mercurio*). See Nena Ossa, “Miscelánea,” *El Mercurio*, November 7, 1976.

<sup>315</sup> Even though I will refer to Dittborn’s publications under the auspices of V.I.S.U.A.L. as catalogues, since they function as such by giving information on the works exhibited and including some critical commentary about them, they can be also considered as examples of an artist’s book, in so far they are conceptual works in themselves offering much more than an illustration of the exhibition.

<sup>316</sup> “Monet en Limache, Topografía” is documented in *Fugitiva*, in pages 54-55.

Santiago, don Joaquín Pinto Concha, appears as the model.<sup>317</sup> This printed reproduction in turn is shown next to a photograph used by Marcel Duchamp for the catalogue of the 1942 exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism* as his own “Compensation Portrait,” substituting Duchamp’s own image with the photograph of an emaciated woman from the Depression era taken by Ben Shahn.<sup>318</sup> The inclusion in Dittborn’s catalogue of Duchamp’s appropriated image accentuated the notion of displacement present in the former’s drawings, reasserting the methodology of slippage used by Dittborn in terms of authority and authorship, original and copy. Interestingly, the photos appear in Kay’s text yet he made no mention of the original author of such a gesture, the only connection to Duchamp being a small text in English referring to the “First Papers” exhibition whose source is not stated.<sup>319</sup> Such a displacement of the author-figure suggests both an indifference and paranoia regarding origins both in the work of Dittborn and Kay as the artist’s main theoretical supporter.<sup>320</sup>

Several drawings brought into tension the question of origins and originality of the mythical and real artists referred to. In “Monet in Limache, Topografía” the comparison of the local painter Valenzuela Llanos to Monet in the title suggested a stylistic identification or affinity between the Chilean example and its French counterpart. Yet the parallel also derided the ‘native’ version of Impressionist landscape by locating ‘Monet’ in a marginal colonial outpost, a mock Fontainebleau. The title ringed with farce, an appropriation and injection of Western history into a remote region that also reduced the importance of Valenzuela Llanos in local history to a displaced imitation of foreign models.<sup>321</sup> The history of Chilean painting was played out in the drawings by a series of foreign artists or by derivative locals whose names were not even worth remembering, as stated in a caption below the displaced portrait of Valenzuela Llanos.

A second form of distortion of the original was achieved through the exaggerated expansion of the portrayed body. As in the previous exhibitions, the human body was subjected to a flattening of forms, with faces and limbs spread out on the page as if they

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<sup>317</sup> “Monet en Limache, Topografía” is also partially documented along with its sources in Dittborn’s catalogue *Dittborn, dibujos* (Santiago: Galería Época, 1976), no page number.

<sup>318</sup> For the catalogue, Duchamp had replaced the conventional author portraits for photographs of other people.

<sup>319</sup> In his text, Kay appropriates several other sources in English and French, from Benjamin to Derrida on the question of photography, painting, imitation, including their textual sources. The lack of direct mention of Duchamp is interesting for, as will be discussed in relation to Leppe’s work, the Duchampian model was fundamental in the conceptualization of Chilean art.

<sup>320</sup> This anxiety can also be perceived in Justo Pastor Mellado’s text “Revista Manuscritos y la coyuntura catalogal de 1975” on Dittborn. No matter how exhaustive in its analysis of the material procedures used by the artist in the catalogue for “delachilenapintura,historia,” Mellado forgets to mention the inclusion of Duchamp’s appropriated photo. Mellado in a way is still following the “invention” of origins made by Kay and Dittborn, particularly through their use of Vostell, as will be discussed in the following section.

<sup>321</sup> Alfredo Valenzuela Llanos (1869-1925) traveled to Paris in 1901 with a grant from the Chilean government to study in the Academie Julien. Llanos stayed in Paris until 1906, absorbing French Impressionism, *en plein air* painting, and certain aspects of Post Impressionism. On his return in 1910, Valenzuela Llanos was hired as painting professor in the Academy of Fine Arts.

had been passed under a press, a relation that was emphasized by the inclusion of press supports placed on the noses of some characters as in “Marinero Somerscales, Estampa” (Somerscales Sailor, Engraving) of 1975 (fig. 3.11).<sup>322</sup> In the individual portraits, the painters’ noses were elongated to Pinocchio-like proportions, invoking an element of untruth in painting and representation. The multiple forms of regular hatchings and crosshatchings that combined to make up the faces and bodies of the figures, and whose imitation of shadows and volume was rendered artificial because of their magnification and patchwork assembly, underscored such a fallacy.<sup>323</sup>

As noted by Kay in the catalogue, the repetitions and mechanical aspects of Dittborn’s drawings were emphasized in the application of lines “subjected to the control of the set square and the ruler that regulated it.”<sup>324</sup> Nelly Richard also emphasized in her catalogue essay the prescriptive results of the repeated lines, along with the moiré effect, grids, and vectors assembled in each page, assigning to them the restrictive connotations of an imposed system. But while Kay related the effects of the “weave”<sup>325</sup> thus created back to photography and particularly to photogravure used in the media, as a way of giving the portraits a form of ‘objective’ appearance, for Richard these lines were strictly repressive.<sup>326</sup> But it can be argued that the hatchings as a form of regulation also suffered from the process of amplification and juxtaposition. Their controlling effects were undone in their manifest artificial reduction of forms into patterned lines and the distorted bodies they gave life to, which not only seemed to expand beyond the borders of the drawn frames but to mock the regulatory effects of the grids in their distorted curves and amorphous planes. In Dittborn’s drawings the grid as a modernist device of control and objectivity,<sup>327</sup> was systematically blown up so that its confining effects as a means of

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<sup>322</sup> “Marinero Somerscales, Estampa” is documented in *Fugitiva*, page 61.

<sup>323</sup> This is what Kay called “the multifaceted complexion of their semblance” in his catalogue text.

<sup>324</sup> Ronald Kay, “Proyecciones en diferente escena.”

<sup>325</sup> In Spanish, “trama” refers to a series of crossed lines, yet has multiple connotations as being part of a weave, a weft, but also a structure. Trama is also used in theater as a plot.

<sup>326</sup> Mellado has also noted Richard’s emphasis on “regulation and restriction”, though he relates it to a new materialism of the political left in Chile (in which he should be included, particularly because of the materialistic approach of his own texts and analysis of the printed page with all its graphic nuances). Even though Mellado has been one of the first Chilean critics to go back to primary sources in recreating the scene of the 1970s and early 80s, countering the “canonical” readings offered by Richard as well as Galaz and Ivelic, my most important disagreement with his interpretations come from the emphasis Mellado places on the political disputes among artists, his tendency to generalize about the political situation in Chile along party lines, and his disregard for the relationship between the artists, their works, and the specific events unfolding around them. This type of information is noticeably absent in the case of his own analysis of Dittborn. For Mellado’s complete interpretation of Richard’s text, see Justo Pastor Mellado, “Revista Manuscritos y la coyuntura catalogal de 1975,” posted on June 2003 in Justo Pastor Mellado webpage, [http://www.justopastormellado.cl/gabinete\\_de\\_trabajo/articulos/2003/20030714.html](http://www.justopastormellado.cl/gabinete_de_trabajo/articulos/2003/20030714.html) (last accessed April, 2010).

<sup>327</sup> Rosalind Krauss has spoken of the grid as a modernist trope designed to eliminate any form of subjectivity, narrative, and illusionism. See Rosalind Krauss, “Grids,” *October*, no. 9 (Summer 1979): 50-64.



binding difference and demarcating boundaries through static coordinates, could be called into question or put on hold. Finding in the repetition of the grid a source of collapse, Dittborn was defamiliarizing the body while scrutinizing and spatializing it at the same time.

A great part of the comic effects in Dittborn's drawings drew on the grid's implosion. The caricaturesque aspect of the figures was derived from corporeal distortion arrived at through graphic means, particularly the obsessive repetition of lines, dots, and patterns, which were appropriated in their regulatory action but taken to the limits of their resistance. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari related a similar strategy of magnification of the grid and the portrait to a form of "deterritorialization" in their analysis of Kafka's "Letter to the Father" in *Towards a Minor Literature*. Revising psychoanalytic theory while attempting to undo what they considered to be its oppressive, unilateral understanding of desire and meaning, Deleuze and Guattari argued for a form of escaping Freud's oedipal complex without resorting to some other form of origin. For Deleuze and Guattari, such a flight could be possible if the father figure was not the final arriving point for the subject's neuroses but rather, if his image was expanded and graphed onto the whole world like a distorted, blown-up photographic map. They described their goal as the securing "a blowup of the "photo," an exaggeration of it to the point of absurdity. The photo of the father, expanded beyond all bounds, will be projected onto the geographical, historical, and political map of the world in order to reach vast regions of it."<sup>328</sup> According to Deleuze and Guattari, what this blow-up effect would achieve was a defamiliarization of what seems normal, fixed and self-contained, overflowing the boundaries cutout by the photograph's frame by reproducing the mythical father's enlarged visage "into the world instead of reterritorializing everything into Oedipus and the family."<sup>329</sup> For the authors such an action would reveal instead of a family lineage a series of expanding family configurations, a more complicated series of connections between father and son that would help to loosen up and disseminate the idea of an original source.

In Dittborn's 1976 drawings, the father figure as embodied in the patriarchs of Chilean painting was continually replaced by similar deformed portraits proliferating endlessly, their identity displaced and unstable. If their physical bodies were presented as fabricated, made up of multiple sources and evidently a representation, the emphasis on the proper name as a fundamental aspect of a subject's representation and identity was also questioned. The juxtaposition of history and fable, of truth and invention in the artistic patriarchs' names and anatomies evoked the role of myth-making in historical accounts of art, as noted by Richard in her catalogue text. But while Richard offered as a cause of this "mystification of history"<sup>330</sup> the absence of a coherent narrative of art in the local context, she failed to account for this lack and the need of reinventing or parodying such origins at the moment. If the historical fathers' disparate sources suggested a

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<sup>328</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Towards a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 10.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Richard, "Delachilenapintura, historia: recorrido," *Dittborn, dibujos* (Santiago: Galería Época, 1976), no page number.

dubious lineage and an “imposture” in the Chilean history of painting, Dittborn’s critique of the father figure and the proper name was tied to a larger context of dispute regarding origins and history.

Dittborn’s manifest interest in a patriarchal lineage appeared in the context of the military regime’s recuperation of artistic forefathers in a series of exhibitions and public programs that took place in 1976.<sup>331</sup> In May, the Cultural Institute of Las Condes mounted the show titled “Siglo y medio de pintura chilena: desde Gil de Castro al presente” (Century and a half of Chilean Painting: from Gil de Castro to the present), which presented works by familiar names in the national pictorial pantheon. The history exhibited started with early 19<sup>th</sup> century portraits of generals followed by 19<sup>th</sup> century seascapes and landscapes sprinkled with a few genre scenes attesting to provincial customs, ending with few abstract works that passed from the renovated form of geometric abstraction of Vergara Grez to the distortions of Chilean landmarks such as the mountains in Nemesio Antúnez.<sup>332</sup> The most contemporary works ended on a mildly Surrealistic note, with Matta and Enrique Zañartu (1921-2000) marking the high points of what Waldemar Sommer described in *El Mercurio* as the “spontaneous, the magical”<sup>333</sup> in art.

The exhibition’s opening was made to coincide with the arrival of the OAS (Organization of American States) delegates meeting in Chile that year, and it was quickly followed by other shows celebrating the historical development of Chilean artistic achievements. “Contando a Chile a través del paisaje” (Narrating Chile Through its Landscape)<sup>334</sup> organized by the Sociedad Nacional de Bellas Artes, opened on June 4 and was followed in June 6 by the show “Panorama del Arte Contemporáneo en Chile” (Panorama of Chilean Contemporary Art) organized by MAC (Museum of Contemporary Art). The conjunction of the political event, which placed Chile and its humanitarian issues on the frontline, with these openly dedicated artistic tributes to the American States’ delegates not only demonstrated how art could be placed in the service of political validation but also how certain representations were considered more effective to do so than others. In the shows, landscape painting featured prominently, presenting a postcard image of Chile as a peaceful land to the exterior world.<sup>335</sup> Delegates of OAS visited the

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<sup>331</sup> It must be noted that there were other art exhibitions concerned with recuperating Chilean achievements in painting, which were organized earlier in 1975 by different cultural institutes that functioned during the dictatorship under the guidance of the military. The exhibitions were the retrospective of the Montparnasse group at the main campus of the Catholic University, the retrospective of Alfredo Valenzuela Llanos at the Sala La Capilla of Providencia’s Cultural Institute, and the retrospective of Onofre Jarpa (1849-1940) at Las Condes’ Cultural Institute. Valenzuela Llanos’ retrospective is particularly interesting to mention in the context of Dittborn’s work and the prominence he gave to the painter in his own “history.”

<sup>332</sup> The works shown by Antúnez were “Volcán” (Volcano) and “Cordillera Adentro” (Within the Cordillera).

<sup>333</sup> Waldemar Sommer, “Chile en su arte,” *El Mercurio*, June 11, 1976.

<sup>334</sup> That these shows coincided and were dedicated to the OAS meeting, was immediately captured and replicated endlessly by the press. See, for example, “Meritorio despliegue de la pintura chilena,” *El Mercurio*, June 20, 1976.

<sup>335</sup> This re-presentation was supported by a physical improvement: trees were planted on several main avenues to enhance the aspect of the city in anticipation of the OAS conference. The theme of the city and

shows a few days before Henry Kissinger, then on an official visit to Chile, declared that the United States of America had enough power to intervene with arms in the Southern hemisphere.<sup>336</sup> As if to explore more deeply the location where he was directing this menace, a photograph in a related article of *El Mercurio* published two days later showed Kissinger touring the Museum of Fine Arts and its special exhibition “South Salon” of works from the south of Chile.<sup>337</sup>

The series of exhibitions culminated in September with the Museum of Fine Arts’ retrospective of Juan Francisco González (1853-1933), a middle-class painter who had introduced a vernacular form of Impressionism to Chilean painting.<sup>338</sup> The Museum’s exhibit exalted the work of a marginal artist who then came into a position of prominence in the academy during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was beginning to be regarded as an early promoter of a type of abstract gesturalism by some critics. Nevertheless, the show focused on González’ native inspired works which offered peaceful views of rural Chile, images that in the present context offered a nostalgic account of the landscape.

Curiously, all the exhibitions visually supported the underlying argument of a book on Chilean painting written by Gaspar Galaz and Milan Ivelic the previous year and published in early 1976. Working in a more historically accurate manner than Romera had done in his previous publications on the art of Chile, Galaz and Ivelic’s thesis in *La Pintura en Chile, desde la colonia hasta 1981* (Painting in Chile, from the Colony to 1981) established a continual line of development in Chilean painting from its origins in the colonial portraits made by Gil de Castro (1785-1841) and culminating in the work of González.<sup>339</sup> The book was able to create a story of progressive steps towards an emancipation of painting from foreign influences while simultaneously moving towards a more abstract, expressionist and materialistic form of painting. By placing González at the end of this history, the authors tacitly posited him as the antecedent for the following 20<sup>th</sup> century developments, including Balmes’ Grupo Signo.

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its renovations is dealt more extensively in Chapter Four. See, “Ornato de la ciudad,” *El Mercurio*, May 27, 1976.

<sup>336</sup> A *New York Times* article of June 1976 by Tom Wider stated that the United States of America had a dual politic regarding Chile, at once friendly and severe. Parts of the article were quoted after the OEA meetings reached dual agreements on how the Chilean state both guarded and trampled human rights. See “La OEA reconoce que Chile asegura los Derechos Humanos,” *El Mercurio*, June 17, 1976, and “NY Times”: una política doble hacia Chile,” *El Mercurio*, June 18, 1976.

<sup>337</sup> The show was the “Salón Nacional Sur” (National South Salon) showing paintings and graphic art organized by the newspaper *El Sur* of Concepción.

<sup>338</sup> The exhibition opened on September 15, 1976, four days after the celebrations of the coup’s anniversary. The exhibit was sponsored by Banco de Crédito e Inversiones (Bank of Credits and Investments), one of the many partnerships that would be established in Chile between the new neoliberal policies and the official cultural world.

<sup>339</sup> The author’s book *Chile Arte Actual* of 1986 could be considered a continuation of the same project including, nevertheless, all the other mediums that the 1976 book had left behind.

Such a historical progression was also the guiding thread of a television program aired on the official national television channel in 1975 titled “Chilean Painters.”<sup>340</sup> The main characteristic of the show was its use of fast-paced animations to recount the history of Chilean art and its relation to the world. During the show’s first five minutes the concept of art and its universal importance were introduced, arguing for art’s common basis on a human impulse that had first made its appearance during Paleolithic times. This culminated in Western masterpieces of Goya and Ingres, arriving to its contemporary version in Picasso. After establishing this basic lineage, the program linked the history of (Western) universal art to that of Chile and begun its first chapter with the dawn of the Republic. With a rapid pace and lively animations that were inspired equally by high and popular culture by mixing reproductions of well known works of art, comic figures such as Superman, and caricature, the show commenced its fifty minutes of narrative with a section titled “precursors” starting with Gil de Castro, followed by four chronologically arranged sections that culminated in the so called “last promotions” which included Dittborn among its ranks.<sup>341</sup>

By beginning with Gil de Castro, the show repeated the paradigm asserted in the 1976 exhibitions of Chilean art being born out of a political necessity of emancipation, a device manifested in the depiction of the strong fathers of the nation since the end of the colony.<sup>342</sup> Downplaying the fact that the history of Chilean painting had started out not with an autochthonous painter, but a ‘mestizo’ from Peru who had learned his technique from European masters and found more work in the newborn Chile than his native Peruvian viceroyalty, the recuperation of Gil de Castro by official cultural institutions during the dictatorship was more attuned to the portrayal of a patriotic body politic started by authoritarian father figures struggling to define an independent national identity. Resorting to them was a way of giving shape to tradition while legitimizing the present, a recourse that resembles Homi Bhabha’s description of the pedagogical discourse, where the identity of the nation is displaced from the locatable forms of difference within the territory named the ‘nation’ to a homogeneous past. According to Bhabha, this a past is shared by all those inhabiting the same space, even though ‘tradition’ is taken from the past experiences of only a few.<sup>343</sup> Thus the painters privileged in these histories of national art were those who offered clearly recognizable

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<sup>340</sup> The show aired on Saturday, March 29, 1975 in Channel 7, National Television of Chile. The director of the film was Eduardo Ojeda, yet the Museum of Fine Arts acted as the advisor of the project, selecting the works shown. The tape was shown again in May, 1975, after a conference organized in relation to the exhibition of Spanish and Chilean painters at the Museum of Fine Arts. In a related action, the filmmaker Sergio Bravo made a documentary in 1975 titled “Chile-Painters-Today.”

<sup>341</sup> After the Republic, the show continued with the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, passing through the Academy and its foreign influences, the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the first half of the twentieth century, and finishing with works from the 1960s and early 70s.

<sup>342</sup> To give just one example of this interpretation concerning Gil de Castro’s role in the formation of Chilean art, an article describing the 1976 exhibition “Siglo y medio” spoke of the painter as “incarnating in his personages the civic fervor of the emancipation struggle”. See the article “Chile en su arte,” *El Mercurio*, June 11, 1976.

<sup>343</sup> Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

images of a shared, preexisting culture that was coherent and natural, offering a picture of the “nation-space”<sup>344</sup> as a collective enterprise and a cohesive whole through emblematic landmarks, distinguished public personages, or local customs. In this patriarchal discourse, art was regarded as a form of narrating the nation and reproducing its image, dismissing Chilean dependency by invoking notions of universality. This discourse also turned attention away from the contradiction posed by Gil de Castro’s origins regarding internal difference by centering on the subject matter of his paintings and refocusing on tradition.

Dittborn’s exhibition of drawings mocked such histories and the traditions they aimed to install by underscoring instead the derivative aspects of Chilean identity and its negation of difference. The drawing “Así Quedaron, Sinopsis” (And That Was That, Synopsis) (fig. 3.12),<sup>345</sup> operated as a mock compendium of the conflicting sides of the histories being celebrated, by bringing together disparate “natural” subjects that posited in the midst of a European-inspired pictorial practice the “cultural liminality within the nation.”<sup>346</sup> Different stages of Chilean history were compressed in the page, starting with the famous late Romantic oil on canvas painting “La Perla del Mercader” (The Merchant’s Pearl) of 1884 by Alfredo Valenzuela Puelma (1856-1909), part of the permanent collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, where an odalisque is unveiled by a Turkish merchant to a possible buyer (or viewer). In Dittborn’s drawing, the plump, demure nude was replaced under a derogatory subtitle (“the little pearl”) by a contemporary woman posing in a bikini at the beach, an ordinary and contemporary Olympia of sorts smiling forcefully for the camera. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century academy was also present in a written allusion to Pedro Lira (1845-1912), a traditionalist aristocratic painter who became the academy’s director and was known for his refined, loose technique.<sup>347</sup> The academy’s basis on idealization and noble themes was mocked in a stenciled caption underneath a representation of a whale drawn mostly through parallel lines that read: “Pedro Lira, try painting this whale!”

The contradictory beginnings of Chilean painting were referred to in the figure of Gil de Castro, whose stand-in was the only painter represented. Dressed up in a plain suit and bowtie while holding a brush, Gil de Castro was depicted wearing a headband characteristic of indigenous groups in Chile, staring at the whale and nude as if contemplating his bastard offspring. A final reference to Chilean popular traditions was the inclusion of Condorito, who joined the gallery of portraits of plain looking individuals from a target-like roundel, like their patron saint.

If the drawing acted as a compendium of Chilean history, it invoked it as a juxtaposition and confusion of the ordinary with the realm of high art, positing the indigenous as a founding element. As noted by Richard and Kay in the exhibition

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<sup>344</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 142.

<sup>345</sup> “Así Quedaron, Sinopsis” is documented in *Fugitiva*, in pages 62-63.

<sup>346</sup> Homi Bhabha, “Dissemination,” in *The Location of Culture*, 148.

<sup>347</sup> The painters Alfredo Valenzuela Puelma and Pedro Lira were described in one of the reviews of the 1976 exhibitions as “the great luminaries that light paths of perfection” who had brought Chilean art to a stage of maturity. See Sommer, “Chile en su arte.”

catalog, the “true” painters were replaced by athletes and indigenous people who usurped the former’s tools, appearing as doubles that brandished the palette and brushes as pictorial insignias conferring authority to their bearers.<sup>348</sup> According to Richard, the “official” position of some painters in Dittborn’s drawings, as in “Watercolor Precursors,” was denoted instead through the use of the roundel “operating as frame,” which accorded distinction, different from the “usurpation of identity”<sup>349</sup> performed by the anonymous locals, whose only mode of entry into “history” was through the appropriation of art’s symbols and signs. Classifying them as “popular types” characterized by “stereotyped ethnic features,”<sup>350</sup> Richard’s interpretation pointed to these figures as general signs of marginality, standing in for those who have not been part of official history. In Richard’s view, Dittborn’s project would thus be one of giving voice and image to those who have been silenced by historical narratives, providing a body and a face, as well as a space I would add, in the Chilean pictorial pantheon.

While Richard’s “restorative” argument is persuasive and points to the ethnographical bent of Dittborn’s work (since the artist set out to graph or map the ‘other’ and speak for it, giving it a name), it skips over several material aspects of the artist’s procedures.<sup>351</sup> For the ‘marginal’ bodies displayed in the drawings evinced on one hand the same distorted treatment of the more aristocratic examples, suffering comic elongations and alterations due to their graphic composition. If this was a “restorative” history, it also disparaged its “low” components: both representatives of high and low were caricatured and questioned in their claims to authenticity and originality.

On the other hand, Richard also argued that the faces and bodies were treated as types, giving way to a classificatory mode of interpretation of the Chilean social landscape. Dittborn’s strategy was in this sense archival, quasi-scientific, or what Kay referred to as a “typological atlas,”<sup>352</sup> and documentary, not only by resorting materially to found photographs but also to certain physiognomic coordinates that could locate the bodies in distinct social levels. But if these were “types” (painter, indian, boxer/athlete, model, for example), their “essence” or basic descriptive characteristics were presented as tainted and inadequate. Kay pointed in this direction when he described the

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<sup>348</sup> Dittborn had stated in relation to the show that “all are painters if they have the implements of such.” María Johanna Stein, “La nueva historia de Eugenio Dittborn,” *El Mercurio*, May 16, 1976.

<sup>349</sup> Richard, “delachilenapintura,historia, recorrido,” *Dittborn, dibujos*.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>351</sup> Mellado has countered Richard’s restorative argument by arguing that Dittborn’s strategy of incorporation of the popular is a representation of “spectral” class conflicts (“la espectralidad del conflicto de clases”). Mellado’s argument is not new nevertheless, and is tacitly based on Kay’s own interpretation of the marginal subject’s appearance on the media as their only form of public recognition (a view that does not divert too much either from Richard). While Mellado’s discussion of *delapinturachilena,historia*’s catalog and his own interpretation of Dittborn’s work is greatly based on Kay, his most important contribution to the literature comes from his materialistic analysis of the correspondence between text, images, and works in Dittborn’s oeuvre. For a detailed analysis see Justo Pastor Mellado, “Eugenio Dittborn: la coyuntura de 1976-1977,” posted on March 3, 2005, in Justo Pastor Mellado webpage, <http://www.justopastormellado.cl/edicion/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=212> (last accessed April 14, 2010).

<sup>352</sup> Kay, “Proyecciones en diferente escena.”

construction of the portrayed faces as “disconnected moments that are supported on intermittent gestures, bruised, hybrid, lost, diffused, erratic, which in the page’s area just begin to “mestizar”, to individualize and question, conforming an archive of the tangled demography of the Chileanness analyzed.”<sup>353</sup> Even though Kay did not develop this point further and turned back to the typological division of characters in Dittborn’s works, the tension forged between the fixation of an identity and its undoing was played out not merely at the level of the face, but in the multiple spatial markers and references connected to the figures. For the bodies represented in Dittborn’s works were constantly localized, territorialized within specific confines through the use of the name, text, and graphic marks.<sup>354</sup> In this sense, Dittborn’s works were cartographies of bodies as much as corporalizations (or “portraits”) of spaces, and performed a constant passage from one medium to the other, suggesting a close affinity between spatial and bodily representations as parts of a process of self-definition.

If in most drawings the human body was placeless in terms of inhabiting mainly white pages, Dittborn relocated the figures by tying their physical representation to other spatial markers. These spatial representations could be textual in nature, as in the drawing “El Ñauca, Epopeya” (El Ñauca, Epic) of 1976 (fig. 3.13),<sup>355</sup> which represented the deformed frontal portrait of an indigenous Araucanian tribe leader, wearing the headband exhibited by the mock Gil de Castro in the compendium drawing. The indigenous man also held in his distorted hands a brush and palette, continuing with the idea of appropriation and displacement of the painter’s tools. Stepping forward like a Greek kouros while ironically dressed in tight athletic shorts, the figure was the only one in the series speaking, with a bubble containing a well-known text in stenciled words.<sup>356</sup> The text belonged to the first Canto of the epic poem *La Araucana*, written in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga, a Spanish soldier and poet who traveled to Chile in 1557 and formed part of one of the earliest military campaigns in the territory.<sup>357</sup>

The poem celebrated the battles between the Spanish conquistadors and the indigenous race of the Araucanos they encountered in the south of Chile and in a seemingly impartial manner described the latter’s racial characteristics, particularly their resistance, in relation to their location. In the paragraph quoted by Dittborn, Chile is described as a fertile territory, marked by its geographical location in the most remote

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<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> This statement goes against many interpretations of Dittborn’s works where the blank spaces are emphasized (in Richard and Valdés, for example). While it may seem counterintuitive, the blank page acts itself as a frame for the figure, which appears like a specimen of the flora and fauna of a place in a botanical album or atlas.

<sup>355</sup> “El Ñauca, Epopeya” is documented in *Fugitiva*, page 65, and appears along with its sources in Dittborn’s catalogue, *Dittborn, Dibujos*.

<sup>356</sup> Mellado, Kay, and Richard have connected the “presence” of indigenous people to sports as one of the few social instances in which their names and visages could appear in the public realm. As Dittborn’s later work attests, another of these forms of appearance was delinquency.

<sup>357</sup> Interestingly, “la Araucana” refers in Spanish to a female noun, while “la Araucanía” as a territory was also gendered in the poem.

area of the world, the Antarctic region. According to the poem this rich land “produces” from time immemorial<sup>358</sup> brave and great people, bellicose and passionate about their freedom, people who have never been subjected by foreign rule.<sup>359</sup> Following ancient climatic traditions for understanding races, while covering them in a patina of historical accuracy and first hand documentary information, Ercilla defined the men’s predisposition for armed conflict as a trait forged by the coarseness of the terrain and climate. In other words, the inhabitants were as much part of the landscape as produced by it.

While visual references to the landscape were absent in Dittborn’s drawing, except for a small donkey parallel to the indigenous man which seemed to negate the natural ‘untamed’ domain to which the figure belonged, the national territory was described only through the text and the body that seemed to rise from it. The text was thus underlined in its capacity to produce a space and a people historically, just like Ercilla’s poem gave textual form to a battle of identities, instituting an image of otherness opposed to the European which helped justify the latter’s conquest and “civilizing” mission.<sup>360</sup> Writing was equally an act of violence against that body, another form of inscription and conquest.<sup>361</sup> Ercilla for example described in the first canto a race of fighters living in a land guided by the Roman god Mars, whose ferocity in battle had even managed to keep the Incas and their stretching empire at a distance for centuries. But in Ercilla’s account, these pagan men found their match in the will of the courageous Spanish conquistador Diego de Almagro who, like a modern apostle, wanted to spread the faith in Christ to the furthest corners of the known world. This encounter between pagan and Christian, wild and civilized, marked the beginning of a series of battles that, until Ercilla’s return to Spain in 1559, had only brought a moderate “pacification” of the southern territories.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> Mellado has been the only critic to mention how the title’s term “ñauca” is an Araucanian word adopted in everyday slang to mean “from an ancient time,” as in the expression “al año del ñauca.” See, Justo Pastor Mellado, “Revista Manuscritos y la coyuntural catalogal de 1975.”

<sup>359</sup> “Never has a king subjected/Such fierce people proud of freedom/Nor has alien nation boasted/E’er of (Antwerp, 1597), *The Araucaniad*, trans. and ed. Charles Maxwell Lancaster and Paul Thomas Manchester. (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1945). Ercilla’s poem was quickly published in Spain and Holland, appearing in Antwerp first in Spanish and then translated into Dutch.

<sup>360</sup> This was an “ennobled” otherness, which justified the Spanish inability effectively to tame” and trespass what became known as the “frontier” (la frontera), referring to the south of Chile.

<sup>361</sup> Derrida referred to this violence in his work *Of Grammatology*, where he spoke of the efforts of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss to communicate and teach how to write to the Nambikwara. For Derrida, writing was like the tracing of a road, like the creation of a map, a penetration into wilderness: “writing as the possibility of the road, of the rupture, of the *via rupta*, of the path that is broken, beaten, *fracta*, of the space of reversibility and of repetition traced by the opening, the divergence from, and the violent spacing, of nature, of the natural, savage, salvage, forest. The *silva* is savage, the *via rupta* is written, discerned, and inscribed violently as difference (...).” Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 107-108.

<sup>362</sup> This situation remains one of Chile’s most important ethnic conflicts. More will be said in chapter Five on the dictatorship’s own attempts at “colonizing” the south and the laws passed to “redistribute” and give titles of land “ownership” to the Mapuches in particular.



Dittborn's drawing brought together more than just a restoration of marginal specimens as argued by Richard, but different forms of inscription of a historical contest over identity and space. As made visible in the drawing, specific bodies and the discourses surrounding them within a contended location enacted the representation of this battle of cultural supremacy. In colonial discourse, the landscape was fundamental in making visible and understandable for the European audience the origins of the peoples involved in the narrative. But while Ercilla documented the landscape and the people it bred as an immutable source of identity, Dittborn reworked the landscape as a place of projection and transactions. In "El Ñauca, Epopeya" this encounter was rendered as occurring between a European gaze and voice, dematerialized except as discourse, and the distorted projection of the Araucanian body. Exposed in his semi-nakedness like the merchant's pearl, the Araucanian's ferocity that bloomed in the southern rugged lands as described by Ercilla was translated into the accouterments of a 1920s boxer, displacing one form of violence and aggressiveness to a more neutralized and contemporary terrain.<sup>363</sup> Even though the Indian was given tools for representation in the form of the painter's palette and brush, he appeared as repeating the words of others, unable to represent himself.

While the reference to the landscape as an artistic space of colonial projection was suggested by both Ercilla's quote and the indigenous man's display of a palette and brush in the drawing, painting the Chilean landscape was nevertheless a 'later' historical development. As demonstrated by the regime's exhibitions of 1976, local painters began representing the landscape only after it had been relatively subjected to European control and the Chilean republic had emerged, a process of dominion which, as noted by Kay, had involved a prior stage of mapping and topographical analysis as tools for delimiting, exploring and gaining control over the territory.<sup>364</sup> Such an intimate relation between art and the control of space was suggested in Dittborn's work "Pioneros de la acuarela, Encomienda" (Watercolor Pioneers, Parcel), where the word "encomienda" originally referred to an institution established by the Spanish crown whereby the conquistadores were awarded for their services a group of indigenous people living in their newly acquired lands, who owed the 'encomenderos' a tribute, often given through labor. Dittborn's 'invented' foreign pioneers of watercolor thus substituted for the 'historic' pioneers who received in exchange of their civilizing endeavors their own piece of the land, including its inhabitants. The representation of the landscape through watercolor, a medium prized for its quickness and, as shown by Svetlana Alpers, used as a drawing (graphic) technique in northern Europe,<sup>365</sup> was thus coupled with possession.

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<sup>363</sup> The importance of the territory in shaping the bodies cannot be understated. Even the journalist Johanna María Stein spoke of the indigenous man in "El Ñauca" as being in a state of "symbiosis with the rugged Andean chain." See Stein, "La nueva historia de Eugenio Dittborn."

<sup>364</sup> Mellado was the first historian to note how the painter Gil de Castro had been a topographer in the Peruvian military before becoming a painter, thus joining the traditions of mapping space to mapping the fathers of the nation. Justo Pastor Mellado, "Historias de transferencia y densidad en el campo plástico chileno (1973-2000)," in *Chile 100 Años. Tercer período. Transferencia y Densidad* (Santiago: Museo de Bellas Artes, 2000), 20.

<sup>365</sup> "Watercolor is a medium that effaces the distinction between drawing and painting, and it was primarily employed in the interest of immediacy of rendering." Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing. Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 158.

A similar role to that of landscape painting as a producer of spaces and identities was suggested for topography in Dittborn's drawings. Derived from the Greek "topos" and "graphos" for "tracing of the land" or "drawing a place," topography shares an inscriptive and descriptive function along with drawing, writing, and mapmaking. Descriptive in so far it attempts to generate a picture or image as faithful as possible of the object perceived, and inscriptive in the more material aspect of marking a surface. In its transcription onto a flat surface of a three-dimensional location, topography delineates and inscribes the contours of a specific place, tracing as if it were its portrait.<sup>366</sup> This graphic connection was developed in the work "Monet in Limache, Topografía," where the centrally placed portrait of the 19<sup>th</sup> century landscape painter Valenzuela Llanos was surrounded by flat charts, diagrams, and abstract annotations that attempted to illustrate and trace, as if in a topographical elevation, the portrayed and his oeuvre. Inverting the subject/object relation between painter and landscape, Dittborn turned the visual language of topography onto the former,<sup>367</sup> using vectors, contours and profile views to describe the relief of a man. The result was an abstracted and disjointed portrait where the painter was analyzed and graphically described as if he were a distant town or a coastline, including many of the "landmarks" in his own life.

As in maps, words played an important function in Dittborn's topographical view of the painter. The portrait was framed at the bottom by the painter's name, "Alberto," and above by his supposed weight "64 kilos," words that seemed to provide factual information about the subject through their contiguity. A list of words that went from adjectives (solitary, romantic, fervent, adored) to nouns (landscape artist, painter, yesterday, Picunche, Chilean) were laid out on a crossed-out grid below the portrait while the painter's life and accomplishments, also summarized in words, were transferred to a series of curving lines, as if his identity could be isolated and distributed evenly over a tabulated space. The painter's oeuvre was reduced to random and commonplace words whose meanings were either too broad to recreate the work (sunsets, Paris, grass, small cow, lots of sun), too specific in their references to Chilean traditions (as in the line from the national anthem: "pure breezes"), or too colloquial an expression to describe any particular thing ("uf!", "uy!"). Just like in topography the land's relief is flattened out through its translation into graphic marks and words, the local Monet's body and corpus of work was subjected to a process of displacement and visual reduction. The inability of language to fully capture the subject was underscored, with discourse as a system of correspondences questioned, and the trust placed in representation tested. If in the works' titles the disruption of syntax challenged the notion of narrative as sequential and instead

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<sup>366</sup> The connection between landscapes and portraits is mentioned by Svetlana Alpers in the context of Vermeer's work "The Art of Painting." The author sees a physical relation established between the model's face and the map next to her so that "the mapping of town and country are compared to the delineation of the human visage." Alpers nevertheless then states that "Vermeer disclaims any identity" by clearly separating the human figure from the map. See Alpers, 167.

<sup>367</sup> Dittborn explicitly stated in his catalogue text that he "owed his drawings to the use by negation, of structures such as the commercial advertisement, the topographic elevation, the didactic plate, the survey plane, and the inventory, in such a way that when these structures loosen, dislocate, and disarticulate, they will enter in disaccord with themselves." Dittborn, "La tortilla corredora," *delachilenapintura, historia* (Santiago: Galería Época, 1976).

underlined the conventional and constructed modes of associating meanings with signifiers, then the drawings enacted the dissolution of conventional systems of identification.

The faith in representation and in the correspondence between things and their meaning was also alluded to in a minor reference to photography and its relation to painting, particularly that done *en plein air*. The inclusion of the word “clic!” in the chart suggested the sound of a shutter, the blink of a mechanical eye that attempts instantaneously to capture a sight. In its replication of the world, the camera frames and seems faithfully to describe a particular view, taking as it were a ‘portrait’ of the thing. But if the action of the camera could be compared to the rapid ‘in situ’ work of the Impressionist painter, the native Monet in Dittborn’s drawing, the ‘click’ sound suggested immediacy in the relation between subject and object, an indexical directness of the object leaving its physical imprint on a surface that a painting could not reproduce.<sup>368</sup> To the implied question: what was to be the fate of painting if photography could do the work faster and more objectively and become an object of profane faith, Dittborn answered in an epithet on the drawing: “of Valenzuela Llanos it is not worth even remembering.” The phrase established a contradiction in terms regarding both the purpose of Dittborn’s own history and of the portrait as a mode of memorialization of the painter, suggesting a complicated relation to national memory.

As forms of tracing an object, writing, drawing, landscape painting, topography, and even photography were joined in Dittborn’s works of 1976 as producing and codifying spaces and subjects. Each medium and practice translated the surface appearance of an object into an inscribed image, offering a piece of knowledge about the world. It was to this relationship between different forms of visual inscription that Ronald Kay turned his attention to in his first text on Dittborn’s work, published in the 1976 catalog. His theories regarding photography and topography would prove fundamental in the interpretation of graphic arts employed by Chilean critics and artists alike in the following decade. But there is an underlying theory of identity in Kay’s writings, one that connects spaces to bodies that, while also influencing the works of artists during the late seventies, has not been dealt with explicitly by critics. A comparison between how Kay understood American identity and Miguel Rojas Mix’s 1972 work on graphic art in the New World offers a view of the differences in approaches to the subject within the context of the dictatorship, as well as the continuing problem of defining national identity.

### 3.3. Ronald Kay, Miguel Rojas Mix, and the Reproduction of the Social Landscape.

Rethinking space and the bodies within it became part of Ronald Kay’s project for the next four years in relation to Dittborn’s work. The basis of his analysis was the catalogue text he produced for Dittborn’s 1976 exhibition, which reached its culmination in the 1980 publication of *Del espacio de acá. Señales para una mirada americana*

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<sup>368</sup> From the collages of Cubism to Rauschenberg’s combines, and in a Chilean context to the well-known incorporations of everyday materials by Balmes and Brugnoli as discussed in Chapter One, painting had proven in the twentieth century how close to reality it could come. Allan Kaprow took this blurring of boundaries further in his text “Assemblages, Happening, Environments,” which was published in the catalog accompanying Vostell’s September 1976 exhibition at Galería Época, as discussed below.

(From this Space: Signals for an American Gaze). In the former, Kay proposed a reading of Dittborn's work articulated on three main threads: mechanical reproduction as embodied in technical drawing and photography, the reproduced body as the crystallization of corporeal gestures, and the role photography played in displacing painting as a medium for representing the New World. Kay's readings were affected by his own travel in Germany and contact with Benjaminian literature, which he helped spread on his arrival in Chile in 1971 with his wife, the artist Catalina Parra.

In "Proyecciones en diferente escena" (Projections from a different scene) of 1976, Kay analyzed the cover of Dittborn's first catalogue published with the exhibition. The cover featured a photograph of the actor Jaime Vadell in the guise of an *en plein air* painter looking out at the camera while holding a palette and brush in front of an easel (thus imitating Dittborn's drawings). Kay focused on the theatricality and imitative aspirations of the image, based on the use of a well known Chilean stage actor to interpret the painter, the pose assumed by him, and the instruments of painting appearing as props for such a staging. Making a parallel between the actor as a model for the photographer and the gesture of translating something seen (the exterior world) into the canvas, Kay related photography to painting as both being imitative arts that capture appearances.<sup>369</sup> According to Kay, the intersection of photography and painting in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century led to a process of quoting from each domain: photography citing painting in its gestures, poses, and subject matter, while painting would have made use of photography's ability to capture what Kay cited as the "optical unconscious."<sup>370</sup> For Kay, Dittborn displayed this on the front cover, making the photograph an imitation of painting while the painter replicated in front of the easel the gaze of the camera.

Kay then turned to the mechanical aspects of Dittborn's drawings. Emphasizing Dittborn's use of mechanical instruments to draw parallel, repeated lines that created visual uniformity, Kay argued that Dittborn denied the subjective appearance of the artist's "hand" by making manifest the mediating aspects of his procedures. The "compulsive iteration of the regulating line"<sup>371</sup> resulted in a weave ("trama") similar to the grids used to create images in different forms of mechanical reproduction, such as photogravures. Through this grid the photographic image was thus able to enter social space, in so far it could be published in the printed media, receiving its sanction as a document through its public circulation. In a similar manner, Dittborn was able to make the subjects portrayed in his work enter the public domain through the use of the weave.

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<sup>369</sup> Kay did not mention how the pose mimicked Dittborn's own 1974 self-portrait as an easel painter. There are differences in terms of the poses, since the painter is turned to the model in the drawing, whereas in the catalog cover, Vadell is turned towards the photographer, evidently posing.

<sup>370</sup> Walter Benjamin first spoke of the "optical unconscious" in his essay "A Short History of Photography." The passage in which the term appears states: "Photography, however, with its time lapses, enlargements, etc., makes such knowledge possible. Through these methods one first learns of the optical unconscious, just as one learns of the drives of the unconscious through psychoanalysis." See Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," trans. Phil Patton, *Artforum* 15, no. 6 (February 1977): 46-61. Interestingly, Kay makes a reference in his text to Benjamin's mention of the optical unconscious in his later essay on mechanical reproduction.

<sup>371</sup> Kay, "Proyecciones en diferente escena."

The turning point of Kay's argument was based on the connection he made between the procedures, imagery, and graphic marks Dittborn used with the photographic visage. According to Kay, the mechanical weave of photography and technical drawing established a relationship of "homology" to geological formations in their layering and creation of visual strata. In the photographic portrait, a form of "topography in which a reading of physiognomy, the face, and the look arrive" could capture these strata.<sup>372</sup> Physiognomy was thus conceived as parallel to topography, both tracing the contours of a physical formation. This connection was manifested in the fact that the magazines from which the images came were "forgotten," outmoded, "buried" both in public memory and physically in the flea markets where Dittborn had scavenged them. But more importantly, for Kay this "burial" was social, for the subjects portrayed were "marginal" or, in Dittborn's own words, "forsaken losers."<sup>373</sup>

Kay organized the characters in Dittborn's drawings into three main groups: well known artists, those who achieve recognition only through a representational convention like the roundel, and those who manipulate the instruments of painting yet are not painters. The latter characters and their inclusion in Dittborn's "history" allowed Kay to propose that they did so because their only "work" was their body. Nevertheless this was a photographed body, a corporeality reduced to its reproduced image. These marginal subjects could only access history through their reproduced visages in sports magazines and ethnographical journals where their physical accomplishments or faces had been momentarily recorded and inscribed.

For Kay the most important part of the photographed body was the face and its features as vehicles of expression. The face became for Kay a site for the external manifestation of a subject's interiority, but also an indication of socially acquired conventions. The photographed bodies reproduced these learned gestures, which went from posing for the camera (what Kay called the "dermal petrifications of public ceremonials"<sup>374</sup>) to training the body for a sport competition, manifesting in their semblances a wide "gestural geography."<sup>375</sup> In his text, Kay was articulating a theory of the photographed body as an index and a ruin, reading it as a concrete sedimentation of history. The photograph acted as a trace of the past and presented it solidified as a fossil in its printed layers. For Kay, the trace that was most evident in Dittborn's drawings because of its very absence was a specific "historical space" in which these bodies lived, a space marked by the "catastrophe" of colonization.

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<sup>372</sup> Ibid. The passage is also based on Benjamin, though unlike the reference to the optical unconscious, the connection to Benjamin is not made manifest in Kay's text. According to Benjamin, "Photography opens up in this material the physiognomic aspects of the world of images, which reside in the smallest details, clear and yet hidden enough to have formal shelter in daydreams." Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," 47.

<sup>373</sup> Authorship in this case is hard to establish, since Dittborn wrote the introduction to *delachilenapintura, historia* and signed it as Tomás Espina. See Dittborn, *delachilenapintura, historia* (Santiago: Galería Época, 1976), no page number.

<sup>374</sup> Kay, "Proyecciones."

<sup>375</sup> Ibid. According to Kay, Dittborn's placement of the figures in blank pages removed any circumstantial evidence of place in order to better analyze their gestural expressions as geological formations.

Colonization had taken place not only through a war in arms. According to Kay, colonization had also occurred by way of the representation and occupation of the American territory in an “abstract system of notation and measurement.”<sup>376</sup> Kay related the presence of topographic markers in Dittborn’s drawings to the colonial organization of the new territories, particularly their assessment and distribution in maps, topographic elevations, and urban planning. These had eliminated and displaced the prior “heterogeneous” space inhabited by a variety of indigenous groups supplanting it with a uniform grid.<sup>377</sup> Colonization was thus a concerted act of graphically reorganizing space and its inhabitants within a regularizing system of horizontals and verticals, “evacuating”<sup>378</sup> the landscape as a space of origin of the locals. According to Kay, Dittborn’s drawings gave shape to that which had been displaced and ‘buried’ by colonization, giving rise as it were to a traumatic original scene: “By elevating topographically the zone that circumscribes and makes possible the figures, Dittborn reinstalls himself in what was traumatic in Hispano-American graphics, and then symptomatically, was redeemed by pictorial posterity.”<sup>379</sup> Dittborn’s “graphic apparatus” was thus a form of editing “the remembrance of forgetfulness,”<sup>380</sup> making visible what the colonizers had to eliminate from the terrain in order to make it their own: the bodies and the landscape where the former, as Ercilla had carefully noted in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, were born into.

The connection established by Kay between landscape, bodies, and graphic art as articulated on the basis of cartography and topography, suggesting indirectly a flattening of the landscape or its “evacuation” through its two-dimensional transposition, was not entirely new. Miguel Rojas Mix had already articulated a similar theory in 1970 in his book *La imagen artística de Chile* where he had reunited the graphic works of European travelers who had represented Chile from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>381</sup> But while Kay was interested in the displacement and elimination of the human figure in the Americas through the imposition of the Renaissance grid, Rojas Mix had investigated how foreign representations of the Chilean landscape and its inhabitants had molded specific conceptions and modes of looking at them. Rojas Mix’s analysis was thus “elevating” in his own topographical way what Kay (and Dittborn) proceeded to flatten.

Rojas Mix’s aim was to reconcile the images of Latin America in general and Chile in particular produced by and for the European mind, with the “cultural

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

<sup>377</sup> Kay also spoke of how the Spanish conquistadors’ rearrangement of space was a form of “collage and décollage,” an important reference to two artistic techniques that Kay had used in his own work in the *Quebrantahuesos*, a publication which reedited a 1950s poetic publication by Nicanor Parra, and which is tied to the reinvention of Vostell for local purposes as will be seen in the next section.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Miguel Rojas Mix. *La imagen artística de Chile* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria S.A., 1970), 49.

dependency” adopted by Latin Americans as a result of internalizing these images. For even though many of the engravings in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries had been produced by travelers *in situ* and were thus based on direct observation, Rojas Mix pointed to how most images were reproduced in Europe and readapted for other works, becoming a mutating and interchangeable matrix for future representations of both Chile and the American continent. According to Rojas Mix, becoming conscious and understanding the “particularities of [the Latin American being’s] infrastructure”<sup>382</sup> through its representations, offered a way out of this relation of dependency, a theme that as discussed in Chapter One was related to the theories advanced by the University where Rojas Mix was working in the early 1970s.<sup>383</sup>

Rojas Mix’s analysis was divided into four chapters related to four types of images: fantastical beings, men, landscape, and animals and plants. The work started with the series of imaginary beings that populated early cartographic representations and the travel accounts of 16<sup>th</sup> century Europeans, followed by their replacement in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by more ethnographically precise renditions of Chilean inhabitants. Rojas Mix then passed to the scientific descriptions begun by Alexander von Humboldt, ending with the wide-ranging *Atlas* composed by the French artist Claudio Gay (1800-1873) depicting popular types and entertainments found in 19<sup>th</sup> century Chile. The following three categories: men, landscape, flora and fauna, followed a similar layout starting with the presence of the fantastical, followed by a romantic conception, and finishing in slightly more scientific based works. According to Rojas Mix, the repetition of themes in each category reflected not only paradigmatic shifts in European culture, but also the overarching stereotypes regarding these ‘exotic’ lands. By the end of his analysis, Rojas Mix concluded on a pessimistic note: the iconography revealed a series of stereotypes that reduced the landscape to a homogenously tropical or rugged one that produced lazy, passionate, and inconstant men. This image was repackaged and sold to Americans in the present, as Rojas Mix’s example of Walt Disney’s Donald Duck confronting Latin American justice in a cartoon revealed.<sup>384</sup>

The difference in approach to the graphic representations of the Chilean territory between Kay with Rojas Mix is based on the varying sources used, pointing to the distinct relationships made by both authors regarding the landscape, knowledge, and power. Since Rojas Mix focused on the iconography of the engravings rather than methods or technologies, his analysis dealt with those physical characteristics of the landscape that were visible to the travelers, including the people. The question of

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<sup>382</sup> Rojas Mix, 49.

<sup>383</sup> It is interesting to note that Rojas Mix had occupied the central position in the publications of Universidad de Chile before the military coup, a position that Kay would also occupy during the dictatorship yet from a more marginal location, Departamento de Estudios Humanísticos (Department for Humanistic Studies), which was the only left-oriented space left in the university. The shift from a humanistic perspective (as seen in Rojas Mix’s *La imagen del hombre* catalogue) to a Structuralist mode was partly derived from this change of hands.

<sup>384</sup> Rojas Mix also used several cartoons and contemporary media images to further this point: from the 1969 cover of *The Economist* for Latin America featuring a Mexican with moustache and wide-brimmed ‘sombbrero’ looking at a Classical facade with the caption “tomorrow, tomorrow” and a cartoon from the French periodical *Spirou* depicting a couple of Mexicans taking ‘siesta.’ See Rojas Mix, *La imagen artística de Chile*, pages 36 and 38 for the images.

representation as understood by Rojas Mix revolved around making an illustration for a European audience of the ‘contents’ of these new lands and presenting them as organized categories. On the other hand, Kay focused on the graphic language that eliminated people and physical elevations from view as manifested in the illustration of a space to be occupied and reorganized according to European parameters in the form of maps and topographical representations. In this respect, Mix’s analysis was based on the works of Europeans who did not stay for the most part in the territories explored but continued their travels and returned safely home (with the exception of Gay). In contrast, the cartographic references that Kay made in his text belonged to two different stages: the first of knowing and measuring the landscape in order to conquer it, and a second stage of planning that resulted from permanent settlement.

Nevertheless, what both authors shared was the realization that these different types of graphic renderings had produced representations of the landscape and the people living in it that hid fundamental aspects of the territories depicted, whether it was through the stereotype in the case of Rojas Mix and or in the “evacuation of nature” for Kay. For both authors these graphic works acted as active sites of knowledge about the spaces they depicted, and both saw an intimate link tying topography to colonialism. In his attempt to study the artistic “topography” of Latin America,<sup>385</sup> Rojas Mix demonstrated how the engravings of travelers and foreign artists evinced a connection between the artistic renderings of the landscape as a source of knowledge about the new continent with that provided by topography as the “tracing of place.”<sup>386</sup> The clearest examples were those artist travelers who were specifically commissioned to produce illustrations of the flora and fauna of the territories for scientific and cataloguing purposes and yet whose plates combined the care of art with exact description. Yet as Rojas Mix explained, the act of recreating the landscape and its features was part of a larger colonial strategy, and the relation between fidelity to what was seen and its function varied largely depending on the images’ uses. As an example Rojas Mix pointed to how the “vedute” made by sailors had appeared earlier than landscape painting as a pure artistic genre in Chile, since the former had held “the same strategically importance as making a map.”<sup>387</sup> A similar need for the map could be seen in the conquistadors who, even though baffled by the myths surrounding the American inhabitants, when it came to “elaborating the means that would serve their colonial enterprise, [they] described reality with an outstanding precision and a practical spirit.”<sup>388</sup> According to Rojas Mix, this explained the colonial paradox in terms of representation: while the stereotypical images of places and men revealed that the European did not care to understand the reality of the new world until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ever since setting foot on the continent, they were intent on making precise maps of the lands in order to subject and control them.

For Kay though, the question of representation was not so much of coming to know the ‘other’ inhabiting the new lands, but to eradicate them from their surface. In

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<sup>385</sup> Rojas Mix, 36.

<sup>386</sup> Dittborn himself stated that drawing was “an expeditionary voyage.” Dittborn, “La Tortilla Corredora.”

<sup>387</sup> Rojas Mix, 42.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.



1979, when Kay published a revised version of his thesis,<sup>389</sup> and then in the 1980 publication of *Del espacio de acá*, he included in his text several photographs taken by the ethnographer-priest Martin Gusinde of the southern Yagan and Ona tribes which had been chased with rifles and slaughtered by the new settlers.<sup>390</sup> This was the “trauma” and “remembrance of forgetting” that Kay attributed Dittborn with “editing” in his works. This was an act of physical disappearance that for Kay could only be recuperated through displacement, which in his case meant the photographic reproduction of the others’ physiognomy and its contemporary edition.

Without directly expressing it, Kay was bringing elements of topography in direct connection to memory, establishing a parallel between the two. It could be said that while engraving and graphic arts, including map making and topography, share etymologically the concept of ‘tracing’ (from the Greek *graphos*), they perform a similar procedure of inscribing a particular image through a set of traces that act “like human memory itself.”<sup>391</sup> The notion of the trace as central to remembering can be tied to Freud’s Wunderblock, the mystic writing pad on which traces are made and only superficially erased.<sup>392</sup> The original traces would thus remain on an underlying waxy surface, which Freud related in a topographic manner to the operations of the unconscious. Kay made specific references in his catalogue text to Freudian psychoanalysis and the procedures of the unconscious derived from *The Interpretation of Dreams*, arguing that Dittborn’s work performed operations of condensation and displacement similar to those found in

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<sup>389</sup> There were two versions published that year. The first was an article entitled “América = Topo/grafía Foto/gráfica” published in the third number of the art magazine *Revista CAL*, associated to the gallery of the same name. The second was a catalogue text that was meant to be published in tandem with a programmed exhibition of Dittborn’s work at the Argentinean art institution C.A.Y.C. (Centro de Arte y Comunicación), an exhibition that was cancelled. Nevertheless, that same year Kay gave a talk on his theories during the first Symposium of Latin American Critics that took place in Buenos Aires. By 1979, for Kay it was not so much the act of mapping than the act of photographing as a “hunting down” or trapping, conquering the “indomitable” bodies and landscapes of the nation. See Ronald Kay, “América = Topo/grafía Foto/gráfica,” *CAL*, no. 3 (August 1979): 10-12.

<sup>390</sup> Martin Gusinde (1886-1969) was an Austrian priest who after studying natural sciences and theology in Austria, had taken a position as a teacher in Santiago at the Liceo Alemán (German Lyceum) in 1912. After taking a teaching position at the Catholic University, Gusinde became the department head of the State Museum of Anthropology. He participated in four expeditions to Tierra del Fuego in the southernmost territories of Chile, living with the Onas, Yaganes, and Alacalufes between 1918 and 1924. After his return to Europe, Gusinde published between 1931 and 1937 two volumes of his work, titled *Feuerland-Trilogie*. For a complete biography and related works of Gusinde, see *Germany and the Americas*, ed. Thomas Adam (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 469-470.

<sup>391</sup> The phrase is Edward Casey’s. Casey has made a similar relation between graphic arts and memory in relation to landscape painting in colonial North America. Seeing a connection between early landscape painters and their early employment as engravers, Casey states that “the linearity of engraving, transposed to topographic painting, is ideally suited to the aim of topography: the discrete exactitude of etched lines provides a precise and easily remembered representation of a given scene. An engraving fixes this scene in its literal traces. Like human memory itself, such a representation exists between perception and reflection; it both depicts and guides -and, again like memory, it does so by means of a network of traces.” Edward S. Casey, *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 9.

<sup>392</sup> Freud, “The Mystic Writing Pad,” *Standard Edition* 13, 176-178.

dreams.<sup>393</sup> Such a connection had already been established by Dittborn in his prior catalogue for the 1976 exhibition, where he had stated that the drawings were indebted to the “dramatic construction procedures used by the human unconscious,” using techniques such as displacement, inversion, condensation and “the multiplication of parallel times.”<sup>394</sup> Kay took this idea one step further by relating these displacement techniques to Benjamin’s “optical unconscious,” which allowed him to form a link between the photographic camera on which Dittborn’s images were dependent and the work of the unconscious as two systems that delve upon what lies hidden from ordinary perception.<sup>395</sup>

By joining psychoanalysis to Benjamin’s theories on photography, Kay was able to re-elaborate Rojas Mix’s humanistic thesis and relate it to a modern system of mechanical recording, making a graphic progression from cartography to photography. That such a technological invention had come to America at the same time that the south of Chile was being colonized and its inhabitants eradicated from their ‘original’ land was a point that Kay would make three years later and in a different intellectual context. For the time being, Kay was concerned mostly in a reading of Dittborn’s work that related graphic forms of representation, from maps to photographs, with the marginal subjects portrayed and the absence of them in mapping. Kay turned Dittborn into an archaeologist, excavating the traces of the Chilean unconscious while delineating its “clinical picture.”<sup>396</sup>

What Kay nevertheless failed to address in his text was that Dittborn’s psychoanalytical interpretation was performed at a moment when the identity of the nation was disputed on a daily basis on the media. Kay’s dependency on Benjamin’s ruins and historic traces kept his work tied to the past. It would be Kay’s wife, the artist Catalina Parra, who would connect topography and graphic arts to the current situation in a manifestly corporeal way in the October exhibition “Imbunches.” The closeness between Dittborn and Parra’s works, as well as their underlying references to both Benjamin and Freud, came about because of the collaboration between Kay, Parra, and Dittborn that began in 1975 with the publication of *Manuscritos* as well as the production of the artists’ catalogues under the name “V.I.S.U.A.L.”<sup>397</sup> Parra’s work exposed a

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<sup>393</sup> Kay saw the operation of “condensation” operating on the combinatory logic of names and the facial features of Dittborn’s portraits. According to Kay, the portrayed semblances were made up of a series of “ademanes” (gestures) which operating according to combinatory logic, made visible a “land register of the complicated demography of the Chileanness under analysis” (un catastro de la enrevesada demografía de la chilenidad en análisis). Kay, “Proyecciones.”

<sup>394</sup> Dittborn, “La tortilla corredora.”

<sup>395</sup> Interestingly, Rojas Mix also noted that the act of recording through graphic marks was connected to memory. The author stated that most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century engravings of the territory were made by travelers not trained as artists who wanted to “keep a memory of this voyage” but “lacking a photographic camera [the travelers had to] recur to pen and brush.” Rojas Mix, 34. While the reference was made in passing and not pursued thoroughly in his text, Rojas Mix associated engraving to the reproduction of the natural world offered by the photographic camera, an instantaneous form of fixing an image on a bi-dimensional plane.

<sup>396</sup> Kay, “Proyecciones.”

<sup>397</sup> *Manuscritos* was a publication issued by DEH (Departamento de Estudios Humanísticos) of University of Chile. The magazine was a literary and visual experiment directed by Christian Hunneus and edited by Kay which had roots in an earlier Surrealistic-inspired publication of 1952, *El Quebrantahuesos*, in which

different interpretation of the landscape, the body, and graphic arts, one where the flattened effects of graphics were given volume through their association to the human body and where an aesthetics of the seam allowed her to interpret what was one of the most important influences within the V.I.S.U.A.L. group: Wolf Vostell and his notion of décollage.

V.I.S.U.A.L. was derived in part from the series of experiments performed in the Department of Humanistic Studies (DEH) of the University of Chile on the couple's return to Chile from Germany in 1972. Kay had begun teaching at the center, which retained a degree of autonomy within the university and in which the writer Enrique Lihn also worked. Kay led in 1974 a series of performance works in the context of his seminars, which were attended by several students who would become important cultural actors in the following years, from the poet Raúl Zurita and the writer Diamela Eltit, both of whom would later form the collective group C.A.D.A., to the critic Adriana Valdés among others.<sup>398</sup> The actions were started in 1974 and drew from the series of guided readings that Kay led, which included texts by Antonin Artaud, Walter Benjamin, Arthur Rimbaud, Wolf Vostell, Joseph Beuys, among others.<sup>399</sup> On October 14, 1974, Kay directed an experience and event titled "Tentativa Artaud" (Artaud Tentative) (fig. 3.14)<sup>400</sup> in the context of his seminar "Signometraje" which had focused on Artaud's writings on theater.<sup>401</sup> Parra, Raúl Zurita, Juan Balbontín, and Eugenio García participated in an

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the poets Nicanor Parra (father of Catalina Parra) and Alejandro Jorodowski participated. In the first number of *Manuscritos*, homage was paid to *El Quebrantahuesos* by including parts of its different numbers in a collage-like composition. *El Quebrantahuesos* was a mural diary similar to a broadsheet, which was placed in downtown Santiago in front of the Tribunals of Justice. One of its main characteristics was the way it displayed "news" by cutting fragments from official newspapers and rearranging them in disparate and often ironic combinations. *Manuscritos* was deeply indebted to this earlier model, as the contributors made manifest, yet they gave it a Structuralist twist by including references to French literary theory in particular. In a review of the magazine in *El Mercurio*, José Antonio Cousiño qualified the endeavor as "hard to define," being both a magazine and a "spectacle," too ostentatious in its material and theoretical supports. See José Antonio Cousiño, "Manuscritos. Revista del Departamento de Estudios Humanísticos: Universidad de Chile, Sede Santiago Occidente No.1," *El Mercurio*, September 27, 1975.

<sup>398</sup> Two good references for the activities at the Department are the aforementioned interviews with artists and writers in *Filtraciones* by Federico Galende, and the recently published catalogue by Ronald Kay titled *Tentativa Artaud* (Santiago: Ediciones Metales Pesados, 2008) concerning one specific action whose (almost archeological) remains were reconstructed in an installation at the Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago in April-May 2008.

<sup>399</sup> As will become evident in Chapter Five, it is extremely ironic that in the 2008 catalogue *Tentativa Artaud*, it should be Raúl Zurita who stated that in Kay's seminar he first came into contact with Joseph Beuys. For since the formation of C.A.D.A. in 1979, its members (and particularly Zurita) have constantly stated that they did not know about Beuys. Even Kay did not mention the importance of Beuys until the year 2008. Why Kay kept these records all these years to himself remains contradictory.

<sup>400</sup> "Tentativa Artaud" is extensively documented in the catalogue *Tentativa Artaud* (Santiago: Ediciones Metales Pesados, 2008).

<sup>401</sup> The influence these readings would have on specific writers was important, as seen in the 1977 catalogue of Leppe, where Adriana Valdés constantly references Artaud, Dittborn's quotes of Artaud in the 1980 *Estrategias y Proyecciones de la plástica nacional en la década de los ochenta* (discussed in Chapter 6), and in the specific strategies employed by C.A.D.A.'s members Raúl Zurita and Diamela Eltit in their individual sacrificial performances.

action orchestrated by Kay, who acted as its shamanic director. In an abandoned room, Kay had installed microphones and a television set turned on randomly to a national channel. Some parts of the installation were covered with earth, which Kay used to make a line over the row of participants who were instructed to seat on the floor, watch the channel, and hear the strange sounds coming from the microphones. Only Zurita received special instructions from Kay, such as shouting at the end of the action in a heart wrenching manner.<sup>402</sup>

Though the work was only done five months after Leppe's "Happening de las Gallinas," its implications on the local scene were less immediate, mostly because of its taking place in a secluded room of the DEH building and without the participation of external viewers. Yet the consequences of Kay's continuous work in the dissemination of texts and interpretations regarding theater, live experiences, photography, and the body, would be much more enduring, as attested by the work begun in 1979 by Zurita in relation to C.A.D.A.'s art actions. Though I will argue in the following chapters that Richard had a crucial maternal role in the formation of the Chilean avant-garde, not only by "baptizing" the scene but by literally birthing it, the importance of Kay and the theoretically strong foundation he provided for artists based on international models should not go unnoticed.

### 3.4. Catalina Parra and Wolf Vostell: Tearing up the Body Politic

While Catalina Parra's 1977 exhibition "Imbunches" has received over the years much critical attention both within Chile and abroad, this interest has centered on the few exhibited works which directly relate to the exhibition's title and the mythical creature with sewn orifices it refers to. While these readings have varied from the political to the feminist,<sup>403</sup> all have focused on three main themes: sewing as a restorative act (and its opposite: fragmentation as violence), the "imbunche" as a mythical creature symbolic of the dictatorship's repression, and the use of images from the Chilean media as a challenge to official discourses on the nation.<sup>404</sup> Nevertheless, these readings have neglected two important aspects of the exhibition. First, the works that formed one third of the display and which connect what were regarded as traumatized bodies to specific locations: those concerning the landscape. Second, the direct influence of Wolf Vostell in

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<sup>402</sup> For a detailed description of the event, see the texts in *Tentativa Artaud*.

<sup>403</sup> The first interpretations could be said to be Dittborn's and Ronald Christ's texts in the same catalogue, passing through later readings, most notably by Nelly Richard, who has varied her position according to the moment of her own writing, passing from the political to the feminist as in *Masculine/Feminine/Practices of Difference(s)*, trans. Silvia R. Tandeciarz and Alice A. Nelson (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004). Other interpretations include those of Gaspar Galaz and Milan Ivelic, Julia P. Herzberg, and Justo Pastor Mellado.

<sup>404</sup> For a symptomatic example see Galaz and Ivelic's interpretation in their *Chile, Arte Actual* which starts "This exhibition appears to us today as an instance of an amplified work on the media" and then follows "One of the keys to access a reading of the exhibition was offered by its own title: "Imbunches"." Galaz and Ivelic, *Chile Arte Actual*, 181.

Parra's use of everyday materials, strategies of fragmentation, and more importantly the emphasis on subject matter dealing with disaster scenes.<sup>405</sup>

Such relationships were not noted in what is the most extensive and methodical art historical analysis of Parra's works, Julia P. Herzberg's 1992 catalogue essay for a retrospective of Parra in Lehman College Art Gallery.<sup>406</sup> Even though Herzberg traced the background of the artist's work starting with her stay in Germany between 1968 and 1972, and remarked on the influences of German Dada's political use of photomontage<sup>407</sup> as well as the exhibition *Information* at Kunsthalle Basel which allowed Parra to come into contact with "media-based art" and led her to create her first collages, she resorted to the same examples that use the "Imbunche" metaphor as their basis.<sup>408</sup> Furthermore, even though Herzberg placed great emphasis on the stay in Germany as formative for Parra's development of a new form of collage, she made no mention in her text of Vostell and the exhibition of his works which took place in the same gallery one month prior to Parra's and how it could have influenced the artist's dé/collaged version.<sup>409</sup> In this section I will attempt to bridge these gaps and propose a different reading for Parra's "Imbunches," particularly in relation to Dittborn and a conceptualization of the body through graphic means.

Parra's 1977 exhibition included twenty-four collages and mixed media works produced between 1971 and 1977. Most of the materials consisted of discarded industrial elements such as pieces of cord, plastic bags and objects from acrylic plates to Kodalith plates and X-rays, as well as screws, wire, zinc plates, and adhesive tape. Organic materials were also employed, such as animal hides, torn pieces of canvas and gauze, thread, and printed-paper, the latter mostly composed of photographic reproductions and newspapers. Several of the works included red and black thread with which parts of the collages had been sewn up in a rough manner and all exhibited a series of repeated actions in their making: sewing, patching, cutting, tearing, joining, wrapping, tying, and pasting. Objects as varied as pieces of zinc plates were wrapped in plastic and hung,

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<sup>405</sup> Mellado has been the only critic to establish a relation between Vostell's décollage and Parra's works, though he only mentions it in relation to the "sewing" act as discussed below.

<sup>406</sup> While Herzberg was the first historian to analyze the origins of Parra's work and strategies, besides a mention to the "map" of Chile (whereabouts unknown) she also neglected the landscapes found in the 1977 exhibition. See Julia P. Herzberg, "Catalina Parra: Reconstructions," in *Catalina Parra in Retrospect*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Lehman College Art Gallery, 1992), 7-22.

<sup>407</sup> Herzberg regards Dada's political bent as manifested in challenging "traditional aesthetics (...) by means of an alternative language, that non-traditional materials, such as found images from printed matter, should replace the easel, paint, and brush, and that art should express political injustice and dissatisfaction with the status quo." Herzberg, "Catalina Parra: Reconstructions," 7.

<sup>408</sup> In 1991, Ronald Christ also noted the explicit political intent of Parra's works, and asked Parra from where the political sensitivity came from, to which Parra answered: "I had all the tools (...) I acquired them in Germany." Ronald Christ, *New Installation* (New York: Intar Gallery, 1991), no page number.

<sup>409</sup> An interesting point that Herzberg does make, yet misinterprets, is the mention to the shared studio space Parra shared with Carlos Leppe in 1975. While Herzberg did not make much of this, and spoke of Parra as working in "isolation," it is important to note the connections established at the level of the body between the two artists and the fact that they shared a working space.

while patched animal hides were suspended next to collaged photographs mended or covered by filmy gauzes, and a bed with spikes held several lamb hides patched up with tape (fig. 3.15).<sup>410</sup> As a final ingredient, Parra illuminated the gallery with a modulated reddish light, creating a cavernous and menacing ambience,<sup>411</sup> described by Gaspar Galaz and Milan Ivelic as “a painful atmosphere inside the exhibition space.”<sup>412</sup>

The repetition of the sewing and patching gesture present in the works led critics reviewing the exhibition to immediately connect the artist’s methods to the “imbunche” tale alluded in the title. Parra’s inclusion in her catalogue of several definitions of the “imbunche” origins encouraged such a reading. The first came from the space of ethnography and etymology, a quote from Rodolfo Lenz’ *Diccionario Etimológico* (Etymological Dictionary).<sup>413</sup> “Imbunche” was defined as a word of Mapuche origin, derived from “ivum,” a term signifying a large thing.<sup>414</sup> The original author (Havestadt) quoted by Lenz stated that the enormous was associated to the monstrous, with the term “Ivumche” coming to signify a “man-beast” who, attended by ‘benefactors’ in a cave, had his orifices sewn as an infant (anus, mouth, eyes), being thus deformed and later serving as the witches’ own advisor.

The second definition provided by Parra came from a dictionary of Chilean sayings and it repeated the original stated by Lenz, alluding to the beings consulted by witches, while adding a second derivative meaning which refers to a ‘meddle.’ This definition was juxtaposed to a paragraph from José Donoso’s novel *El obsceno pájaro de la noche*, which extended the description of the sewn up body: “all sewn up, the eyes, the mouth, the ass, the sex, the nose, the ears, the hands, the legs. All sewn up, obstructed all the orifices of the body, the arms and hands imprisoned by the straightjacket by not knowing what to do with them, yes, they will be grafted in place of his members and the organs and the faculties of the boy that was going to be born: to extract the eyes and the voice and steal the hands and rejuvenate their own tired organs (...).”<sup>415</sup> In Donoso’s

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<sup>410</sup> A photograph showing the exhibition space can be found at the Museum of Modern Art library, under Catalina Parra, Artist’s File: miscellaneous uncataloged material.

<sup>411</sup> Critics of the time were the only to notice the light and its effects, a fact overseen by more recent writers on Parra. For a description see Johanna María Stein, “Catalina Parra: manos e imaginación,” *Revista Qué Pasa*, November 10, 1977.

<sup>412</sup> Galaz and Ivelic, 183.

<sup>413</sup> Lenz’ original name was Rudolf Lenz. He was born in 1863 in Halle, Germany, and studied philology in Bonn. He arrived in 1890 to Chile, to take charge of the Institute of Pedagogic (Instituto Pedagógico) on an invitation of the Chilean government. He became best known for his work in ethnography and folklore, publishing several books on Chilean pronunciation and use of language, the Mapuche language *Mapudungun*, and local customs. His most important conclusion regarding language in Chile was that Chileans used Spanish with Mapuche derivations and pronunciations. Interestingly, Lenz was the first author to treat the graphic works of the *Lira Popular* in a serious study, a work that is discussed in Chapter Four.

<sup>414</sup> The references can be found in Parra’s catalog, *Catalina Parra: Imbunches* (Santiago: V.I.S.U.A.L., 1977), 2.

<sup>415</sup> Donoso, quoted in *Catalina Parra: Imbunches*, 16. The inclusion of Donoso’s text in Parra’s catalog has been interpreted by Justo Pastor Mellado as explaining her methodology, which he understands as the

novel, the imbunche was a pretend deaf man who was thrown into a sack by a group of old women after being all sewn up and bandaged, to be finally left in an abandoned building soon to be demolished.

All sewn up: at the time very few critics and reviewers took up the image of the “Imbunche” for a metaphor of the nation and its repressive, censoring character.<sup>416</sup> Parra herself explained that while she and her friends had expected the show to be closed by the authorities, she was surprised that they had been incapable of “seeing” the allusions to a wounded body. It was only in the eighties that critics made explicit the associations between the “Imbunche” and the wounded nation. Galaz and Ivelic noted in 1988 that the “precariousness of the mends [made by Parra] over the social body made evident the frailty of the sutures that tried to join the pieces of the collective being.”<sup>417</sup> These later readings were based on the notion that the nation had suffered a fracture and the social body had been attacked and mutilated. For them, Parra was not only showing and trying to join these fragments together, to repair them, but was doing so in a metaphorical and oblique way. Such was the argument of Herzberg, who stated that Parra’s exhibition was “the first to show disguised political art during the Pinochet dictatorship,”<sup>418</sup> as well as Nelly Richard’s more general thesis of the works presented in 1977 being ‘elliptical,’ an argument illustrated in *Margins and Institutions* by one of Parra’s 1977 works. For Ronald Christ, who wrote in the exhibition catalog, Parra was performing a form of “silencing”, presenting ghosts during “noontime” while never literally pointing to them. For Christ, Parra’s work “rejects interpretation because its “subject” precedes meaning, precedes what many will see either as its “content” or understand as its “message.”<sup>419</sup>

Even though the works may thus seem to have been masked in a hermetic language, they operated in an in-between space of veiling and unveiling manifested physically and visually in the loosely joined threads that patched up the collages, the gauzes that disguised parts of objects and images, and in the ambivalent comments made by Parra at the time. Such ambivalence can be seen in the responses to the two emblematic works used as examples by critics, the collages “D.i.a.r.i.a.m.e.n.t.e.” (fig. 3.16) and “Diario de Vida” (fig. 3.17),<sup>420</sup> which brought Parra praise by the very

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“objectual extension of the notion of sewing,” since the result of the imbunche is a wrapped object, a parcel. See Justo Pastor Mellado, “Revista Manuscritos y la coyuntura catalogal de 1975.”

<sup>416</sup> Of the published criticisms of the time, only one mentioned that Parra’s works operated as “denunciatory texts,” yet did not elaborate on what was being denounced. See “Exposiciones. Catalina Parra,” in *Revista Paula*, October 25, 1977. Waldemar Sommer, the official critic of *El Mercurio* after Romera’s death, emphasized the “visceral aggressiveness” of Parra’s language. See Waldemar Sommer, “El espíritu de la materia en Catalina Parra,” *El Mercurio*, November 6, 1977.

<sup>417</sup> Galaz and Ivelic, 182.

<sup>418</sup> Herzberg, “Catalina Parra: Reconstructions,” 17. To this day, this has been the basic reading of Parra’s work abroad. An example of such persistence is the presence of Parra’s “Diariamente” in the 2008 traveling exhibition *Global Feminisms*, represented in the Political art section.

<sup>419</sup> Ronald Christ, “Preterite Ghosts,” in *Catalina Parra: Imbunches*, 20.

<sup>420</sup> “D.i.a.r.i.a.m.e.n.t.e.” is reproduced in Francine Masiello, *The Art of Transition. Latin American Culture and Neoliberal Crisis*, in page 220, while “Diario de Vida” is reproduced in Nelly Richard, *Margins and Institutions*, page 26. The latter is partially visible in the photographs taken by *El Mercurio* for the article

institution she was attacking. The first work used fragments of the newspaper *El Mercurio*, including an obituary column on the lowest part of the collage and a combination of different covers crudely stitched together with black thread, as well as parts of the newspaper masthead and date. Cutting across the word “daily” taken from an advertisement of subscriptions to *El Mercurio* from the same year, was a reproduced photograph of an unidentified couple.<sup>421</sup> The word “diariamente” in both title and advertisement alluded on a first level to the daily presence of the newspaper in Chilean homes, a theme of the quotidian reaffirmed by the advertisement’s inclusion of a loaf of bread made up of pages of the same newspaper, and the word “diario” commonly used to refer to daily newspapers.<sup>422</sup> But as Herzberg has aptly phrased it, while “this combination is seemingly innocuous,” the inclusion of the photo of the couple, whose features were slightly distorted by placing a Kodolith on top it, acted as “an oblique reference to the many who were disappeared daily (diariamente).”<sup>423</sup> Such an interpretation is complemented by Galaz and Ivelic’s comment that the images of the media and their physical supports were daily read and discarded, an indirect reference to the daily “disposal” of bodies by the military, treated in an abstract and inhumane manner.<sup>424</sup>

“Diario de Vida,” on the other hand, also played with the newspaper’s daily appearance and consumer society, yet included in its title a double entendre. “Diario de vida” referred to a journal as a personal register of daily occurrences, and yet the inclusion of the word “vida”, life, implied more ominous meanings. The work consisted of a large stack of *El Mercurio* newspapers, forming a large cube that had been tightly wrapped with cord and then submitted to a further act of pressure by encasing it between two acrylic plates and screwing them at the corners. The sense of confinement that came from both the accumulation of newspapers and the pressure exerted by the plates, was reinforced by the headline of the first newspaper (the only visible in the work) which, as

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“Catalina Parra: convierte a “El Mercurio” en objeto artístico,” published on November 6, 1977. Two other works dealing with *El Mercurio* advertisements are reproduced in Galaz and Ivelic, *Chile Arte Actual*, page 157, even though the authors do not address the specific works nor give their titles.

<sup>421</sup> Between 1976 and 1977, *El Mercurio* published a series of advertisements for subscriptions to the periodical. They featured the typed words: “diariamente” (daily) along three different types of images made up by the periodical: a loaf of bread, a bottle of milk, and a newspaper alongside a glass of milk and pieces of bread.

<sup>422</sup> As stated by Galaz and Ivelic, the complete advertisement read “diariamente necesario” (an everyday necessity), a phrase that indirectly could allude to the government’s own arguments that the removal of Marxist elements constituted a national necessity in terms of its ‘health.’ See Galaz and Ivelic, 183.

<sup>423</sup> Herzberg, 15. What has not been noted or dealt with by critics was the use of the same image in several collages, such as “diariamente: sin preocuparse más” (daily: nothing more to worry about), where the loaf was repeated nine times, stitched at the edges and then at the center right half hidden by a piece of white gauze. Out of the twenty-four collages, only four of them were titled “diariamente” and resorted to *El Mercurio* newspapers. The two works that are often illustrated yet never analyzed are “diariamente: condiciones sanitarias,” “diariamente: avisos económicos,” and “diariamente: sin preocuparse más,” which deal with a growing consumer capitalist society in Chile as well as its ecological and sanitary problems.

<sup>424</sup> Galaz and Ivelic, 183.



noted by Jacqueline Barnitz, announced a political crisis in France, exposing the newspaper's displacement of local problems to the exterior, performing an act of disavowal of the internal.<sup>425</sup> Such a disavowal was also remarked upon by Galaz and Ivelic (and later by Richard), who concluded that the strain on the newspaper, demonstrated its incapacity to tell the truth, "closing its pages and information, suspending its function, transforming the structure of the newspaper negating its identity as a means of communication."<sup>426</sup> Parra had thus succeeded in making an "imbunche" out of the newspaper, sealing off its surfaces and, according to Richard, illustrating "the way in which the media's monopoly of a single imposed truth distorts meaning."<sup>427</sup>

But the actual newspaper thought otherwise. In an interview with the artist, which included two photographs of Parra standing next to her work, *El Mercurio* celebrated the artist and her conversion of the periodical into an "art object." Parra playfully charged, "El Mercurio is an object that represents the daily life of Chileans. Just like sacks, or a plate of zinc, or a rabbit, or a wire,"<sup>428</sup> and went on to praise the newspaper for its graphic layout, particularly the advertisement for subscriptions. While the newspaper viewed Parra's choice of the periodical as a sign of its importance in Chilean life, a point of view that Parra encouraged during the interview, the artist set into work a play of double meanings that could be read equally as praiseful or critical of it. In the caption of the photograph showing Parra next to "Diario de Vida" the artist is quoted as saying: "with many *Mercurios* tied together, I evoke this life journal with a lock, so personal... this is the journal of a people."<sup>429</sup> Parra's phrase alluded both to the "objective" character of the periodical as a source of information (the newspaper as a journal), but also to its subjective (and therefore tainted and invested) renderings of reality, with the 'lock' functioning as both a sign of privacy and a symbol of forceful enclosure. Parra's reference to a "diary of the people" left the question open of who those people were, whether the forgotten and disappeared, those murdered, or those who read *El Mercurio*.

In the *El Mercurio* article, no mention was made of the works that evidently presented bodies and body parts, as in the animal hides, or their references through tissues and gauzes.<sup>430</sup> This evident absence could be understood as another form of disavowal, since Parra's exhibition abounded in bodies and their substitutes, particularly

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<sup>425</sup> The headline read: "Inminente crisis política francesa" (imminent political crisis in France). Jacqueline Barnitz, *Twentieth-century Art of Latin America* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2001), 290.

<sup>426</sup> Galaz and Ivelic, 183.

<sup>427</sup> Nelly Richard, "Women's Art Practices and the Critique of Signs," in *Beyond the Fantastic. Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America*, ed. Gerardo Mosquera (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996), 149.

<sup>428</sup> Catalina Parra in "Catalina Parra: convierte a "El Mercurio" en "objeto artístico," *El Mercurio*, November 6, 1977.

<sup>429</sup> Catalina Parra in *El Mercurio*.

<sup>430</sup> Luisa Ulibarri noted at the time "the sanded sacks suspended again over plastic, screwed to metal bars (...) insinuating the presence of static bodies, big, mutilated." In Luisa Ulibarri, "Exposiciones. Parra con nuevos frutos," *Revista Ercilla*, October 17, 1977.

skins as tangible phantasms of subjects no longer alive.<sup>431</sup> The most evident of these doubles for the creature's deformed remains was "Imbunche Gigante" (Giant Imbunche) of 1977 (fig. 3.18), a work consisting of large overalls made out of torn and patched canvas, its borders sewn, with the arms cut off and the legs tied up with small cords, hanging within plastic.<sup>432</sup> Similar to a tailor's mold, this graphic replica of the human corporeality was nevertheless emptied out of its original content, reproducing the body's contour and giving it life as mere skin. Lacking interiority and volume, and further denied access through the regular sewn threads on its borders, Parra's suit appeared as a hollowed framework, a body without a body, pointing to the limits of the corporeal, to its enclosure.<sup>433</sup> In a similar manner, several of Parra's hides and canvases, as in "A Walter Benjamin" (To Walter Benjamin) of 1977 (fig. 3.19),<sup>434</sup> were stretched out to their limits, converted into planar maps of the body, traces of the originals now flattened out to mere superficial layers, ironed shadows with closed edges which were then wrapped, masked, and exhibited.

The skins also resembled stains, making another reference to the human body. The earth colors of the "imbunches" furthered this association with a corporeal mark, however dried up and taut the skins were presented. They appeared as "open wounds," as Waldemar Sommer described the work "A Walter Benjamin,"<sup>435</sup> since there "still seems to be life in the half tanned fur."<sup>436</sup> As a stain and an open wound, both images suggested

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<sup>431</sup> Jacqueline Barnitz has made such an interpretation, pointing out that Parra's materials (burlap, sacks) "resemble corpses." Barnitz, 289.

<sup>432</sup> "Imbunche Gigante" is reproduced in the article "El anti-arte de Catalina Parra," *El Mercurio*, October 23, 1977.

<sup>433</sup> A similar problem of absence and presence, of missing bodies and their shadows, was proposed in "coffin capacity: one person," a collage made up of photographs of an excavated hole for tubing purposes that Parra and Kay had found while living in Germany. If the animal hides materialized through the absence of the interiors the death of the being within, making out of the animal a metaphor of the human and acting as deflated memories, the hole in the ground made concrete allusions to the missing body and to the grave as another form of containment. Julia P. Herzberg and Ronald Christ both analyzed the work in their catalogue texts.

<sup>434</sup> "A Walter Benjamin" is reproduced in Waldemar Sommer's review "El espíritu de la materia en Catalina Parra," *El Mercurio*, November 6, 1977.

<sup>435</sup> The work was dedicated to the family's cat of the same name, which had died that year amid intense physical pain. Parra described the cat and the work in several interviews of the time. The work was composed of a black plastic onto which had been spread and stitched two hides of small animals, as well as smaller gauze below the hides containing two reproduced images of the spoon with which the cat had been fed its medicine and Walter Benjamin's name reproduced in typography and covered with a Kodolith plate. The collage was entirely covered in transparent plastic and hung from a pole through a series of stitches. The cat's name also points to the closeness of both Parra and Kay to the works of the German author.

<sup>436</sup> Sommer, "El espíritu de la materia en Catalina Parra." The only work that was truly "alive" was "Espejo Humeante" (Smoking Mirror), an acrylic cage containing a piece of dough with amassed with yeast and water and wrapped in gauze. The cage was placed above a pedestal and had an inverted mirror on its top, which allowed the viewers to see its fermenting contents. The work is related, as "Diario de Vida," to process-oriented art forms, particularly "systems" aesthetics, bringing to mind the 1960's works by Hans Haacke as well as the systems proposals of the Argentinean group at C.A.Y.C. in Buenos Aires, especially those of Víctor Grippo.

a living body and its limits: the stain as a result of fluids emerging from corporeal openings, and the open wound as the cut in the surface of the skin, a break within that barrier leading to an undesirable exposure. Parra's hides and carcasses acted both as surfaces, physical boundaries between an inside and an outside of the body which the "imbunche" myth made even more palpable, and as evocations of the materiality and carnal dirtiness of the absent bodies. Carcass and stain could both be read as traces and marks of a presence, but also as boundaries, signs of the confines of the body.

The emphasis placed on the corporeality of the boundary itself, or inversely of the body as a limit, is related to the "Imbunche" myth in more than one way. An important aspect of the "imbunche" that has not been noted by any critic using its image as a metaphor for a claustrophobic Chile or the body in pain as a symbol of the nation, is that the mythical being is characteristic of the southernmost regions of Chile. The "imbunche" is exclusively associated to the island of Chiloé and its concomitant inlands inhabited by Mapuches and other indigenous people. It is, in other words, a mythical creature that inhabits the *terra incognita*, the unknown, uncharted lands of the south, and a product of the southernmost imagination.<sup>437</sup> As a marginal creature feared and revered at the same time, the "imbunche" is a symbol of borders, a body that is pure demarcation and which signals the frailty of these boundaries and the order they attempt to sustain.

That the "imbunche" has all its orifices closed down, being unable to speak, defecate, or even move, not only makes it a grotesque figure, but implies that the extremities of the body are zones of danger that must be controlled. As Mary Douglas stated in her work on the relationships between the human body and the social body, orifices form part of the "boundaries of the body,"<sup>438</sup> sites where interiority and exteriority meet, where corporeality is at its most vulnerable state, and undesirable matter from within is expelled.<sup>439</sup> Whether this particular matter is considered "pollution" or a source of danger, and thus given a negative connotation, is less a matter of the make-up of the material itself than of the fact that a boundary has been socially established and then transgressed.<sup>440</sup> If Parra's works are to be read as images of the body politic, as was suggested by Ronald Christ in an 1983 text,<sup>441</sup> then it could be argued that the most fragile areas of the body are those in the 'south' which, following the conventions regarding Western maps since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, occupies the position furthest down in the

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<sup>437</sup> Parra's "imbunches" were in this sense close to the Araucanian leader that Dittborn had depicted in the drawing "Encomienda" yet turned even further down (in the map) to the marginal regions of the nation.

<sup>438</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 121.

<sup>439</sup> What for Julia Kristeva constitutes the "abject." See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

<sup>440</sup> This is where Douglas and Kristeva diverge: for Kristeva the trespassing of the limit marks the appearance of the abject, whereas in Douglas the establishment of the limit between the pure and impure is what gives "pollution" its bad name. For Douglas, not all bodily fluids are considered "polluting," varying across different cultures.

<sup>441</sup> Ronald Christ, "Shades of Shadows," in the exhibition catalogue *In Praise of Shadows* (New York: Yvonne Seguy Gallery, 1983), 2-15.

world map, symbolically standing at the limits of knowledge as the “*finis terrae*.”<sup>442</sup> The reference to the “imbunche” and the “function of sewing” in Parra’s works were thus not only a “symbolization of closure, cloister, or privation of a natural end,”<sup>443</sup> but an embodiment of the margin itself as a source of danger. The imbunche’s grotesque nature thus became an excessive sign of an obsession with security and the threat suggested by that which is open to the outside. If Parra’s works were a metaphor of the nation, as has been often suggested, they pointed not merely to a state of confinement but to the menace implicated by marginal zones.

Parra’s iterative gestures of patching, sewing, and joining pieces brought even more attention to the issue of borders, particularly to liminality as a graphic sign, and to what was being united or closed down through them. Sewn in an openly precarious manner, the patches, gauzes, and threads that joined the skins to plastic, pieces of newspaper to more paper, or gauze to both, offered views into the in-between space opened up by the slits. Poorly stitched, the threads pointed to a gap between the fragments brought together by Parra, marking with their lines an indeterminate place and a yet to be defined meaning.<sup>444</sup> As Parra played with foreground and background in her collages, with the veiled and unveiled, letting scraps of newspaper emerge and challenge the authority of the news in front (as in “*Diariamente*”), what appeared in between the borders was an-other story, a story half seen, not fully spoken, yet also present even if only as an evanescent trace.<sup>445</sup> Tears and threads formed visible lines, tectonic plaques

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<sup>442</sup> The architect Vittorio di Girolamo had spoken in 1977 in the context of the exhibition he organized regarding forms of inhabiting the nation titled “Chile: opciones de desarrollo para el siglo XXI,” that there was a geographical error in the current representations of Chilean maps. These focused on continental Chile and particularly its center, with the Antarctic and other “marginal” territories displayed fragmented in cases. Such representations induced a psychological and sensorial interpretation of the nation’s borders as “uninhabitable,” producing a myth of Chile as *finis terrae*. According to di Girolamo, “when maps are too altered representations of the geography they pretend to illustrate, the reasons that determine this geographical inexactitude tend to be of a psychological order. When this happens, the people deny themselves the possibility of inhabiting the totality of the motherland. And we believe this is the precise case of Chile. Its cartography reveals an intellectual and sensorial lack of knowledge of the real geography and a fear of the borders –south, Antarctic, Andean, oceanic, and Atacameño–, as if these were uninhabitable places.” Vittorio di Girolamo, quoted in Mabel Correa, “Redescubriendo a Chile,” *Revista Hoy*, October 12-18, 1977, 36.

<sup>443</sup> Waldemar Sommer, “El espíritu de la materia en Catalina Parra.”

<sup>444</sup> Francine Masiello has pointed to a similar effect of indeterminacy of meaning created by Parra’s works with thread and gauze: “The visible presence of thread on canvas is both a silencing and a denial of pleasure, but because of the loosely stitched yarn we can also have the possibility of unsuspected readings. In other words, despite the scene of repression identified with the imbunche, this ritual practice allows access to new ways of seeing. Parra’s canvas teaches us to learn to read between the lines of official history, to override the ill effects of the media, and to challenge the banality of consumer culture.” Francine Masiello, *The Art of Transition. Latin American Culture and Neoliberal Crisis* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2001), 221.

<sup>445</sup> Parra used the negatives, gauzes, and plastic as material veils, revealing and concealing at the time, seen both ways.

that emphasized the disjuncture and discontinuity of the smoothly even surfaces provided by the media.

Even though the act of sewing can be read as a form of jointure and disjuncture, most critics have approached this gesture as a form of repair. Richard has read this operation as a mode of “feminine” restoration countering the patriarchal aggression embodied by the military regime in Chile. Sewing would be in Richard’s view a feminine act associated to domesticity (which by extension, can be directly related to the everydayness of the newspaper) that brought the torn materials of Parra’s collages to “the reparatory surgery of a feminine handcraft.”<sup>446</sup> This restorative act would thus not only have political implications of “healing” what had damaged in the nation (by male subjects), but would be related to a feminine domain of care and nurturing. By extension, the patriarchal modes of administering information, in the case of “*Diario de vida*” and its use of *El Mercurio*, would be subverted and displayed as flawed and further in need of maternal repair.

Such a reading of the act of sewing as mending two tissues together had already been given prominence in Dittborn’s catalogue text, which Parra had “visualized” with a series of images.<sup>447</sup> Dittborn’s contribution consisted of a text written in three columns, starting at the left where a whole phrase was created by repeating the first word and then adding others one by one. The phrase began with a series of verbs: “to unite/ to reunite,” followed by their combination with more words: “to reunite by means of a stitch/ to reunite by means of a stitch the lips/ to reunite by means of a stitch the lips of a wound.”<sup>448</sup> In the central column, the phrases emphasized first the idea of bringing together two opposite materialities, then stated the relation between wound and scar, the latter related to a “seismographic memory,” while the third paragraph listed a series of “reparatory procedures”<sup>449</sup> related to a wounded body: “wrap, suture, stick, cauterize, graft, sew, bandage, patch, mend.”<sup>450</sup> The third column referred in turn to tissues and membranes that had been torn and then joined by a simple thread.

Dittborn’s text centered on the human body in a state of extreme pain, laceration, and disjuncture. This was a body under attack, where its surface bore the marks (as wounds, as scars) of that violence. The images included by Parra to “visualize” Dittborn’s text made the connection between graphic marks and bodies even more

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<sup>446</sup> Richard, *Margins and Institutions*, 45.

<sup>447</sup> In his work on the production of catalogues in Chile between 1975 and 1977, Mellado has devoted what is probably the longest and only analysis of Parra’s catalogue, focusing on Dittborn’s writings and Parra’s “visualization.” Yet even though Mellado linked the formal practices of reproduction seen in the catalogue to a few works, specially under the notion of the skin (the manipulations of the text being like “wounds”), he also stopped short of relating these to other works in the exhibition and thus to questions of landscape and territory.

<sup>448</sup> Dittborn, “Imbunches Catalina Parra (análisis),” in *Catalina Parra: Imbunches*, 5.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid. The full text continues: “signal in the surface of the carnal erogenous body, the repetition of blows and/encounters with cutting instruments/ prolonged falls and immersions/ collisions/ contact with incandescent utensils/sealing off by digital pressure/ inhalation of gases/ convulsive shaking.” Ibid.

manifest. These included a doctor wearing a gauze mask ready to operate, patients sleeping under sewn sheets connected to inhalators, large groups of men sleeping huddled on the ground under frail blankets, a wounded semi naked patient receiving blood transfusions, bodies isolated from infections by transparent plastic (as in the case of the reproduction of *El Mercurio* showing a father attending to his three newborn sons in an incubator), or bodies covered in plastic floating in a river (fig. 3.20). All the images were subjected by Parra to a process of ripping, translating the gashes evoked by Dittborn's text into the images as lines, and then binding the pieces together through visible red threads, tape, and glue.

Such a technique of deconstructing a media image, of ripping it and letting seep through other meanings, was closely associated with the strategies of dé/collage present in Wolf Vostell's works shown one month earlier in the same gallery.<sup>451</sup> Vostell's exhibition, "'El huevo" Media environment" ("The Egg" Media Environment) included several short black and white Fluxus films centering on disaster scenes and consumer society,<sup>452</sup> which were shown on four screens as accompaniments to documentation of Vostell's project for Documenta 6.<sup>453</sup> The latter was exhibited at Galería Época as a series of videos, a slide show, and dé/collages shown in two darkened rooms every two and a half hours, while the catalogue included an interview with the artist and selected texts.<sup>454</sup>

Vostell's Documenta project had consisted of a media environment divided into three parts, of which only two had been mounted. These were two different rooms set up as spaces of participation, "La Quinta del sordo" and a "laboratory," the first recreating in

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<sup>451</sup> Vostell was a personal friend of Parra and Kay, whom they had met in Germany. The V.I.S.U.A.L. group had helped organize Vostell's show at Galería Época and edited the catalogue. Kay was interviewed by *Revista Hoy* in connection to the show, where he spoke of the relation between the appearance of new modes of expression in Europe and Germany in particular with that nation's traumatic experiences of two wars occurring in less than a century and the repression and "hysteric erasure of any outbreak of violence" that had ensued. Kay rearticulated Vostell's own views regarding the role of the artist in society by stating that "the artists are the expressive means of a society, the channel of energetic discharges, and what they do is not made just to shock or for the mere desire of the new." Malú Sierra, "¿Arte, filosofía o esnobismo?," *Revista Hoy*, September 28-October 4, 1977, 37-38. In the catalogue text, Vostell had argued that "in wars, men have been forced to destroy. The end-product of these untamed factors in the image of the world necessarily has to see itself reflected in the art of our time like a principle and criticism and not as a glorification of the destructive in itself as usually happens!" Wolf Vostell, "*El huevo*" *Media Environment*, exhibition catalogue (Santiago de Chile: Galería Época, 1977), no page numbers.

<sup>452</sup> Some of the videos documented actions such as the 1969 sculpture-action "Stationary Traffic," where a 1964 Opel was, in the words of Waldemar Sommer, "petrified with cement." See Waldemar Sommer's review of Vostell's show, "Hacia nuevas formas de la razón plástica," *El Mercurio*, October 9, 1977.

<sup>453</sup> Documenta 6 took place between June 26 and October 2, 1977. Vostell's entry was originally titled "The airplane is an egg in the sky's hand." For a brief description of the exhibition at Época, see Giorgio Vomero, "Aportes de la gráfica y la escultura en 1977," *La Tercera*, January 15, 1978.

<sup>454</sup> The texts were derived from a variety of sources, not fully quoted. For example, a part of Vostell's "No": Life as a Picture – A Picture as Life: Nine Décollages," originally printed in *Décollage*, ed. Wolf Vostell, no. 4 (1964), was printed in the Chilean catalog as if it were a complete text. It could be argued that in the making of the catalog, the members of V.I.S.U.A.L. were directly applying Vostell's own lessons.

television sets the ambience of Goya's black paintings along with an image of a Starfighter airplane and the second inviting viewers to make self-portraits in video. The most polemical aspect of Vostell's project involved placing a Starfighter jet on top of the Fridericianum Museum which would be joined by a long plastic tube to the second part of the environment inside the museum (Goya's dark room) and would have ants walking inside it.<sup>455</sup> Even though that year's Documenta had emphasized the relation between art and the social arena, especially in its connection to the media, and had showcased several projects in front of the Fridericianum Museum,<sup>456</sup> Documenta authorities had opposed the construction of this part of Vostell's project, arguing that strong winds could pull the Starfighter down.

Whether this threat was the main reason for Documenta's refusal or not, the image of the airplane had darker resonances for both Germany and in the context of Vostell's oeuvre.<sup>457</sup> On one hand, the Starfighter was part of NATO's service in Germany since the late 1950s, used as a form of self-defense against communist influence in Western Europe.<sup>458</sup> On the other hand, since the 1960s Vostell had been working with violent imagery related to everyday life and wars past and present. His iconography ranged from car crashes to missiles, passing through Nazi concentration camps to the atomic threat and the bombings in Vietnam with its string of associated images made famous in the press. The airplane figured prominently in this repertoire and it had been the conjunction of modern machine and accident that had led to Vostell's accidental discovery of the term "dé/collage." As explained in Galería Época's catalogue, Vostell read an article in *Le Figaro* of September 6, 1954, the news recounting the crash of a Superconstellation jet<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>455</sup> In the same Documenta, Joseph Beuys presented an installation comprising an interpenetrated system of connected pipes pumping honey from a "workplace" stationed at the museum's rotunda.

<sup>456</sup> Among these outdoor works were Richard Serra's "Terminal" and Walter de Maria's "vertical earth kilometer," both of 1977.

<sup>457</sup> Vostell's work would prove prophetic of the threatening aspects of flying: in October 13, 1977, a Lufthansa commercial flight was hijacked by four members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, who demanded the liberation of several leaders from the Red Army Faction held as prisoners in Germany. After landing in several airports of the Middle East, and following the shooting of its pilot, the airplane landed in Somalia where the German government decided to take it over in what became known as "Operation Fire Magic." After killing the hijackers, the German government declared that it would not negotiate with terrorists, a statement soon followed by the Chilean government. In October 19, the military regime announced that it would not be accepting anything from terrorists within the Chilean territory. See *El Mercurio*, October 19, 1977. The image of the plane was thus charged with contemporary politics, and while not directly inspired on the current events, the airplane detained on one of the most important German Museums would be a manifest act of defiance to social order.

<sup>458</sup> The German Starfighter also carried nuclear munitions, having tactical operations, even though Germany was a non-nuclear nation. Such a contradiction was possible through an arrangement made with the United States of America, which provided the weapons for the aircrafts and controlled their use. The Starfighter was a plane known for its accidents, leading to their retirement from the German air force in the 1980s.

<sup>459</sup> It is important to mention here that one of Dittborn's most well known videos of the 1980s, "Lo que vimos en la cumbre del Corona" (What We Saw at the Corona's Peak), was also based on an airplane crash. The video is discussed in Chapter Six.

in which the term 'd collage' was used: "shortly after takeoff (d collage) a Superconstellation fell from the sky, plunging into the river Shannon."<sup>460</sup> Going to a dictionary, Vostell found out that d collage meant the take off and elevation of an airplane from the ground, but also to "unstick, unglue, to detach (...) to separate, get out, to die."<sup>461</sup> Converting the term into a visual strategy, Vostell began deconstructing and tearing images, posters, and objects in his graphic works. By removing fragments of the images Vostell was transforming their original meanings through a process of layered abrasion, ungluing and destroying surfaces and thus offering interruptions in the continuity of experience. Shortly afterwards, Vostell began to "apply this concept to the open and disjointed forms, mobile fragments of reality, in other words, events,"<sup>462</sup> turning to time-based art forms. By experimenting with happenings and environments, the artist found a way actively to transform reality and the perception of it. Life itself became for Vostell a form of d collage,<sup>463</sup> a life that he envisioned as guided by a destructive yet transformative principle, moving toward annihilation and dissolution, but also liberation from accepted models of behavior.

As a technique, d collage was associated at first to Affichisme and Nouveau R alisme, and involved ripping and destroying posters in public spaces as an urban intervention and protest against consumer capitalism.<sup>464</sup> Yet the term was re-defined by Vostell as not merely the opposite of collage, but as a "collage in movement."<sup>465</sup> Rather than adding and juxtaposing pieces of heterogeneous light-weight materials so as to build up an image in a unified way, leading to an "organized pictorial totality, complete in itself,"<sup>466</sup> d collage was an attempt to disrupt normal ways of viewing by making the repetitive gesture of destruction a constitutive element of the work and reveal, as in the excavation of past remains, traces of the present and its violence. John Hanhardt has interpreted the practice of d collage as performing an archaeological work by revealing "hidden messages, deconstructed to expose their material and ideological base."<sup>467</sup> In this act of excavation and exposure, the work would not only be derived from life's materials

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<sup>460</sup> Wolf Vostell, "El Huevo. Media Environment."

<sup>461</sup> Ibid.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

<sup>463</sup> "Life is d coll-age, in that the body in one process builds up and deteriorates as it grows older –a continuous destruction." Wolf Vostell, "d coll/age," *Books* 3, no. 4 (May 1966), reprinted in *Art and Artists I*, no. 2 (August 1966): 9-10.

<sup>464</sup> Benjamin Buchloh has traced the origins of d collage to the Surrealist L o Malet, yet the term and its artistic usage came into prominence with the works of Raymond Hains, Jacques de la Villegl , and Mimmo Rotella in post-war France. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "From Detail to Fragment: D collage Affichiste," *October*, Vol. 56, High/Low: Art and Mass Culture (Spring, 1991): 98-110.

<sup>465</sup> Vostell, "d coll/age," 9.

<sup>466</sup> Buchloh, 108.

<sup>467</sup> John Hanhardt, "D collage and Television: Wolf Vostell in New York, 1963-1964," *Fluxus: A Conceptual Country. Visible Language* 26, no. 1-2 (Winter/Spring 1992): 110.



(such as posters or everyday media), but in Vostell's extension of the concept of dé/collage to life itself, and the merger of art with the everyday through actions it implied, it could reveal new aspects of contemporary life.<sup>468</sup>

Parra's visualization of Dittborn's text thus seemed to articulate some of the principles expounded by Vostell regarding dé/collage and the relationship between art and life, particularly as envisioned in Vostell's 1964 magazine of the same name.<sup>469</sup> Both her "Imbunches" and the catalogue transformed the images culled from the media or the appropriated everyday materials, and in the act of ripping and de-layering the imagery they revealed the invested interests and contradictory realities underlying it. On the other hand, both artists stated a strong commitment to the present. Vostell, for example, argued in an interview with Nena Ossa, the then director of the National Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago, that he was "the documentarian of my time (...) documenting what I have seen and felt in my epoch (...) I show what I see, which is conflict,"<sup>470</sup> a phrase that resembles Parra's statements that for her it was important "to leave a record of [the present] time in my works."<sup>471</sup>

Yet Parra's dé/collaged "visualization" also ended with Donoso's quote of the "imbunche," a definition that not only posited the re-appropriation in the present of an indigenous myth, but also established a relation between décollage and the mythical sewn-up body. This has led critics such as Justo Pastor Mellado to interpret Parra's work as revealing in the "imbunche" gesture a native expression of collaging and dé/collaging practices, thus "anticipating" from a local context these European strategies.<sup>472</sup> A similar view was held by Julia Herzberg, who saw in Parra's work a reinvention of collage in so far "rather than merely pasting or gluing, the artist sews (coser), stitches (suturar), patches (parchar), and wraps (envolver) images (or objects) to the support."<sup>473</sup> Yet while it is a stretch to consider the native Araucanian myth an anticipation of a practice that

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<sup>468</sup> Vostell's famous statement concerning the correspondence between art and life, "Art is equivalent to Life" was also quoted in the 1976 exhibition catalogue. Even though Vostell's exhibition in Galería Época presented mostly documentation of "El Huevo," offering in a way a conceptual exhibition of contemporary art where text and photograph took prominence, there was a strong emphasis in the texts on the intimate relation between art and life. The catalogue accompanying the show played a large role in the transmission of Vostell's ideas regarding happenings, as well as those of Allan Kaprow, whose text "Assemblages, Environments, Happenings" was also included. The latter's text and its appropriation by Chilean artists was not as immediate as Vostell's. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the exhibition did not receive much attention by the Chilean press, and besides Waldemar Sommer's review, a mention of Vostell also in *El Mercurio*, and the article in *Revista Hoy*, the exhibition went largely without discussion in the media.

<sup>469</sup> Vostell's magazine *Décollage*, *Bulletin Aktueller Ideen*, No.1 included contributions from Nam June Paik, Georges Maciunas, and Benjamin Patterson.

<sup>470</sup> Wolf Vostell interviewed by Nena Ossa in "Entrevistando a Wolf Vostell en Berlin," *El Mercurio*, October 16, 1977.

<sup>471</sup> Parra in "Catalina Parra: convierte a "El Mercurio" en "objeto artístico."

<sup>472</sup> Mellado has stated that in Parra's work "the mention to thread and sewing is the key to determine an antecedence that could already be "found" in the same Chilean territory, in its most archaic practices, to re-signify the history of collage and *dé-collage*." Mellado, in "Revista Manuscritos y la Coyuntural catalogal de 1975."

<sup>473</sup> Herzberg, "Catalina Parra: Reconstructions," 15.

emerged in a specific European context related to urban popular culture, and a more specific account of the strategies used in each case needs to be determined (in the “imbunche,” sewing up a single body into itself, what Mellado rightly calls the “package,” as opposed to a collage’s juxtaposition of heterogeneous materials onto flat surfaces, or the dé/collage’s idea of revelation through rupture), the interesting aspect of Parra’s work was her ability to confuse the limits of both. If the “imbunche” suggested a new model for the history of collage, it was by denying the possibility of a unified self while simultaneously exaggerating its closure and pointing to its areas of fracture. If an “Imbunche” is a collaged body, it is only through the subversion of the idea of completion, closing down by sewing what is both the same and different in the human body, its thresholds, in a repetitive act of disavowal.

Furthermore, Parra’s “imbunches” also turned the (dé)collaged surfaces of the page into bodies and the bodies into sites of inscription. In Parra’s works the bi-dimensional surfaces of the printed media were treated as fragile pieces of flesh, readily torn, dismembered, and revealing more strata of meaning in their layers, as in dé/collage. But they were also available to be imprinted with new meanings and superimposed with more layers of images, words, stains, and marks. The language of medical examination used both by Dittborn in his text and Parra in her images, a language that joined stitching to suture and the instruments which cause wounds, further effected a displacement from text and image to the physical and sensorial and back. It was in the performance of this displacement that Dittborn’s text and Parra’s torn and mended images operated as displaced reminders of the violence performed daily on human bodies in Chile, using the image of the wound as a mark, a graphic sign of violence inscribed on a body. Stitch and wound were posited as two sides of an original act of marking a surface, making of graphic forms the equivalent of a rupture, an interruption and an interval on the self/surface. The graphic mark, whether it was a letter, line, stitch, border, wound, or suture, was in this way rendered traumatic: spatially and anatomically disruptive, leaving in its traces the memory and visual evidence of violence. The body was turned into a support for these impressions, like a page, recording on its “surface” inscriptions, becoming a legible text, a corporeal geography.<sup>474</sup>

Dittborn pinpointed such a strategy in his catalogue text in a phrase that has been appropriated by most critics to define the operations of Parra’s works.<sup>475</sup> According to

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<sup>474</sup> The relationship in Parra’s work between the torn page, the body, and maps can be in turn connected to geo-geography’s Plotemic origins and the conception of “chora.” As Kenneth R. Olwig has argued, Julia Kristeva’s interpretation of Plotemy’s division of geographical knowledge into three branches –geography itself, topography and chorography- made of chorography the graphic representation of the Platonic “chora.” For Kristeva, “chora” was more than mere “space,” but rather a receptacle, a formless mass given shape through geometry. According to Olwig, this would suggest that geography is “a means by which are engraved, with the help of geometry, a meaningful, rational representational form upon the chora of the earth.” The chora is thus treated as a body, in an original state of formlessness, which through the geographic mark acquires a definite and visible form. See Kenneth R. Olwig, “Landscape as a Contested Topos,” *Textures of Place. Exploring Humanist Geographies*, ed. Paul Adams et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 99.

<sup>475</sup> Galaz and Ivelic quote the phrase in *Chile, Arte Actual* (page 182), Herzberg quotes it in her catalogue text (page 13) for example, and Mellado speaks of “the page converted into a seismographer that registers the subterranean movements of the social body” in “Revista Manuscritos, la Coyuntura Catalogal 1975.” Writing in 1983 of an exhibition of Parra’s work displaying X-rays and stitches, Christ also noted: “If some

Dittborn, Parra's "imbunches" were "the seismographic memory/of an endless perturbation."<sup>476</sup> It is interesting to note that Vostell had used the term "seismographic" in his catalogue text to define the aspects of his own work as registering the movements of its own time.<sup>477</sup> Dittborn's phrase nevertheless had a particular resonance in the Chilean context, since it alluded to a characteristic of the Andean region as subject to constant earthquakes, a trait that had been associated in the arts to a state of social agitation.<sup>478</sup> In a more general manner, the term "seismographic" points to the act of drawing certain movements or "shakings" of the earth, as the Greek word suggests, measuring through lines the limits, direction, and intensity of those movements.<sup>479</sup> In the hands of the seismographer, the body of the world becomes a surface broken and disrupted by motions capable of being inscribed in a chart, resembling the recording of psychic life through dreams and the unconscious as mentioned in relation to Dittborn's own work. According to the latter, Parra was performing a similar strategy of recording this form of a social unconscious by looking at the 'faults' and gaps of a corporeal surface, whether real or imagined, individual or shared, examining the intermediate space formed between "a wound and its scar."<sup>480</sup> By probing at that liminal space of opening (the gash as the vivid mark of violence) and closure (the scar as the lingering sign of a wound) and transcribing the underlying activity laid bare by these gaps, Parra was iterating the friction produced by this encounter, what Dittborn called that "endless perturbation."<sup>481</sup> What exactly that perturbation was remained unsaid, though the violent imagery and the slippage between different kinds of corporealities suggested a relation between individual bodies and the body politic.

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of these compositions are to be recognized as portraits, we must think of them as analogous to Gertrude Stein's portraits in words; and if these don't look like their subjects either, we may learn from them another way to understand Picasso's remark to Stein that she would come to resemble his painted portrait of her. If most of these compositions must also be political, we should think of them as rejecting parties and manifestos; they are minimally diagnostic, never curative; in fact, they are more *seismographic*: they register and record, political in the oddly personal way that Proust is political. Finally, if these works are geographic, we ought to consider them as sightings toward and away from worlds the artist has known and dreamed, akin to the mental and spiritual geography of Bunyan but without allegory." Ronald Christ, "Shades of Shadows," in *Praise of Shadows/Catalina Parra*, 13-14 (my emphasis).

<sup>476</sup> Dittborn, "Imbunches Catalina Parra (Análisis)", in *Catalina Parra, Imbunches*, 4.

<sup>477</sup> Vostell, "El Huevo" *Media Environment documentación documenta seis*.

<sup>478</sup> There is a tradition in Latin American art and culture that could be generally called "telluric" and which refers to this nexus between certain territories and people in Latin America and the effect produced by living in a land dominated by the Andes mountains and subject to constant displacement (through volcanoes, earthquakes). Such a tradition, which can be seen in the poetry of Pablo Neruda and the paintings of Fernando de Syszzlo among others, draws on the deep and eternal shaping forces of the earth at its most raw and powerful state.

<sup>479</sup> The 'quake' itself points to a displacement of the ground caused by geologic faults or volcanic activity, by a release of energy often associated to a fracture in the earth.

<sup>480</sup> Dittborn, "Imbunches Catalina Parra (Análisis)", 4.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*

The translation from body to land, and by extension to the territory, was manifested more clearly in the inclusion of seven map and landscape collages in the exhibition. Mellado has in this respect noted that the work “Map of Chile” acted out the “seismographic” character of Parra’s *Imbunches* by charting the interior movements of the social body.<sup>482</sup> “Map of Chile” consisted of a vertical map made up of several X-ray plates of a body, the plates semi-hidden behind gauze and spread above a torn and darned map of the nation.<sup>483</sup> The geopolitical body of the nation, the body politic as defined by its geographical limits, was overlaid with the portrait of a subject’s interior, the body’s hidden components made visible as shadows and light blotches through the X-rays. Like a play of shadows, each “body” (individual and political) was overcast, hidden and exposed through the other, brought into a relationship of utter proximity yet not quite equivalence, like a fold or reversal of each other.

The indexical quality of the X-ray functions in a different way from photography’s. If the photograph is the imprint of the light reflected on an object’s surface, X-rays are a form of recording through light that manages to trespass the exterior ‘skin’ of an object, reaching its innermost recesses. The X-ray thus functions as an interior photo-graphy taken when a bodily illness or fracture is suspected or, as Ronald Christ phrased it in relation to Parra’s 1983 works, it is “the negative of our positive selves.”<sup>484</sup> That the map as a form of registering the presence and extension of the nation was substituted in Parra’s “Map of Chile” by the shadows of bodily interiors, suggested a need to go beyond the surface of the idea of the “nation” as a solid unbreakable whole. Parra’s “map” questioned the limits of the visible and the invisible when defining Chile and its ‘interiority,’ literally tying together different physical and invented bodies.

In the official geopolitical map, the national territory was envisioned as a large, natural frame for structuring and ordering the collection of bodies inside it, providing a spatial context defined by clear limits within which Chilean identity could be located. As the concept of the ‘nation’ becomes naturalized in the map, it comes to be understood and represented as a physical location. The frame itself defines the content, the nation as a whole preceding its combination of parts. And it was to these parts and differences within, which “Map of Chile” pointed to, inviting to think of all those shadows, ghosts or missing bodies making up the invisible nation.<sup>485</sup>

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<sup>482</sup> This is the only work concerning the territory that Mellado mentions in his analysis of Parra. For Mellado, “the important thing is the photographic use of a radiographic referent, which appeals to the registering of a body’s “interior,” in order to “calculate” its non-visible pulsations: that is, that strives to turn the page into a seismographer that registers the subterranean movements of the social... body.” In Mellado, “*Revista Manuscritos y la coyuntural catalogal de 1975.*” In the original Spanish text the last two words are inverted, “cuerpo... social,” reading “body... social,” which could also be translated as “body politic.” This relates to the importance given by Mellado to the body in his text.

<sup>483</sup> The whereabouts of “Map of Chile” are unknown and there are no known reproductions of the work. Nevertheless, in the article “Catalina Parra convierte a “El Mercurio” en “objeto artístico,” the artista appears standing in one of the photographs next to a work that closely resembles all characterizations that have been made of it.

<sup>484</sup> Christ, “Shades of Shadows,” 2.

<sup>485</sup> While Chile was receiving threats of economic reprimands by the U.N. for its continual violations of Human Rights, the government and the right-wing press “demonstrated” the falsity of those claims by

Parra was not alone in this interest with borders and maps. In 1977 the Chilean government began a series of talks with Argentina regarding a dispute over the southernmost borders of both nations, which had been redefined in a treaty signed by Queen Elizabeth of England. By December 1978, the talks and aggressive stance of each country had grown to the point of placing them at the brink of war.<sup>486</sup> During the last months of 1977, when the tensions between Chile and Argentina were escalating, new maps of Chile were immediately created and published in the press, informing the public of the nation's sovereign rights. An official map provided by the Geographic Military Institute soon followed, underlining the new 'borders' that the treaty had annexed to the national territory.<sup>487</sup> The new map not only included the recently acquired lands of Picton, Nueva, and Lennox islands in the Strait of Magellan, but also information regarding the different regions of the nation, their natural resources included on the margins like a sixteenth century Dutch map, joining natural wealth to sovereignty and its future development.<sup>488</sup>

At the same time, the government, the Chamber of Commerce, the police force, and the Ministry of Education began a campaign of "Chileanness" at frontier towns and villages of the national territory. This was an attempt to improve the customs of the people who lived at the borders of the nation and were thus in "danger" of adopting foreign customs through their daily interactions.<sup>489</sup> To achieve this integrationist and nationalist aim, the police force would use "plates" and calendars with printed reproductions of Chilean landscapes from 'central' regions, along with local sayings and

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providing news of the finding of "presumed disappeared" people living in their homes, doing military service, or living abroad. See the article "Informó el gobierno: han sido ubicados 1.200 presuntos desaparecidos," *El Mercurio*, December 14, 1977.

<sup>486</sup> The talks began in October 1977, though the dispute commenced earlier that year. The treatise favored Chile, and Argentina constantly opposed the agreement, leading to a diplomatic war that peaked with the papal intervention of 1978 in order to avoid an armed conflict. Nevertheless, there were subsequent disputes regarding the new borders to be defined, a conflict that dragged on for years and culminated in 1984 with a diplomatic meeting of each nation's representatives in the Vatican and the Chilean hand-over of several miles of ocean to the south of the disputed islands.

<sup>487</sup> "Nuevo mapa de Chile," *El Mercurio*, July 20, 1977. The new map replaced the "Geographic Atlas" published by the Institute until 1976.

<sup>488</sup> Only a few weeks earlier, the government had announced development plans for the ninth and eleventh regions involving in the first case a plan for redistributing ancestral Mapuche lands, and in the second an agreement with the Geographical Institute of Universidad Católica to explore and measure the region elaborating maps and physical charts. See for example "Se inicia el próximo mes "Proyecto de Desarrollo Mapuche en IX Región"," *El Mercurio*, June 13, 1977, and "Proyecto de desarrollo para el litoral de la XI región," *El Mercurio*, July 11, 1977.

<sup>489</sup> *El Mercurio* explained the problem by stating that "limit localities have more communication and expeditious transportation towards neighboring countries, which has an influence in having them adopt the customs and everyday idiomatic expressions of other nations. In the Chilean north this national indifference is more pronounced since *the landscape is totally different from the known* and the distances to the inhabited centers do not allow for a frequent interchange of knowledge dealing with geography and local customs." See, "Publicaciones serán exhibidas en lugares públicos. Campaña nacional en Precordillera," *El Mercurio*, November 9, 1977 (my emphasis).

folkloric expressions in order to familiarize 'border' Chileans with the rest of the nation. In a related action, the government started a pilot plan of developing "frontier schools," basic educational establishments in frontier towns aimed at "developing the principle of national unity from a human and territorial point of view."<sup>490</sup> That such a strategy of national integration was performed at the borders of the territory manifested a clear understanding by the military of how physical zones of contact with other nations were permeable to outside influences, thus positing a danger to internal identity, as well as revealing a certain consciousness of the frailty of national identification and the need therefore to enhance patriotic feelings of belonging.<sup>491</sup> Insofar as the landscape as a visual representation of 'nationality' played as important a role in the education of the frontier inhabitants into Chilean customs (even though these were based on the "centers"), as much as did language and the reproduction of local customs, it could be said that the geographical qualities of the nation, its particular relief and physical features, became a form to confine and define identity. While the borders of the nation were considered too distinct and 'different' in terms of their visual features, the central regions were regarded as sources of a certain Chilean essence, easily transmittable through printed reproductions.

Whether Parra's works of 1977 were directly influenced by these disputes is a matter of speculation.<sup>492</sup> Yet it was not noted by critics dealing with the exhibition that one fourth of the works made explicit reference to the Chilean territory and its landscape.<sup>493</sup> These works consisted mostly of collages made out of reproductions of photographs displaying the Chilean coast, valleys, and mountains, focusing on the

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<sup>490</sup> "Escuelas fronterizas para cinco regiones," *El Mercurio*, November 27, 1977.

<sup>491</sup> In a speech of November 23, 1977, Pinochet addressed the nation's prosperity (the so-called "economic miracle") by stating that it had been possible only through a concerted effort of self-discipline, patriotism, and the consciousness of the threat coming from abroad. The question of limits and foreign menace had not diminished and was still used as propaganda for the need to "defend the liberty of your sons and watch them over –with the authority of the government and the weapons of our soldiers- so that the nation will never again fall under a Marxist regime." Augusto Pinochet, in a speech during the National Day of the Chilean Woman, quoted in *El Mercurio*, December 3, 1977. National security was the great legend invoked by the military to sustain the need for the disappearance of bodies.

<sup>492</sup> Nevertheless, there are several reasons to think Parra's choice of the works exhibited was related to current developments. In an interview carried out before the exhibition, yet published in October, 1977, Parra was shown not only with the "imbunches," but also with several serigraphies she had made concerned with more general ecological problems affecting the earth. These had been created in 1975 and, as the article stated, they would not be shown since they "did not have the condition of imbunches." See "El anti-arte de Catalina Parra," *El Mercurio*, October 23, 1977.

<sup>493</sup> Only Waldemar Sommer made a comment at the time of the connection between the "Imbunche" and the territory, by stating that "the orifices of the portrayed personages, [create] an obstruction –direct or insinuated- that here is made extensive to our geography as well as our material and intellectual goods." Sommer, "El espíritu de la materia en Catalina Parra." Other object-based works in the exhibition evoked the landscape in indirect ways, as in "Desmentido Informe" (Denied Report), a plate of zinc covered in plastic recalling the precarious constructions of shantytowns, then spreading in the nation's capital. Other works also pointed obliquely to the body, as in "Doble o nada" (Double or Nothing), which consisted of three black plastic bags tied with cord at the four corners, producing rounded bundles, its contents (if any) unknown. The bags were crossed over by a pair of cords falling vertically front and back and trapped between pieces of transparent plastic.

physical limits of the nation, its “natural” frame. The collages were pressed down between acrylic panes and sometimes screwed on the four corners in a manner similar to “Diario de Vida” and hung on the walls, iterating the motif of physical confinement. The images of ports, coastlines, green depressions, and high snow-capped mountains were repeated twice or more times in each collage, yet all of them were fragmented, stitched back, layered with gauze, and patched with tape at the borders. The repeated representations were thus never quite the same, but consistently presented as incomplete. In “Vista Panorámica,” a set of 8 black and white photographs of the Central Valley taken from a bird’s eye view, each repeated image offered some form of absence and demarcation. In the four images of the valley enclosed by mountains, large portions of its fertile lands were cut away in different graphic forms leaving, for example, a blank horizontal space in place of the valley, a straight line at the bottom of the mountain, or the latter’s contours cut off, forming a jagged white line around its edges. The absent white spaces were then obsessively marked upon by a minute stitched border, accentuating its lacerated edges.

The removal of the edges of the landmasses pointed to how boundaries are unstable forms of demarcation. The ‘natural’ landscape was evidently manipulated, amputated, parceled, and effaced, suggesting less an eternal immutable space preexisting any human intervention, than an object subject to representation and change. The linear quality of Parra’s interventions also emphasized the role of the line itself as a spatial constructor, particularly in landscape, maps, and topography. As has been argued by Edward Casey, the line “has the peculiar property of representing landscape in terms of dyadic pairs of exclusive alternatives: inside/outside, this side/that side, above/below, and so on.”<sup>494</sup> And yet in this act of demarcation the line also becomes a threshold, not quite in and not quite out. In this sense, the line acts like a membrane or “flesh,” creating difference by its very emplacement, while joining the binary as its point of contact, or what Merleau-Ponty described as a form of “lining” between subject and world.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the flesh acts as a medium for contact as it “lines and even envelops all the visible and tangible things.”<sup>495</sup> This lining can be invisible yet tangible, making us part of the world and observers of it at the same time.<sup>496</sup> In Parra’s case, the lining was literal, embodied in the gauze, tape, thread, or ‘absented’ border that functioned as a seam, a kind of tissue that joined and separated the different elements. In Parra’s landscape works, the gauzes and tissues acted as a visual device to intertwine the visible and invisible, inside and outside, allowing the “invisible” to seep through, or break out against a background through the seam, materializing the act of vision and representation. Against the ‘seamless’ vision of Chile and Chileanness proposed by the

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<sup>494</sup> Casey, *Representing Place. Landscape Painting and Maps*, 180.

<sup>495</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. A. Linguis (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 123.

<sup>496</sup> Speaking of the world as something that “sustains and unites” the subject to it, Merleau-Ponty stated that “the hallmark of the visible is to have a lining of invisibility in the strict sense, which it makes present as a certain absence.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, eds. G.A. Johnson and M.B. Smith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 147.

military, Parra was counterpoising a series of screens, layers, marks and scars that ruptured through those homogenous images.

The need to repeat in order to confirm an identity was accentuated in the slight alterations to the seriality of the photographs (and the endless accumulation of *El Mercurio* newspapers). To the mechanical and thus seemingly objective reproduction of the land, Parra annexed the handmade stitches and the repetitive manual gesture that incessantly and uncertainly attempted to bring together the torn parts into a whole. The breakup of the landscape's surface into flattened out and incomplete descriptions of the territory established a lapse between the imagined and actual landscape, exacerbating the distance between the two and the inability to produce a single unit of identity. In contrast, the Chilean government at the time was supporting an image of a solidly based nation as seen in the advertisement displaying an idyllic beach published in *The Wall Street Journal* under the heading "Chile a safety zone for foreign investors," which included the caption "It is safe to invest in Chile."<sup>497</sup> While the government associated safety with place and economic development, and was projecting in the media a single image of an improved nation booming economically and socially stable, Parra pointed to the friction set in motion by the repetition of these images, as well as to the inexistence of that fixed line or border that could clearly delimit the contours of the nation.<sup>498</sup> Parra's "imbunches" operated by dislocating the media's images, and in this way pointed to the fractures in this propagandistic image of sameness.

This political effect was mimicked in "Vista Panorámica" (Panoramic View), a collage which literally offered a distanced overview of rolling hills and agricultural lands (see fig. 3.15). The postcard, picture-perfect imagery was also evident in the work "Valparaíso," which displayed two stacked reproductions of the historic Chilean port and its coastline, with several ships and boats in the foreground suggesting the ebullience of the port's economic activity. Nevertheless this image of well-being was countered by the gaps in the reproductions, hidden from view by a large square of gauze. The tightly woven gauze not only recalled the effects of restoration belonging to a medical discourse, as suggested by both Dittborn and Richard, but the screening effect achieved signaled towards the impossibility of withholding the traumatic effects of a rupture, working therefore as an opaque veil or a half-opened hand shielding the eyes. In this sense, Parra's repetitive and mediated reproductions of lacerated landscapes (as well as the plastics covering up the collages and gauzes covering bodies) invoked what Jacques Lacan would

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<sup>497</sup> The campaign was started by a group of Chilean private investors. According to *El Mercurio*, it was destined to show the good 'conditions' of Chile for foreign investment, remarking upon the 'tranquility and stability of all sectors in the Chilean work force.' See "Campaña publicitaria," *El Mercurio*, July 17, 1977. The advertisement was originally published in *The Wall Street Journal*, June 8, 1977.

<sup>498</sup> In relation to the instability of the 'line' as a contour defining identity, Merleau-Ponty remarked in "Eye and Mind" that Bergson "was on the threshold of that gripping discovery, already familiar to the painters, that there are no lines visible in themselves, that neither the contour of the apple nor the border between field and meadow is in *this* place or that, that they are always on the near or the far side of the point we look at. They are always between or behind whatever we fix our eyes upon; they are indicated, implicated, and even very imperiously demanded by the things, but they themselves are not things." Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," 143.



call the “screen,” a mediator between the gaze of the world and the subject, and a protection against a traumatic experience in the process of developing an identity.<sup>499</sup>

Lacan’s concept of the screen was associated by the author with the “real.” Lacan variously explained the meaning of the “real” in his writings, focusing on an inexplicable, un-symbolizable experience beyond language, associated by him with trauma.<sup>500</sup> Resisting symbolization or access to language, the real would be an experience unable to be transformed into a sign and which is lived as a break in the continuity of subjectivity. This would create a discrepancy between self and world, a rupture that is experienced as traumatic.<sup>501</sup> According to Lacan, the screen would function as a mediating element between subject and milieu. In its role as mediator, the screen helps the subject relate to a hostile world and its “gaze”<sup>502</sup> by negotiating its appearance through the creation of relatable images and discourses, for example by envisioning the self as whole body during Lacan’s mirror stage, where the child first catches a view of himself through a reflection and another’s gaze, the mother’s.<sup>503</sup> Kaja Silverman has interpreted Lacan’s screen as a “cultural screen,” a culturally “generated repertoire of images” that help

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<sup>499</sup> The Lacanian concept of the screen is similar to Freud’s concept of the “screen memories,” childhood remembrances that cover up repressed desires and serve the subject retrospectively as sites for the projection of fantasies. Freud, “Moses and Monotheism,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* 23, 74.

<sup>500</sup> In Lacan’s first seminars of the 1950s, the ‘Real’ appears as a distinct category of experience in relation to two other psychic orders, the ‘Imaginary’ and the ‘Symbolic.’ The Imaginary concerns the creation of an ego ideal during early childhood through the mirror stage and the internalization of this ideal whole self, while the Symbolic involves the child’s entry into organized language. The Real would then be a pre-verbal, pre-mirror stage, a sphere of non-meaning. In this tripartite division, the ‘Real’ appears as the non-representable, irreducible, what cannot be put into language or symbols. In *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, of 1978, Lacan explained the ‘Real’ in relation to repetition and compulsion. In these seminars, Lacan distinguished in repetition two different sides: a symbolic one of compulsive repetition of signifiers, and a ‘real’ side involving the interruption of the signifiers by trauma, or what he called the *tuché*. The traumatic experience would be the impossible to symbolize, to put into words, the real.

<sup>501</sup> “I set out from the fact that there is something that establishes a fracture, a bi-partition, a splitting of the being to which the being accommodates itself, even in the natural world.” In Lacan, “What is a picture?,” *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 106.

<sup>502</sup> In his *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan uses a series of diagrams regarding sight to explain the relationships between the subject and the world. Taking a visual model based on a Renaissance geometrical point of view, Lacan situates the subject at the vantage point, extending a cone from his eyes to the object in front of him, which occupies the widest end. At the center of this cone, emerges the image of the thing seen. Lacan then begins a series of alterations of this diagram, first by superimposing a second cone of vision that is inverted: here the subject occupies the position of the object, and the “gaze” the position of the point of vision. The subject becomes a thing seen, observed by the world, or by the gaze which in turn operates as a field of vision that precedes and surrounds the subject at all times. In place of the image, Lacan situates in this model the “screen.”

<sup>503</sup> Lacan stated “I am led, therefore, to regard the function of the mirror-stage as a particular case of the function of the *imago*, which is to establish a relation between the organism and its reality –or, as they say, between the Innenwelt and the Umwelt.” Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage,” *Écrits. A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977), 4.

define the subject and which offers points of identification.<sup>504</sup> Insofar as the screen mediates the subject's relation to, and perception of, the world, it structures what we see and how we are seen in the form of representations.<sup>505</sup> The screen therefore, not only protects from the exterior world, but also functions as a field of projection, a space of representation and interaction that is articulated both from the outside and inside the subject, as ongoing movements of projection and introjection.<sup>506</sup>

Interestingly, Lacan also described the screen as something similar to a "mask, a double, an envelope, a thrown-off skin, thrown off in order to cover the frame of a shield."<sup>507</sup> Lacan's string of nouns supplement the original concept of screen as an intermediary in the visual field, underlining the contingent corporeality of this buffer. While most of his images pointed to protective devices (the shield, the envelope), Lacan also referred to the notion of a replica, a "mask, a double" of the subject, where the screen would work as a cover-up, both natural and cosmetic, disguising the subject.<sup>508</sup> But the screen was further treated by Lacan as an index, a splitting of the subject, a dehiscence, a material sign left by an original body, the shed-off skin of the animal. In other words, the screen could be understood as a material repetition.

In its repetitive mode, the screen points to itself as a form of displacement. Hal Foster has interpreted the function of the screen in relation to Andy Warhol's "Disaster" series as a form of repeatedly pushing away the traumatic. According to Foster, while the real is unrepresentable, "it can only be repeated, it *must* be repeated"<sup>509</sup> in order to

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<sup>504</sup> Silverman takes Lacan's mention of the screen in the field of vision and adds on to its meaning by stating: "Although *Four Fundamental Concepts* does not do so, it seems to me crucial that we insist upon the ideological status of the screen by describing it as that culturally generated image or repertoire of images through which subjects are not only constituted, but differentiated in relation to class, race, sexuality, age and nationality." Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York, London: Routledge, 1992), 150. Silverman adds that "Lacan characterizes the screen in terms which are directly reminiscent of the mirror stage, as an "imaginary" mapping." Silverman, 147-148.

<sup>505</sup> In her reading of Lacan through Silverman, Jean Wyatt has argued that "looking at an object always means looking through an intervening screen; (...) one does not look just at objects but at oneself, too, through a screen fabricated by culture." In Wyatt's view, the screen is not only a cultural construct but acts as a cultural norm in the definition and identification of the self. Jean Wyatt, *Risking Difference: Identification, Race, and Community in Contemporary Fiction and Feminism* (New York: SUNY Press: 2004), 123. Slavoj Žižek has countered the interpretations derived from Silverman, arguing they presuppose that the screen imposes and determines specific subject positions. See Slavoj Žižek and Jerry Aline Fliieger, eds., *Jacques Lacan: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2002), 169-170.

<sup>506</sup> For as Lacan suggests, "man alone can map himself into the screen," alluding to a form of agency in the subject with regards to his or hers representation, the possibility of playing with the screen as if it were a mask, mapping oneself in it.

<sup>507</sup> Jacques Lacan, "Mimicry, the human screen, and the quote (Seminar XI)," 1978, 107.

<sup>508</sup> Taking his cue from Roger Caillois' analysis of animal mimicry, Lacan spoke of the screen as a form of camouflage, as dissimulation. Mimicry was understood as becoming something else in Caillois, renouncing the self as when an animal imitates the shape of a flower: yet in Lacan this travesty takes the form of displacement of trauma.

<sup>509</sup> Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: the MIT Press, 2001), 132.

displace the traumatic further away from the subject's consciousness. And yet this repetition is not merely a reproduction of an object or its simulation, but "repetition serves to *screen* the real understood as traumatic."<sup>510</sup> But in Foster's view, as the screen attempts to veil a traumatic experience, it also signals its existence and interrupts its function, creating a rupture in itself. Thus, for Foster repetition points to the traumatic real and in turn the real manages to "rupture the screen of repetition."<sup>511</sup> If we return to Parra, in her works repetition exacerbated the screening function, so that while obstructing vision it attracted attention to that very blind spot.

Yet one can look at the screen as a liminal psychic function that acts as a place of encounter between subject and world, and which also offers a permeable space for the conjunction of gazes. Even as the screen protects the subject from the world and the traumatic real, it catches the 'gaze' and, however briefly, sustains it in its mesh. The screen then can also be understood as a net and a grid that traps both the observer and the gaze, joining them while separating them.<sup>512</sup> In its mediatory position, the screen is a point of touch, the film or lining spoken of by Merleau-Ponty. However much it protects, the screen captivates in its opaqueness and points to a danger out there, outside, beyond itself.

Parra's works articulated this duality of the screen, its ambivalent form of traumatic displacement and capture. Parra's "imbunches" did not merely illustrate the disappearance of bodies in the nation or the wounds inflicted on them as a product of the dictatorship's violence: they screened these traumatic effects, displacing them through repetition. If in a work like "Cordero de Dios" (Lamb of God) of 1977 (fig. 3.21) the reference to sacrifice and torture was highlighted in the lumps and patches of cotton trapped in a grid-like arrangement of metal supports and barbed wire suggesting a bed,<sup>513</sup> and thus resembling of one of the most popular methods of torture that were beginning to be known at the time, the more austere gauzes of the collages and the blank spaces between images and stitches suggested instead an upholding of the viewer's gaze, a point of visual detention manifested as a screen and a crack on a visible invisibility, a latent presence. In Parra's works repetition as screening was rendered deficient, never fully guarding off the traumatic rupture, just like the compulsive threads were unable to close off completely the body.

The graphic marks across the imbunche's surfaces indicated the screen's blind spots. In these ersatz bodies, torn and mended, veiled and distanced, Parra was tracing the contours of vanishing subjects and unstable spaces whose silhouettes were disrupted no matter how often repeated. Parra's work embodied a form of re-cognition and non-

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<sup>510</sup> Ibid. (emphasis in the original).

<sup>511</sup> Ibid.

<sup>512</sup> Lacan also defines the real as an encounter, though an encounter that is missed by the subject, who always arrives too late: "The function of the *tuché*, of the real as encounter –the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter- first presented itself in the history of psychoanalysis in a form... of trauma." Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 55.

<sup>513</sup> An image of the installation "Cordero de dios" was reproduced in 1979 in *Revista Cosas* along with a brief mention of the exhibition "Encuentro de Arte Joven" (Encounter of Young Art) at Instituto Cultural Las Condes. See "Encuentro de Arte Joven," *Revista Cosas*, October 11, 1979.

recognition in the repetitive acts of screening, hiding, separating, and closing. But they also pointed to a failure of places coalescing in a single image, of meaning emerging directly, and of trauma being effaced. The displacement of materials, the replacement of skins for bodies and pages for skins, reflected not only on identities exchanged and substituted, but also on the libidinal energies operating at the center of repetition and in the struggle for defining Chilean identity. The anxiety of repetition was also an anxiety over the body politic in its multiple manifestations: nation, territory, and the bodies within them.

As a whole, Parra's exhibition articulated a tight relationship between bodies and territories, constantly merging their edges. The body was graphed as a territory with borders and orifices that presented a threat to a fixed identity, while the territory was envisioned as a great body menaced by penetration or disclosure. Parra presented body and territory as spatial and corporeal entities in a state of constant friction and dispute. This conceptualization of the body as place and of place as corporeality based on the slippage between the flatness of the media's surfaces and the tactility of the gashes (or the physicality of the graphic mark and the body) was central to the emergence of graphic arts as a form of political contestation in the Chilean scene after 1977. It provided a connection between the social body and its representation that, while appropriating structural and formal strategies of communication from maps and media alike, connected them to subjectivity and, as will be seen in Chapter Five, agency.

### 3.5. Eugenio Dittborn's "Track's End" and the Ethnographic Turn: From the Territory to the Marginal Archive

The centrality acquired by graphic art in its relation to the body was manifested one month later in Eugenio Dittborn's exhibition at Galería Época. Dittborn's new work seemed to change the course of his own oeuvre insofar as half of the works were featured as paintings yet were based on photocopies of printed photographs taken from the media.<sup>514</sup> While for critics in the 1980s this displacement of mediums was regarded as a challenge to the autonomy and authority of painting, bringing the printed image to the status of high art, this shift was also performed through a formal change involving a movement away from the line as the structuring element of the work and its replacement for the stain. It was through the stain that Dittborn was able to join the concept of graphic art and mechanical reproduction to the body as a matrix, as a source of graphic signs. The human body and its amorphous traces took prominence in the 1977 works as desacralizing elements, asserting through their opaque, diluted appearance in the canvases the presence of particular bodies: athletes and delinquents, bodies in a limit situation, whether of physical effort or social discipline. And it was the conflation performed in Dittborn's works between graphic art and marginality, particularly a

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<sup>514</sup> Dittborn himself stated in 1977 that he was moving away from the line followed in previous years, abandoning the "incongruous mixture of semi-caricaturesque characters extracted from reality and the amalgamation of fiction with the concrete and terrene." Eugenio Dittborn in Irene Bronfman, "Los rostros de N.N.," *Revista Hoy*, November 30-December 6, 1977, 47-48.

subaltern form of representation, which became associated in the Chilean artistic terrain in the next decade with an avant-garde language. Chilean art seemed to conceptualize itself through the appropriation of graphic art as a marginal form of re-production, one closely tied to the marginal body.

Dittborn's 1977 exhibition was titled "Final de Pista" (Track's end), a spatial image coming from the sports arena suggesting a limit of achievement, a goal, and a final stop.<sup>515</sup> "Final de pista" brought together a set of eleven paintings and thirteen graphic works featuring the portraits of tennis players, boxers, runners, but also of fugitives, criminals, and provincial families.<sup>516</sup> As in previous works by the author, all the portraits were taken from discontinued magazines and even the photographic archive of an old photographer who set up his box in plazas in the northern city of Antofagasta, dotting the exhibition with an anachronistic note.<sup>517</sup> Yet even though the exhibition's title contained a spatial image, Dittborn's works veered away from the territorial connotations attached to his earlier drawings. Instead, by using solely the portrait as a point of departure, Dittborn presented an archive or catalogue of displaced human bodies. By displaced I mean two things: without a reference to a specific location of belonging (except, as will be seen, in terms of the proper name) and removed from their original settings of visual and factual emergence (in the printed media, the photographer's archive, or the actual track).

Three different types of bodies were presented: athletes during the most strenuous moments of their competitions, portraits of delinquents published by the press, and popular family memorabilia in the form of portraits taken outdoors. Much has been said regarding the physicality invoked in the first group,<sup>518</sup> which displayed moments of extreme bodily effort, or what Richard called the "somatic disorder of subjects."<sup>519</sup> This reading concerning agony and disjunction was first proposed by Dittborn in his catalogue text,<sup>520</sup> where he described his works as indebted to the "multiplication of unfinished

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<sup>515</sup> It is important to note here the coincidence between Dittborn's title and a comment made by the art historian Leo Steinberg in 1962 to describe what he regarded as the end of painting in the context of the decline of Abstract Expressionism and the rise of a 'literal' form of painting. Speaking of a work by Jasper Johns, Steinberg commented on how this meant "the end of the illusion... There is no more metamorphosis, no more magic of medium. It looked to me like the death of painting, a rude stop, *the end of the track*." Leo Steinberg, "Contemporary Art and the Plight of the Public," *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 13. My emphasis.

<sup>516</sup> It might be noted here that Dittborn's text in his second catalogue was titled "La tortilla corredora" (The Running Omelet), also alluding to a sports metaphor. Waldemar Sommer suggested that the title referred to "the territory situated beyond the end of a "grand race"," and read in the exhibition a constant allusion to death. Waldemar Sommer, "Dittborn y su carrera más allá de la meta," *El Mercurio*, December 18, 1977.

<sup>517</sup> The first mention regarding the origins of the provincial portraits can be found in "Dittborn: gestos sin dolores," *Revista Ercilla*, November 30, 1977.

<sup>518</sup> Starting with Kay, Richard, and followed by Galaz and Ivelic, Valdés, and Ticio Escobar among others.

<sup>519</sup> The original states: "la descompaginación somática de sujetos." Nelly Richard, *Una Mirada sobre el arte en Chile/octubre de 1981*, 21.

<sup>520</sup> All his commentators have since taken up this interpretation. Since 1985, Dittborn began a series of airmail paintings, which finally placed his work in an international scene and gained him recognition.

movements by the human body in a sporting state of body, dislocated by the uniformly rapid displacement of its unmoving parts, (...) passing from end to end, side to side of pitches, rings, pools, tracks, in a no-time, instantly perpetuated in the brutality of its public suffering.”<sup>521</sup> And indeed, most of the images presented were of sportsmen and women pushing their bodies to the limit, their physical exertions caught by a reporter’s camera and brought to another public stage, that of the media, what Kay would later call a “space of agony where the subject expires publicly.”<sup>522</sup> Suspended in an everlasting state of fatigue and frenetic struggle through the photograph, the strained bodies of the players appeared in both the media and Dittborn’s works as “martyred”<sup>523</sup> bodies, suffering for their faith.

Dittborn’s painting of a runner making his last efforts in the work “A Fondo Perdido” (Lost End) of 1977 (fig. 3.22),<sup>524</sup> or of a tennis player awaiting in a tense bent pose the incoming ball in “Contragolpe” (Counter hit) of 1977 (fig. 3.23),<sup>525</sup> invoked the pain, loss, and suffering involved in sports performance and the underside of its celebration of bodily achievement.<sup>526</sup> If sports summon ideas about overcoming the body’s limitations and of accomplishment through physical prowess and its imposition on an adversary, less visible body narratives of strenuous exertion, defeat, injury, pain, and exhaustion support these victories. Yet by decontextualizing the images and eliminating

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These works continued using imagery from the 1970s-early 1980s exhibitions, in particular the delinquents. Dittborn’s work has since been interpreted first in the context of a ‘multicultural’ paradigm (as exemplified in his inclusion in “The Decade Show” in New York, 1990) and later in a postcolonial vein. I find useful to use some of these arguments and interpretations, though am particularly careful of avoiding the internationalist perspective that has been applied to his work in later years, since it has circumvented the particularly political and contextual of the emergence of such imagery and its direct connection to the technology on which it was based in the 1970s.

<sup>521</sup> The original text in Spanish can be found in Eugenio Dittborn, “dittborn, un texto para final de pista:” in *Final de Pista*, exhibition catalogue (Santiago de Chile: Galería Época, 1977), n.p. The English translation can be found in *Fugitiva* (Santiago de Chile: Galería Gasco, 2005), 81.

<sup>522</sup> Ronald Kay, *N.N.: aUTOPsIA (rudimentos teóricos para una visualidad marginal)* (Buenos Aires: Centro de Arte y Comunicación, 1979), 7.

<sup>523</sup> Dittborn, “dittborn, un texto para final de pista:”

<sup>524</sup> “A Fondo Perdido” is reproduced in *Fugitiva*, pages 78 and 79 along with its photographic source.

<sup>525</sup> “Contragolpe” is reproduced in the article “Una de cal y otra de arena,” *Revista Ercilla*, December 28, 1977, 49.

<sup>526</sup> Sports are a form of disciplining bodies, submitting them under the auspices of fair competition and recreation to a process of regularization and control. If these normative narratives are couched in a language of health, entertainment, and achievement, they also depend upon the subjection of the body to regimes of discipline. While the dictatorship in Chile made use of bodily metaphors to invoke national unity and was intent on controlling the bodies within the Chilean territory, it often used a sports language to speak of its achievements, for example referring to its economic programs as proofs of the nation’s good ‘performance’ and being on the right ‘track.’ According to the Minister of the Economy, Pablo Barahona, the strategy used to achieve such outstanding economic recuperation was based on the “exaltation of the abilities of the Chilean people and also on exports,” blending the idea of natural capacity with economic production. “El actual modelo es genuinamente chileno,” *El Mercurio*, October 25, 1977.

their original captions, while translating and enlarging the reproductions to exceed the limits of the canvases, Dittborn left the viewer with anonymous blown-up bodies at the point of collapse.<sup>527</sup> The lack of contextual referents and the iconic impact of the enlarged sportsmen made possible the slipping of the images into a terrain of pure agony, leading one critic to call the works a “denunciation of pain.”<sup>528</sup> That the works could be read as accusatory and given a political connotation associated with torture, the exertion of rationalized pain to punish and subdue otherwise subversive bodies, was possible through this inverted process of abstraction and extreme focus. Such a slippage between the fainting athletic bodies as discrete, even normalized substitutes of those confined to social invisibility in the torture centers, was also enabled by the portrayal of the body as an unstable signifier in a chain of meaning, a “shifter.” According to Émile Benveniste, a shifter is a linguistic category that assumes different identities (and thus shifts) depending on the speaker using that category at a particular time.<sup>529</sup> In this sense the shifter is performative, an acting out of identity that nevertheless needs to be constantly renewed. If in their original context some of Dittborn’s athletes were actually “winners,” the reduction of the body to its represented carcass allowed them to be treated as mobile and ambiguous signifiers.

In this play of substitutions, the image of the suffering body was also tied to a religious one, particularly to ideas of sacred violence in the form of ritual sacrifice. The anonymous athletes in Dittborn’s paintings were elevated through their physical endurance to a space of modern sainthood and maximum self-sacrifice on one hand, resembling the actions of martyrs capable of withstanding the most terrible torments while experiencing spiritual release. Nevertheless, the competitors could be interpreted on the other hand as scapegoats and victims of the ritualistic spectacle of sports, feeding the thirst for organized and socially sanctioned violence.

What these examples of physical pain shared was that the body was envisioned in a state of exception, at a time and in a space where normal rules of conduct do not apply. Religion, sports and dictatorships perform different forms of a state of exception, suspending for a limited amount of time what is otherwise a forbidden form of concerted violence. While the rules, forms, and content of that exceptional state change in each case and are not equivalent (it is certainly unfair to treat political torture in the same manner as a soccer player hitting another), the state of exception carves out its own space of transgression and establishes its own limits, where sanctioned codes of conduct such as violent behavior are allowed to be trespassed.<sup>530</sup> In the meantime, the Chilean

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<sup>527</sup> Each canvas was more than a meter tall and wide, similar in format to the drawings of *delachilenapintura, historia*.

<sup>528</sup> “En plástica: lo mejor de la quincena en dos exposiciones,” *Revista Paula*, December 6, 1977.

<sup>529</sup> According to Benveniste, as “empty” signifiers shifters actualize discourse and are therefore performative. Interestingly, Benveniste also calls shifters “speech indexicals,” as if they were traces, adopted by the speaker at the moment of speech. Émile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meeks (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1971), 226.

<sup>530</sup> Georges Bataille’s work on transgression and its relation to eroticism, to an impulse toward death, speaks of this two-way relationship between limits or taboo and transgression. In *Eroticism: death and sensuality*, Bataille stated that “transgression outside well defined limits is rare: within them taboos may well be violated in accordance with rules that ritual or at least custom dictate and organize.” Georges

dictatorship was constantly redefining the limits of its own exceptional state in a process of ‘naturalizing’ that very exception.

In Dittborn’s exhibition, the image that best captured the passage between sports, politics, and religion was “La Pietá” of 1977 (fig. 3.24).<sup>531</sup> The work was a reproduction in acrylic of the televised image of the Cuban boxer Benny Kid Paret’s inert and recumbent body held by the arbiter on the ring on the fateful night of 1962, when he was knocked out to his death.<sup>532</sup> Achieving a tragic notoriety for a moment of extreme torment and public exposure (Paret was battling for the middle weight world title), the boxer’s inanimate body and diffuse image was transformed in Dittborn’s work into a modern version of the Christian saga of family loss and suffering. As a contemporary Pietá, a popular image of mercy and sorrow, the substitution of Paret for Christ and the arbiter for the Virgin Mary nevertheless evacuated the scene’s religious content, which was only present through the title and the repetition of the pose: the flaccid gesture of an unresponsive body. ‘Lowered’ to the arena of contemporary sports and its televised reproduction, the archetypal Christian image of suffering was thus transposed to a contemporary popular setting, surviving through time only as exterior posture, a crust of its original substance.

If the pose can be read as a relic of the religious scene and its spiritual content, it speaks not only of photography’s segregation of the thing reproduced from its original context (the 1960s boxing encounter, the Pietá from the Christian family drama), but also of the persistence of certain images throughout history and their reappearance as anachronisms. As a residue of the past that appears dated and obsolete, running against the progress of history, the anachronistic suggests a degree of permanence in culture, a resistance to the new as the old resurfaces in the present. In Dittborn’s image of Benny Kid Paret, the Pietá as an image of sorrow thus emerged as a ghost, an uncanny displacement that nevertheless acquired new meaning in a different context.<sup>533</sup> The image became in Dittborn a portrait of a new family drama, with pain turned into spectacle, a displaced form of looking at death directly in the eye from the comfort of one’s own living room.

The ghostly aspects of the exhibition were noted by critics at the time. Most used phrases like “phantasmagoric itineraries” and “figures that are left with more of a spirit

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Bataille, *Eroticism: death and sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1957/1986), 71.

<sup>531</sup> A reproduction of “la Pietá” can be found in Eugenio Dittborn’s catalogue *Final de Pista. 11 Pinturas y 13 graficaciones* (Santiago: Galería Época, 1977), in page 23. In page 7, the original image of the boxer appears along with the quote of Saint Luke’s text.

<sup>532</sup> While this was the only image of an athlete whose identity was recognizable, Dittborn’s treatment of these bodies relied on their anonymous uniformity, a difference from the delinquents represented in the portraits.

<sup>533</sup> If photography is anachronistic insofar as it displaces an event from the past translating it into the present, the portrait in particular makes this return more obvious by endowing it with a face, a visage, a semblance of humanity that nevertheless, as argued by Sylviane Agacinski, appears as a ghost. Sylviane Agacinski, *Time Passing. Modernity and Nostalgia*, trans. Jody Gladding (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 109.



than a corporeal wrapping”<sup>534</sup> to describe Dittborn’s works, and even suggested that as a group they roused a “necrophilic sentiment”<sup>535</sup> in the viewer. Exalting the frozen past bodies through their photographic reproduction, filling up the gallery space with visages of the dead, the images verged on a morbid fixation upon the past.<sup>536</sup> The exhibition and Dittborn’s catalog text were infused with a Benjaminian aura in its concern with time, particularly in the survival of the past, the repetition of older situations, and the capacity of the obsolete to illuminate the present.<sup>537</sup> As Dittborn stated in the catalogue, his works were “indebted” to obsolete magazines, which acted as “profane relics in whose photographs the failed acts of public life laid as sediments (...) and where actuality is filtered, incomplete.”<sup>538</sup> Speaking as a geologist and archaeologist, Dittborn’s approach to photography was to consider it a ruin, the calcination of the image (and of the body) in which laid occult layers of meaning that the artist could excavate and summon up.

But these layered ‘sedimentations’ seemed to shed light less about the past and its dynamics than about the present. In this sense, Dittborn’s work was equally indebted to Freud’s unconscious, especially in the use of the term ‘filtering,’ in the sense of a displacement, a seeping through of a repressed meaning.<sup>539</sup> That Dittborn described in the catalogue text the old magazines as a “common grave”<sup>540</sup> for anonymous bodies, not only stressed the mortuary ambience of the exhibition (as the phrase “track of ashes” also suggested) and of photography as the freezing of death, but of that governing the nation

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<sup>534</sup> Waldemar Sommer, “Dittborn y su carrera más allá de la meta,” *El Mercurio*, December 18, 1977. Sommer continued in his cryptic interpretation of Dittborn by describing it as “realism beyond the grave” (“realismo de ultratumba”).

<sup>535</sup> Giorgio Vomero, “El deshumanizado dolor en Dittborn y Leppe,” *La Tercera*, November 11, 1977.

<sup>536</sup> Even the works’ titles were culled from the media and ringed with an air of melodrama and remembrance, as in “Su imagen querida” (His loving image), “Lejana vida” (Distant Life), and “Sus mejores años” (His best years).

<sup>537</sup> While Dittborn has only of late acknowledged his participation in the readings directed by Kay since 1975, the influence of the latter is manifested in Kay’s own familiarity with Benjamin’s texts on photography, as is evident in the multiple quotes and similar views of his 1976 text on Dittborn’s work. Kay was instrumental in making Benjamin’s texts available to his close circle of V.I.S.U.A.L., since it would not be until the late 1970s that the first translations into Spanish made by critics were published in magazines such as *Revista CAL*.

<sup>538</sup> Eugenio Dittborn, *Final de Pista. 11 pinturas y 13 graficaciones* (Santiago: Galería Época, 1977), 10.

<sup>539</sup> As was noted in the previous sections, Dittborn himself first suggested in his writings the relation between his methods of construction and those of psychoanalysis. This relation was later expanded by Kay, when he spoke of Dittborn as doing a “clinical picture” of society. Most critics have followed this reading, and perhaps the most evident example of the parallel created between the artist and psychoanalysis comes from a pamphlet written by Mellado in 1982, which, using similar expressions as Kay and Richard’s 1976 catalogue texts, was quoted by Richard in 1986. Mellado stated that: “In his work Dittborn edits the representation of the collective unconscious through its remnants, that is, through the images of those forgotten men and women petrified in poses –their sole entry into history (...) *Dittborn the analyst* reads, listens to, restores a fragmented discourse.” Quoted in Richard, *Margins and Institutions*, 42, from Mellado, *Grabado en la memoria*, pamphlet, no publisher, 1982. My emphasis.

<sup>540</sup> Dittborn, *Final de Pista. 11 pinturas y 13 graficaciones*, 10.

as well. 1977 was a year in which international accusations against the growth of human rights violations by the Chilean military regime grew, with the U.N. issuing a resolution against the nation at the beginning of December, a threat met by Pinochet's call for a national plebiscite to defend national honor against international aggression.<sup>541</sup> The number of "N.N." graves was also growing, as were the unexplained disappearances, a situation that invited a more contemporary and local reading for the ghostly faces in Dittborn's works, which some critics manifested at the time when they called such works "denunciation" pieces.

The association between past portraits and the present has led recent critics to read Dittborn's works as dealing with memory, exalting them as documents against forgetfulness, particularly the national amnesia imposed by the military regime. Such readings led Richard, for example, to speak of the photographic document as a "*guardian of memory*," and to go as far as stating that Dittborn's act of "resurrecting these documents [the old magazine photographs] is equivalent to *unearthing what was censored in the news of the past and then transferring it to the present as a confrontation*."<sup>542</sup> Yet these interpretations focusing on the "censored" in the past obfuscate the ways in which Dittborn's own interpretations have guided these readings, for the magazine photographs were not censored at the time they were published but made highly visible the athletes and homicides they advertised. One could speak of repression only in the sense of Edgar Allan Poe's purloined letter,<sup>543</sup> which is not Richard's intention when she states, for example, that Dittborn "reinterprets the national memory through photographic *omissions* in popular portraits and everyday scenes until its traumatic repression is lifted."<sup>544</sup> It is rather in the slippage between past and present traces, between visibility and invisibility, permanence and impermanence, that Dittborn's works acquire their political strength. Relying on the apparition of the present in the past photographs as if one were seeing a ghost or the emergence of the familiar in the unfamiliar in an inverted form of Freud's "uncanny," Dittborn was confronting the viewer of his works with the possibility of death and otherness. If in Parra the image of the present had to be perforated and scavenged in order to arrive at some understanding

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<sup>541</sup> Since June, the Organization of American States had advanced accusations against the regime, which as in previous years, were only met with evasive answers and a deflection of violence towards "terrorists." The plebiscite called by Pinochet on December 22, took quickly place in January 4, 1978, after a misleading, propagandistic campaign. More will be said on the advertisement used for this campaign in Chapter Five, but for the time being, Pinochet's claim to "defend Chile" and its sovereignty was supported "categorically" by the people as advertised by *El Mercurio* the following day: 75% of the population wanted Pinochet in charge, against a mediocre 20% opposed to him. See "Categorica respuesta ciudadana," *El Mercurio*, January 5, 1978.

<sup>542</sup> Richard, *Margins and Institutions*, 41. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>543</sup> A letter so sought after, and so visible in the pantry where it was left, that it goes unnoticed by those looking for it.

<sup>544</sup> Richard, 41. My emphasis.

of its meaning or absence of it, in Dittborn the present could only be framed and invoked in past traces.<sup>545</sup>

The pose was also an element present in Dittborn's second series of corporealities, those coming from the photographer's closet. In works such as "Sagrada familia" (Sacred Family), another allusion to the Christian motif, middle class families, couples, friends, appeared posing for an instant in a plaza, smiling for the camera on a weekend outing.<sup>546</sup> The innocuousness of the photographs, the inconspicuousness of the portrayed gestures and poses, and their similarity to other photographs taken in the same circumstances, spoke of customs and postures adopted socially, learned, practiced and exerted mechanically in known contexts. In these familiar yet also slightly antiquated photographs of anonymous people, the strict separation of Chilean social classes was also made evident and inadvertently documented. From the absence of a proper studio to take the family portrait, to the informal economy of the illegal street vendor, and the populist appeal of the photographic portrait, Dittborn's reconfiguration of the ordinary Sunday photo as mock paintings pointed to forms of representation accessible to the masses. Portraying them in his own works as the only indistinct bodies, with no specific names or even painfully victorious moments to commemorate, Dittborn was recuperating the ordinary as marginal, and the provincial (as evident in some of the backgrounds, with the rocky ledge of Antofagasta as the photographer's backdrop) as anachronistic, disconnected from the present of the metropolis.

This part of Dittborn's "Final de Pista" has gone largely ignored by his critics, as if the ordinary popular classes were only an insignificant lapse into the domestic and anonymous. Yet these family portraits are tied to the contradiction placed between anonymity and the name invoked in the series next set of corporeality, the delinquents' portraits, as well as Dittborn's identification of materials with forms, techniques with images, and signifiers with signified. As several critics noted, even though Dittborn had turned to painting, he constructed these works out of "ordinary, insignificant materials,"<sup>547</sup> associated to "public use and waste,"<sup>548</sup> such as unprimed canvas, chalk, petroleum oil, Vaseline, and cardboard. Evoking the ordinary, the poor, and the precarious, the materials suggested a rejection of artistic craftsmanship and noble mediums, placing an emphasis on impermanence and the everyday. Dittborn's own statement in December 1977 that "I abandon 'artistic' materials to give room to the marginal,"<sup>549</sup> brings to mind not only Vostell's influence and the assorted texts in his exhibition catalogue but also Allan Kaprow's "Assemblages, Happenings, Environments"

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<sup>545</sup> With the hindsight of more than seven years and a political situation that was changing and becoming more vocal of its discomfort with the dictatorship, Dittborn revealed in a video made by Richard that because the dictatorship had broken time and established a time away from time, his works also recreated a time out of tune with itself.

<sup>546</sup> A fragment of "La Sagrada Familia" was reproduced by Dittborn in his exhibition catalogue, *Final de Pista. 11 pinturas y 13 graficaciones*, in page 21.

<sup>547</sup> Sommer, "Dittborn y su carrera más allá de la meta."

<sup>548</sup> "En plástica: lo mejor de la quincena en dos exposiciones," *Revista Paula*, December 6, 1977.

<sup>549</sup> Dittborn quoted in "En plástica: lo mejor de la quincena."

text which was also included in it. Kaprow argued for the incorporation into art (and particularly into painting) of the everyday, using the notion of the ‘margin’ as provoking a visual disruption in the order of high art.<sup>550</sup> In the artistic lineage that Dittborn and the V.I.S.U.A.L. group were constructing for themselves by joining their own projects to those of the European and American avant-garde, the concept of the marginal as ‘popular’ took preeminence, with the incorporation of the real posited as an attack to tradition. Such an incorporation of the margin signaled, as Kaprow argued in his text, that “in short, contemporary art has moved out of its traditional limits”<sup>551</sup> by extending itself physically and materially towards everyday reality.

Dittborn’s delinquents, the third form of corporeality presented, received the most attention by the press.<sup>552</sup> If these had appeared as comical, deformed characters in the artist’s earlier histories, by 1977 Dittborn made them the centerpiece of the exhibition as expressions of marginality, but I would also argue of human invisibility, as the latent presence of the popular and of class division in Chilean society. The reproductions of delinquents came from old criminology magazines, such as *Detective*, a periodical published in Chile during the 1930s as exposed in the catalogue’s cut-outs taken from the magazine. In their original sources, each portrait came with an identification plaque, caption or legend, which included the name of the bandit, his or hers alias, place of operations, and characteristics of the crimes committed by them. Photographed after the moment of capture, their bodies framed by the camera so that the most distinct characteristics of the face could be clearly seen from the front, and holding sometimes identification numbers while posing in a static and docile manner, these mug shots seemed like endless variations of the same, a monotonous repetition of roles and postures.

Serialized through numbers and limited gestures, and reduced to names, whether fake or real, the gallery of faces or the face of crime represented in the criminology magazines, deployed a regime of visibility based on a dual movement between individual identification and stereotyping. In the construction of a socially deviant subject, the particularities of the delinquent were delineated through both visual images, as in the singularity of the face, and linguistic markers, as in the proper name. Yet the singular was subjected at the same time to the homogeneity of the stereotype, that of delinquency, a stereotype which in the words of Homi Bhabha appears at first as “offering, *at any one time*, a *secure* point of identification.”<sup>553</sup> Such a stereotype was built up through the use

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<sup>550</sup> The included text by Kaprow was “Assemblage, Environments & Happenings,” originally published in *Assemblage, Environments & Happenings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1966), 150-208.

<sup>551</sup> Allan Kaprow, “Assemblage, Environments & Happenings,” 154. Kaprow’s argument was based on the notion of “extension” which he discussed in the same essay as both a process and a physical expansion of the work, a concept that would have serious resonances in the Chilean scene after 1979 in particular, and which artists such as Hernán Parada directly implanted, as will be discussed in Chapter Five. For Kaprow’s concept of “extension, see Kaprow, 159.

<sup>552</sup> And continues today. These characters have become a staple of Dittborn’s work and he has continued to use them throughout the 1990s and 2000.

<sup>553</sup> But as Bhabha observes, such an identification is ambiguous for “this is not compensated for (nor contradicted by) their view that, at other times and places, the same stereotype might be read in a

of the photographic portrait as a framing device, capable of turning the subject into an object, and its reduction of individuality to a standardized pose (the ID image as a homogeneous form of identification). Such a stereotyping gesture was accompanied by descriptions of character deemed degenerate or anti-social: violent, dangerous. The common visages and popular names of the portrayed (such as Hernández, Guzman, García Orellana) were thus characterized as “other” to the social order: disruptive, outsiders to the system, criminal, through verbal and visual formats that objectified them. As stated by Kay in a text produced two years later, *N.N. aUTOPsIA*, the use made by Western societies of the photographic procedures in the form of the identity portrait or passport photograph had become “the most efficient way of maintaining public order,”<sup>554</sup> linking a specific usage of a technology, and the standardization of its format, to a form of taxonomy and the organization of society.<sup>555</sup>

Dittborn appropriated and deconstructed in his paintings this standardized, archival regime of vision, disassembling its parts to layout another version of identification and deviancy. Three strategies of visualization were used by the artist: enlarging the original individual portraits to fill up all the canvas with a single body as in “Luis Cáceres Hernández” of 1977 (fig. 3.25),<sup>556</sup> grouping several portraits in columns and enclosing each face in a circle to create a catalogue of visages as in “Su imagen querida” of 1977 (fig. 3.26),<sup>557</sup> or arranging the faces along with their names in a grid (“Muerte del nombre”). The first strategy, the blown-up single portrait of the delinquent, was formally similar to Andy Warhol’s series of serigraphic police photographs of the same subject, a resemblance that peaked in a work of 1980 titled “Rojo cabeza de muerto” (Red Head of the Dead).<sup>558</sup> Yet Dittborn’s works were the poor cousin of

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contradictory way or, indeed be misread.” (emphasis in the original). Homi Bhabha, “The Other Question,” in *The Location of Culture*, 69-70.

<sup>554</sup> Kay, *N.N. aUTOPsIA* (*rudimentos teóricos para una visualidad marginal*).

<sup>555</sup> In the English version of *Margins and Institutions*’ first edition that reproduced the passage from Kay’s text, the phrase was entirely omitted. The translation is mine from Kay’s original Spanish text. See Richard, *Margins and Institutions* (Melbourne: Art and Text, 1986), 130. In *Margins and Institutions* Richard provides a brief summary of Kay’s theories on photography in America, after which she describes Dittborn’s strategies as “a photographic inventory” in which the “identity card photo –and its normative framing of an identity ascribed to a rigid mold of identification- is the most precise metaphor of a repressive society” and uses as a quote a passage from an unpublished text written in 1978 by the poet Enrique Lihn, a text which Dittborn had quoted five years earlier than Richard in his own artist book *Fallo Fotográfico*. Lihn’s text is appropriate for it focuses on the stereotyping maneuvers of photography: “the camera, imitated or mimicked by painting (...) is a metaphor and correlation of society as a machine that exhaustively produces and reproduces its subjects and allocates them different social roles (...) Society as Camera is a stereotyping machine.” Quoted in Richard, *Margins and Institutions*, 21, original in Enrique Lihn, *Mirar por el ojo del rodillo* (Santiago: 1978).

<sup>556</sup> “Luis Cáceres Hernández” and “Su imagen querida” were reproduced by Dittborn in his exhibition catalogue *Final de Pista. 11 pinturas y 13 graficaciones*, in pages 24 and 25.

<sup>557</sup> The roundels resembled formally those of the “Honor portraits” of 1976, suggesting both accomplishment but also another of objectification.

<sup>558</sup> By 1980, Dittborn had incorporated photo silkscreen in his work, another significant similarity to Warhol’s works. Yet “Rojo cabeza de muerto” incorporated as well the child’s script that, as described

Warhol in terms of machines, and rather than being made in serigraphy they were painted and stained into the canvases, irreverently clouding Warhol's mechanical dispositive.

In general, the results were large taxonomical tables, classifying as a species under the implied category of deviancy and criminality a series of individuals who, on occasion, were visually described in their specific physiognomic traits. What Dittborn was laying out was a system of social classification, a large database of beings juxtaposed according to resemblances of character, professions, physiognomic traits, or names. Like the flora and fauna of society, Dittborn diligently removed his objects of study from their contexts, reduced them to a point zero of identification, leaving just empty looking visages floating on neutral spaces. Yet by touching on the universality of the archive, its reduction of identity to the stereotype, while at the same time alienating the context to make the anatomical details of the individuals emerge more forcefully, Dittborn's works pointed to the difficulty of assigning identity based on all-encompassing categories or, on the contrary, on minute personal details.

This system of classification was similar to that used by Dittborn in 1976, when the objects so organized were Chilean painters, real and imagined, and the object was to create a "history" of Chilean painting. A history that included not just 'objective' data (the real, historic painters) but also the fables, the myths, the stories passed down by travelers of the objects composing "Chilean painting."<sup>559</sup> While a system of classes had surfaced in the previous works and was countered by the overlapping of the high and low in culture, as well as the foreign and the indigenous, by 1977 the bodies represented were narrowed down by the artist to a specific group: social marginalia. For the bodies presented in the graphic works and paintings pointed to a location off-limits in society, something obscene in its original sense of "off the scene," away from the center, at the margins.

Dittborn's paintings and graphic works achieved a conflation between the popular and the marginal and of the latter with the criminal. If in the earlier 1976 "historia" Dittborn had first associated elements of popular culture such as Condorito to the indigenous, linking the native to local names and to low culture (as in the comics), these were now brought together under the guiding image of the delinquent. Operating as a criminal anthropologist, Dittborn's taxonomical mode of classification cast the faces as filing cards in a criminal's record. Michel Leiris had spoken of the closeness of the criminal and the cultural "other," asking himself why it was that the "ethnographic inquest makes me think of a police interrogation?"<sup>560</sup> If Leiris was speaking of European

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below, gave a 'primitivist' reading to his oeuvre that is not found in Warhol. "Rojo cabeza de muerto" is reproduced in Richard's *Margins and Institutions*, in page 34.

<sup>559</sup> This is similar to Michel Foucault's description in *The Order of Things* of a model for describing nature based on tradition and resemblance where "History was the inextricable and completely unitary fabric of all that was visible of things and of the signs that had been discovered or lodged in them," where to name a thing meant to include all the histories related with it. According to Foucault, the appearance of Natural History involved the elimination of the anecdotal in favor of the name as a category. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 129.

<sup>560</sup> Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique Fantôme*, 1932, quoted in Hubert Martin, et. al., *Magiciens de la terre* (Paris: Editions du Pompidou, 1989), 44.

colonialism and was partially criticizing the Surrealist interest in non-Western cultures,<sup>561</sup> Dittborn's 1977 works focused on the persistence of colonialism within an ex-colony, dealing with the construction of internal forms of otherness as embodied in the socially deviant subject. Such actions could be described as manifestations of "internal colonialism," with the criminal as a social outcast associated with the savage, linking degeneracy to the uncivilized, to another of (Western) culture.<sup>562</sup>

This type of interpretation of social deviancy has a well documented history in the West since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and is associated with the rise of anthropology in the social sciences and its quick appropriation by derivative sciences, such as criminology, ethnography, and even art history.<sup>563</sup> The relationship between crime and savagery could be seen in the exhibition mounted by the Chilean police (carabineros) in December 1977, where a history of identification practices in the nation was displayed.<sup>564</sup> The show focused on corporeal markers as signs of delinquency and their recognition, progressing from tattoos inscribed on the body, the extirpation and amputation of members, marks made with fire on the skin, and ending with the use of photography and imprints of the hand and fingers as a faithful method of criminal identification. A parallel evolution of the methods of personal identification were also shown, including passport photographs, which according to the organizers had led to the discovery of corporeal anomalies, from missing fingers to hands with six of them. Social deviancy was thus correlated in the police force's show to body marks as visual signs of social deformation.

In this reductive construction of otherness, a geographic metaphor was also implicit: these social outcasts were modern primitives and needed to be subjected to the social order as defined by the modern state. Doubly envisioned as extreme and borderline by evincing a disturbingly violent behavior and an uncivilized lack of respect for private property, the delinquent was located in a marginal position in relation to the state's modern center, inhabiting the nation's borders.<sup>565</sup> This problem of placement, of

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<sup>561</sup> For an analysis of the contradictions in Surrealism between colonial desires and anti-colonial sentiments and its relation to the Caribbean, see María Clara Bernal Bermúdez, *Más allá de lo maravilloso: El surrealismo y el Caribe* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2006).

<sup>562</sup> As mentioned by Walter Dignolo in *Local Histories/Global Designs*, the term "internal colonialism" was first proposed by the Mexican sociologists Pablo González Casanova and Rodolfo Stavenhagen who applied it to the ways in which the Mexican state dealt with the Amerindians in their project of constructing the Mexican nation. Dignolo describes internal colonialism as a double act that attempts to enforce "the colonial politics towards indigenous communities and, on the other, to establish alliances with metropolitan powers." Dignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: coloniality, subaltern knowledges, and border thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 104.

<sup>563</sup> The most famous example being Adolf Loos, and his work *Ornament as Crime* of 1908, where ornament in architecture and design is regarded as a sign of cultural degeneracy and contrasted to the purity and progressiveness of modernism. See Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays*, trans. Michael Mitchell (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1998), 167-176.

<sup>564</sup> The show took place in the third floor of the Central Office of Carabineros. While not easily accessible to the public, it was nevertheless announced in the press. See, for example, "Agilizan sistemas de identificación," *El Mercurio*, December 6, 1977.

<sup>565</sup> It is interesting to note the coincidences between the Chilean interest in criminology during the turn of the century until the Second World War and the Argentinean modernization process spurred by the flux of

spatializing deviancy was further tied to a question of class and race that in Chile, as Dittborn's portraits exemplified, was tied to the lower strata of society, to the indigenous and its mestizo offspring. Dittborn's own reference to Ercilla's epic poem in his previous exhibition had pointed to the historic reduction of the indigenous population question to a problem of "la Frontera" (the frontier) making the Araucanía a space that had to be integrated to the modern nation yet always remained an internal border and enemy. As noted by Hernán Vidal, the problem of incorporating the indigenous to the concept of the Chilean nation had been historically contradictory for both the state and the military: regarded as different in terms of race and culture, the Mapuches at the same time formed through "mestizaje" one of the largest sources of national identity and the Creole population.<sup>566</sup> In a similar manner, the delinquent could be considered both the excreta of society and its own product, existing within and without its rules and limits.

In 1978, Dittborn extended the conflation between the delinquent and the savage to the female body, including in his archive of images those of prostitutes. Photographed after being captured by the police, the female portraits also exhibited cataloguing markers, such as the serial numbers and proper names that the male delinquents had exposed, data which Dittborn would sometimes include in the graphic works, laying out the portraits in a grid-like pattern (fig. 3.27).<sup>567</sup> Substituting the male criminal for the female deviant, the chain of signifiers used by the artist displaced the notion of criminality to the sexual and the gendered. Drawing on a long modernist tradition of representing the prostitute as a harbinger of modernity from Manet to Picasso, Dittborn established a link between the "fallen woman" and social degeneracy, eroticism, and social backwardness in the midst of great urban centers.<sup>568</sup> As an excessive sexual conduct, infringing on the limits of the family and respectability, prostitution was cast by the state as de-civilizing behavior, bringing men and women closer to an animal nature.

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immigrants during 1980 and the 1940s, where theories of criminality imported from Italy gained ground, particularly the positivist, pathological point of view of Lombroso. For an analysis of the role of positivist pathological approach in Argentina and the treatment of female criminals, see Lila M. Caimari, "Whose Criminals Are These? Church, State, and Patronatos and the Rehabilitation of Female Convicts," *The Americas* 54, no. 2 (October 1997): 185-208.

<sup>566</sup> And even more contradictory for the military since, as Vidal points out, the origins of the Chilean army (el ejército chileno) was based on the warring character of the Mapuches who "were part of the racial amalgam that produced the blood as a philosophical stone of the Chilean's warrior virtues." Hernán Vidal, *Mitología Militar Chilena. Surrealismo desde el superego* (Minneapolis: Institute for the Study of Ideologies and Literature, 1989), 75.

<sup>567</sup> Some of Dittborn's graphic works such as "Todas íbamos a ser reinas" were exhibited during the performance of the play "Las del otro lado del río" by Andrés Pérez at Sala del Ángel, along with works by other artists that focused on the play's main theme of prostitution. Dittborn reworked the theme during the following two years using the same manuscript text, yet changing the visages. The work was reproduced in "Expo ad hoc," *Revista Hoy*, August 30-September 5, 1977, 36.

<sup>568</sup> See for example Anna Chave's analysis of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* and the connection of the prostitute with commoditization, savagery, and primitivism, in Anna Chave, "New Encounters with *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon: Gender, Race and the Origins of Cubism*," *Art Bulletin*, LXXVI, no. 4 (Dec., 1984): 597-612. More will be said on prostitution and its relation with modernity in relation to the works of Francisco Smythe and Diamela Eltit in Chapters Four and Five.



Sexuality outside of “proper” limits (of regulated commerce and morality alike, since as the magazines curiously revealed, there was a contradiction within capitalism of the ‘sale’ and promotion of criminality as if it were another form of popular entertainment) was connected through the criminal magazines to other forms of social maladjustment, an equivalent of homicide and theft.

But the most adamant gesture of identification between gender and primitiveness in Dittborn’s works, and what separated the female delinquent portraits from their male counterparts until 1980, was the inclusion of fragments from Gabriela Mistral’s famous poem “Todas íbamos a ser reinas” (We were all going to be queens) written in a child’s script, separating the two layers of female portraits.<sup>569</sup> If the feminine was cast as socially deviant in her sexual aggressiveness, Dittborn linked this form of savagery visually and symbolically through the poem’s content and the handwriting to childhood as another form of primitivism. The irony of the poem’s first utopian lines could be felt in the “fall” of these women from childhood innocence to adult promiscuity, a descent that also implicated a fall from grace from the intellect and morality to the body and untamed desire.

The relation between Dittborn’s taxonomical approach to deviancy and his reinterpretation of primitivism placed his endeavors in an anthropologic and ethnographic arena. The artist cast himself as both an archaeologist and an anthropologist: excavating traces of the past and presenting them to the public in an attempt to speak for those others. Kay would constantly refer in his writings to Dittborn’s focus on ordinary people who only achieved a fleeting form of notoriety through the reproduction of their visages in the press, those who otherwise would have no voice and no form of social representation, remaining in the margins of national consciousness.<sup>570</sup> Joaquín Cociña has been one of the few writers to criticize this position, arguing that in Kay’s interpretation there is always a redeeming aspect to Dittborn’s recuperation of the marginal.<sup>571</sup> I agree with Cociña insofar as Kay was reading Dittborn’s work through a Benjaminian lens, seeing in the traces of the past, and particularly the photograph, a moment of redemption, a glimpse of future revolution carried out by the lower classes. Dittborn’s statements at the time also reflect this redemptive vision, as he referred to himself as a “disinterrator, an excavator. But not of antique things. I want to excavate actuality and recuperate a hidden pain.”<sup>572</sup> For Cociña, what Dittborn was illuminating was not the marginal as the

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<sup>569</sup> The poem is a lament of unfulfilled hopes, in which the speaker reflects on a girl’s dreams of becoming a queen and growing up to be something radically less promising.

<sup>570</sup> This is what Richard interprets as the “omissions” in the photographic portraits mentioned above.

<sup>571</sup> Joaquín Cociña, “Ciudad letrada y pinturas aeropostales”, in *Documenta Magazine*, Documenta 12, [http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://magazines.documenta.de/files/890x/userlogo\\_70.jpg&imgrefurl=http://magazines.documenta.de/frontend/article.php%3FIdLanguage%3D13%26NrArticle%3D151&usg=\\_\\_0l8I\\_vxLZuzDlAAssFrw7tzFKx0=&h=1026&w=890&sz=135&hl=en&start=1&um=1&tbnid=LntzB94tvqI88M:&tbnh=150&tbnw=130&prev=/images%3Fq%3Deugenio%2Bdittborn%2Blubricante%2Bquemado%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den](http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://magazines.documenta.de/files/890x/userlogo_70.jpg&imgrefurl=http://magazines.documenta.de/frontend/article.php%3FIdLanguage%3D13%26NrArticle%3D151&usg=__0l8I_vxLZuzDlAAssFrw7tzFKx0=&h=1026&w=890&sz=135&hl=en&start=1&um=1&tbnid=LntzB94tvqI88M:&tbnh=150&tbnw=130&prev=/images%3Fq%3Deugenio%2Bdittborn%2Blubricante%2Bquemado%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den) (last accessed May 2009).

<sup>572</sup> “Dittborn: gestos sin dolores,” *Revista Arcilla*. The collective group C.A.D.A. carried this “redemptive” form of visualization in art to an extreme, where involvement with prostitution in the work of Eltit in particular and marginality in general gained operatic proportions. Some of C.A.D.A.’s works dealing with

un-representable in society, but rather the system of power sustaining those representations.

Both Kay's and Cociña's arguments nevertheless point in opposite directions to the question of representation and power present in Dittborn's works and the means through which it was performed. In this sense I would argue that it was Dittborn's systematic form of conflating terms (popular, marginal, delinquent, criminal, savage) and displacing signifiers so as to destabilize their meanings, as well as his recurrent use of exaggeration (whether of forms or of these links), which allowed for the dual exposition and criticism of certain ideological narratives and forms of representing (and disavowing) otherness. While the technologies of the exercise of power, such as photography, and its codification in specific practices, as in criminology, occupy a paramount position in Dittborn's work, the exercise of power was also visualized and manifested physically upon individuals, their bodies, and acts. If, as Cociña argues, it was a system of power perpetrating itself that Dittborn's works reproduced, it was nevertheless through specific bodies, their images, and their disciplining that this act took place.

And in 1977, Dittborn's deviant bodies were presented in a manner that complicated the relations between the popular and marginal as stated by Kay, as well as between technologies of reproduction and power. For Dittborn's bodies emerged in both graphic and painted works as stains, viscous substances, indistinct in their moist borders. The painted portraits were not layered over the canvas in a traditional pictorial manner but stained and rubbed into the unprepared surfaces with acrylic, Vaseline, sanguine, or chalk.<sup>573</sup> The results were distorted portraits diluted and diffused in the canvases or roughly smudged onto cardboard, with several layers of distorted grids (coming from the photographic reproduction, from the canvas' weave or the cardboard's irregular surface) interrupting one another. In works such as "Muerte del nombre" (Death of the Name) of 1977 (fig. 3.28),<sup>574</sup> Dittborn even incorporated a small blotch of Vaseline next to each of the stained delinquent portraits, creating a counterpoint between the diffused faces arranged in a clear grid on the canvas, the figures' last names inscribed in clear types below them, and the soaked stain puncturing the image.

The critic Waldemar Sommer noted this change in techniques, mentioning how in Dittborn's earlier paintings and drawings the images had appeared in "angular forms, incisive on occasion, and were characterized by the clear predominance of the line, [while] now his visions are rendered through a more pictorial language, and drawing

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margins and marginality will be referred to in Chapter Five, in relation to Lotty Rosenfeld's involvement with the group and her video work.

<sup>573</sup> Mellado has argued that the stain in Dittborn is derived from Jackson Pollock's dripping technique. I would argue instead that if Pollock is at the beginning of the stain, particularly as seen in his Black Paintings of the 1950s, Dittborn was here more influenced by Pollock's derivatives, the Post-Painterly abstract painters and their indirect relation to the flat surfaces of Pop art (I am thinking of Helen Frankenthaler's stained landscapes on one hand and Kenneth Noland's chevrons on the other). This relates to the quote mentioned above of Leo Steinberg and the end of painting. A show titled "North American Painting" was exhibited at the National Museum of Fine Arts in February 1975, and included works by Sam Francis, Ellsworth Kelly, Morris Louis, Larry Rivers, and Richard Anuszkiewicz among others.

<sup>574</sup> Two fragments of "Muerte del nombre" were reproduced by Dittborn in his catalogue text in pages 26 and 27.

acquires a new morbidity.”<sup>575</sup> Sommer interpreted the appearance of the stain as a pictorial sign, with the few lines that remained in the works being vague and undefined, supporting an overall diffused and atmospheric effect.<sup>576</sup> However, the critic also noted the persistence of graphics in the so-called paintings, noting in passing the contradiction implied in the visual resources used, so that the “spirit of graphic art is not abandoned in this terrain, one that in essence does not belong to it.”<sup>577</sup> Sommer was pointing to a certain confusion of limits present in Dittborn’s works, a distortion of medium specificity achieved through the clear way in which the mechanically reproduced origin of the images was presented and the contradiction it posed to the ‘pictorial’ materials through which it was embodied.

This translation of sources was made evident in the enlargement of the original photographic reproduction or its photocopy to reveal the grid and graphic patterns composing it, or by locating the original reproduction as part of a collage composition with pictorial ingredients included. Such an act of medium transposition has been interpreted by most critics, particularly Richard, as instigating a crisis within the realm of painting, challenging its conventions, especially that of originality, expression, and the uniqueness associated to the painter’s manual mark. These readings have taken painting and other mediums as distinct forms, which would have been juxtaposed in Dittborn’s works to create a state of tension by bringing back into a specific format (the canvas) its technological nemesis: photography.<sup>578</sup> While most critics have not addressed the problem of mass production embedded in the seriality of the photograph as a possible class component in Dittborn’s works, serialization and its possibility of endless reproduction has been generally regarded as a loss of “aura,” the ‘here and now’ of the artwork in the words of Benjamin. This in turn would inevitably imply a disruption of art’s most precious character: its aloof uniqueness and self-containment.

This argument has been used as a proof of the ideological and conceptual ‘rupture’ at the center of Chilean art in the late 1970s, distinguishing the emergence of a new avant-garde, what Richard called the “escena de avanzada” (advanced scene), from prior generations. Richard in particular has made a point about the re-emergence of photography in 1977 and its varied use by artists such as Parra, Dittborn, Smythe, Altamirano, Leppe and Roser Bru, arguing that these artists “understood [photography] as an *apparatus for the visual manipulation of objective reality*, as a technique for reproducing and serializing the image, as a standard for popular aesthetics, as an

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<sup>575</sup> Sommer, “Dittborn y su carrera más allá de la meta.”

<sup>576</sup> This effect was reinforced by the introduction of thin washes of color, pink as in “Contragolpe,” or green in some of the collages.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid.

<sup>578</sup> In 1986, Richard’s summarized the question thus: “For example, Dávila, Dittborn and Díaz began to address serial processes of the image and its reproduction by graphical or printed multiplication: their work opposed the pictorial gesture of handicraft, and the subjectivity invested in that gesture, to the field of new visual technologies which codified the image and the social imaginary, thus reviving the discussion about the two rival codes of social perception counterpoised within the framework of the picture.” Richard, *Margins and Institutions*, 39.

instrument of social perception. As an *ideology of vision*.<sup>579</sup> Richard's definition of photography is broad,<sup>580</sup> and attempts to encompass formal strategies as varied as those of Parra and Dittborn (and as will be seen in the next chapter, Smythe and Altamirano) regarding image making, the nature of the photographic sources, and their social impact.<sup>581</sup> Richard opted for a reading of the photographic referent as discursive, capable of being systematically analyzed and dismantled into techniques and units of representation. It is not without importance that Richard only mentioned in passing Roser Bru's 1977 exhibition at Galería Cromo in her 1986 text as an example of this new approach to photography, and that this show rarely gets treated in accounts of the period.<sup>582</sup> Bru's work nevertheless offers several points of comparison with Dittborn's strategies at the time, especially since the former's work revolved around a form of painting based on graphic referents in which certain historic painters such as Goya and Velázquez recurred.<sup>583</sup>

The similarities between Bru's July 1977 exhibition and Dittborn's works are striking, starting with the similar format used: paintings on unprepared canvas mixed with drawings based on photographic portraits of the dead and their reproduction in photocopies. Bru's paintings recreated faded gestures and obliterated faces counterpointed with stark graphic marks, as well as drawn frames, calligraphy, dates, and private information regarding her subjects. Nevertheless the most prominent differences with Dittborn were Bru's reliance on the painterly gesture even in her graphic works and

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<sup>579</sup> Richard, 35-36.

<sup>580</sup> Yet the definition is obviously not all-compassing. Several characteristics of the photograph, such as framing, are not mentioned, since Richard focused less on the formal qualities of photography than on its "ideological" components. But ideological only insofar as they represent for her a particular capitalist, imperialist mode.

<sup>581</sup> Nevertheless, the question of the popular and massification is not addressed in Richard's analysis.

<sup>582</sup> A curious omission because Richard wrote a text in Bru's 1977 catalogue, titled "El trabajo de la memoria en la pintura de Roser Bru," in *Roser Bru* (Santiago: Galería Cromo, 1977). By 1977 Richard was already developing her theories on the attack of painting performed by the new Chilean scene, and she made Bru, a painter's painter who Sommer even compared to Francis Bacon, part of this avant-garde by stating that in her work "the brush or the pen, begin to show forms of decomposition of the image. The instruments of Roser Bru's paintings work in relation to unpainting [despintura]. (To erase painting, until only traces of it are left)." Ibid. Bru is usually only tangentially linked to these avant-gardes, and her exhibitions are usually analyzed only in the context of her own work, or in relation to Balmes' generation. Besides Richard, other attempts at connecting Bru's work with Dittborn have been suggested but never explicitly stated or analyzed, as in the chart made by Paula Honorato and Luz Muñoz in "Recomposición de Escena 1975-1981" published on the internet as <http://www.textosdearte.cl/recomposicion/index.html> (last accessed April 2010).

<sup>583</sup> Bru had arrived in Chile in 1939 as an exile from the Spanish Civil War in the ship "Winnipeg," on which Balmes and his family had also embarked. She remained loosely associated to Grupo Signo in the 1960s. Since 1974 Bru had tackled the subject of *Las Meninas*, Velázquez, and Goya, including graphic elements in her paintings. Yet Bru's free-flowing gesture and use of chiaroscuro, volume, and gradations of values were noticeably different from Dittborn's flat renditions of Goya and the like. As noted by the Spanish critic Alexandre Cirici, Bru's works were characterized by the obliterating mark, "the dynamic sweep" (*barrido dinámico*). In Alexandre Cirici, *El deterioro y la memoria* (Madrid: Galería Aele, 1976), no page number.

her choice of subject matter: not thieves and homicides or forgotten athletes, but the well known writers Franz Kafka, Anne Frank, and Kafka's correspondent Milena Jesenská (fig. 3.29).<sup>584</sup> Bru's selection of recognizable personas long dead was countered by a sense of passage and forgetfulness that emerged in the vanishing washes and the rapid strokes of acrylic that blurred their reproduced visages. At the same time, the repressive context of characters' emergence, particularly the alien worlds created by Kafka, the sense of otherness he felt as a Jew in Czechoslovakia, and the Nazi state and condition of hiding in which Frank's writing was conceived, were echoed in the tightly drawn frames that cropped, imprisoned, and withheld in otherwise empty areas of neutral colors the floating portraits.

While a similar ghostly effect to Dittborn's drier portraits was thus achieved,<sup>585</sup> Bru's work made the political resonances between past and present more evident, to the point that the poet and critic Enrique Lihn referred in his catalogue text to the show as depicting "the Auschwitz effect."<sup>586</sup> The works were perceived at the time as having a "denunciatory character" where the "dead-alive accuse, testify the histories of pain, the dangers, the threats,"<sup>587</sup> or as Sommer stated, the images of Kafka and Frank "hands us the heart-rending testimony of annihilation suffered by that beautiful unity, the human being, under the insanity of redemptive totalitarianisms."<sup>588</sup> The inclusion of the photographic referent was regarded by these critics as a form of documentary in the work of both artists, a reminder of death, while the vagueness of the figures' contours, achieved in Bru through an open brushwork and soft-focus drawings or in the case of Dittborn through a staining process, acted as a reminder of loss. But if Bru was speaking of universal tragedies and specific forms of inhumanity through evocations of the Holocaust, Dittborn was instead turning the lens towards a local, minor counterpart of this violence, and doing so through a form of displacement by presenting a gallery of anonymous faces and apparently innocuous gestures.<sup>589</sup> If the fate of Kafka and Frank

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<sup>584</sup> A fragment of the 1977 work "Dos veces Milena" (Twice Milena) is reproduced in Roser Bru's retrospective catalogue with text by Adriana Valdés, *Roser Bru* (Santiago: Gergar Ediciones and Banco BICE, 1991), in page 16. In the same catalogue in page 25, the work from 1978 titled "Díptico de Kafka y Milena" (Diptych of Kafka and Milena) made with unprimed canvas and using photographs is reproduced, showing the similarity in materials used between Bru and Dittborn.

<sup>585</sup> In the catalogue of a retrospective mounted in 1991 at Galería Praxis, the critic Adriana Valdés referred to Bru's work with historical figures throughout her career as making present in the "fixity of their gazes, other epochs which refuse to disappear (...) the past is made present, it appears as a ghost." Adriana Valdés, "Desmaterializaciones," *Roser Bru* (Santiago: Hergar Ediciones and Banco BICE, 1991), 16.

<sup>586</sup> Enrique Lihn, "El efecto Auschwitz," *Roser Bru* (Santiago: Galería Cromo, 1977).

<sup>587</sup> The brief review of the exhibition continues: "[in these works] aesthetics and criticism are perfectly joined." "Exposición," *Revista Paula*, August 16, 1977.

<sup>588</sup> Waldemar Sommer, "Roser Bru y Juan Pablo Vicuña," *El Mercurio*, July 13, 1977.

<sup>589</sup> One year later, in the context of the exhibition of human rights, Bru presented a work with a series of anonymous portraits taken from identification cards of Chileans who had disappeared during the dictatorship titled "Cal-Cal Viva" (Live Lime-Lime), of 1978. The work evoked Dittborn's in its presentation of a grid of portraits, as well as in the use of the hatching line that obliterates, though with an aggregate layer of white suggestive of lime and death. Nevertheless, that same year Bru turned to other

was well known to viewers, no such certainties were held for Dittborn's bodies. If only, Dittborn's images suggested a plunge into the depths of anonymity and the certainty of eventual disappearance. In this sense, Bru was still working with icons and effigies, mounting commemorative altars to the great grandparents of modernist suffering and art.<sup>590</sup>

The attention given to Dittborn's use of photography in later years and its construction as paradigmatic of a break in the Chilean art scene and its turn towards self-reflection, was part of a desire on the side of critics in the 1980s to clearly separate these two generations in a project of establishing a new avant-garde.<sup>591</sup> Bru would belong to Balmes' informalist group and a generation tied to ideology,<sup>592</sup> while Dittborn would be the rebel child escaping from its grip through a denigration of painting's sacred aura. But besides this "irruption" of the photographic in the space of the canvas as a "mechanical fact,"<sup>593</sup> and thus of the mass-produced in high art as an effect of serialization, there were other elements to Dittborn's use of the photographic referent and its combination with

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famous European sources, closer to her own Spanish background: Robert Capa's photograph of a Spanish peasant being shot down as well as the poet César Vallejo, among others. "Cal-Cal Viva" is reproduced in page 24 of Roser Bru's 1991 catalogue.

<sup>590</sup> Such a funereal reference was made evident in Bru's 1980 incorporation of the mummy portrait theme in her paintings, through reproductions of portraits from Fayum.

<sup>591</sup> The first attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of the period that posited this theory was Richard's 1981 text on the Chilean avant-garde scene, which placed the photographic discussion at its center. By 1986, in *Margins and Institutions*, Richard's position changed, yet still assigned to Dittborn a prominent role, as when Richard stated that "after 1980 the early position on photography lost its polemic validity, when it became apparent, except in the case of Dittborn, that it was only functioning to register live performances, and as such became, with video, a mere documentary record of urban interventions." Richard, *Margins and Institutions*, 39. Besides strongly disagreeing with this position regarding the role of photography and especially of video, which will be discussed in Chapter Six, Richard's stance only takes into account the groups she was favorable towards, such as C.A.D.A., which as she correctly described did use video and other technologies of reproduction only in a documentary fashion. Nevertheless, individual examples coming from members of the group, such as Lotty Rosenfeld and Diamela Eltit, depart from Richard's sweeping categorizations.

<sup>592</sup> Such has been the dominant view of this older generation of artists, who were merely "illustrating" politics. See, for example, how Richard characterized the use of photography in Balmes, Barrios, Martínez, Pérez and even Brugnoli and Errázuriz as using "printed signs to communicate information about the sociopolitical events, inserting the artist in the daily context of the mass media messages whose sum of data is reprocessed by the work." *Margins and Institutions*, 130. (My translation from the Spanish original). The original English translation in *Margins and Institutions* dismisses nearly all the emphasis Richard places on ideological content in the generation of the 1960s and early 1970s: "These artists used photographs showing social and political events and the everyday context of the mass media." *Margins and Institutions*, 36. It is interesting to note how Chilean art was being marketed in the book for an international audience after 1986, polishing off the political edges of the prior generation.

<sup>593</sup> The original English translation does not include the phrase. The 2006 version in Spanish states: "En casi todos los trabajos de estos autores, la fotografía -como dato mecánico- es comentada por otros aparatos de producción gráfica o pictórica que combinan sus lenguajes expresivos con la técnica de reproducción serial de la cámara." Richard, *Márgenes e Instituciones*, 44. In this version, the "mechanical fact" and "the serial technique of reproduction of the camera" have been added to the original Spanish text (compare to *Margins and Institutions*, page 130), accentuating Richard's changing discourse through time and the centrality she began assigning to mechanical reproduction.

painting which were not just undermining painting as a tradition and centering instead on the language of art and its social effects as argued by Richard. To continue with the example of Bru's 1977 exhibition and focusing on the crossing-out gesture and evanescent brushwork employed by the artist, it was less the body as a site of identity that was placed under attack in Bru's work than resuscitating memories of universal suffering through pale visages and establishing bridges between forms across time. While identity and the conflicts it poses also crossed Bru's portraits of Kafka, Milena, and Frank, her subjects were still firmly anchored on their well-known images and stories. On a material level, the stains, sweeping brushstrokes, and graphic marks in Bru's works continued to sustain forms, returning to the subject a sense of coherence, uniqueness, and authenticity. Instead, in Dittborn's stained portraits, there was an attempt at undoing forms and genres from within, pointing at forms that wear away from the inside and undo identity, reflecting to the self its lack of a stable form.

Sommer's use of the word "morbidity" in describing what he perceived was the new aspect of Dittborn's drawings is interesting when compared to Bru's funereal portraits, which did not receive such appellations in spite of the "Auschwitz" associations. Sommer's term points to the disruptive qualities associated to a type of marking that instead of conveying forms with precision turned the line diffuse, unbounded, and which in Dittborn's case rendered the human portraits hideous. The stain (and the stained body) in Dittborn's works appeared as a mark, but one of an in-between quality: contaminating the strict limits between painting and graphics, but also of support and paint, while stressing the role of the body as a limit and locus of mediation between subject and world. In other words, in Dittborn's works the stain came close to an "informe" element.

In the section "Critical Dictionary" published in the magazine *Documents*, Georges Bataille defined the informe as "what is allowed no right to form," something that could be called hideous.<sup>594</sup> Bataille was addressing not a lack of form or the merely deformed, but an element within these two terms that brings "things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form."<sup>595</sup> As the critics Rosalind Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois have noted in their catalogue *Formless: A Users' Guide*, the informe is not a category in a binary construction, it is not the opposite of form as 'inside' is from 'outside,' but acts as a principle that unsettles all form, that threatens to reduce it to what Bataille called "a gob of spittle." The informe is something that exists, but is always reduced to not quite anything, something that cannot be accurately described and thus disturbs categories of meaning, de-classifying them.<sup>596</sup>

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<sup>594</sup> Georges Bataille, "Informe," *Documents* 7 (December 1929): 382. The original states: "... un terme servant à déclasser, exigeant généralement que chaque chose ait sa forme. Ce qu'il désigne n'a ses droits dans aucun sens et se fait écraser partout comme une araignée ou un ver de terre. Il faudrait en effet, pur que les hommes académiques soient contents, que l'univers prenne forme. La philosophie entière n'a pas d'autre but: il s'agit de donner un redingote à ce que est, une redingote mathématique. Par contre affirmer que l'univers ne ressemble à rien et n'est qu' *informe* revient à dire que l'univers est quelque chose comme une araignée ou un chacrat."

<sup>595</sup> Ibid.

<sup>596</sup> The critic Irene Bronfman, described the overall effect of Dittborn's exhibition as "something indefinable." In Bronfman, "Los rostros de N.N.," 47-48.

If Dittborn's taxonomical approach to the images of delinquents and athletes suggested forms of classification that attempt rationally to describe and distribute the world, these archives were constantly disturbed by the informe, the bodies appearing as dispersed stains and ghostly traces.<sup>597</sup> Dittborn's use of base materials seemed to illustrate this tendency towards declassification, materials that resembled less painting than fluids, organic refuse, waste, and even junk such as burnt oil. The organic nature of the supports was also emphasized, such as the grain of the canvas and the porosity of the cardboard, suggesting a transposition of materialities, a slippage between corporealities, and a state of fluidity and of eventual disappearance.

Not quite painting, not quite graphic art: a stain is nevertheless a basic graphic imprint that is also, as was noted by Sommer, a pictorial one. In his catalogue, Dittborn included a hand-written passage from the New Testament, Saint Luke's account of the deposition, which mentions the shroud in which Christ's body was covered to be entombed. The passage was paired in the catalogue with the reproduced image of Benny Kid Paret, which formed the prototype of the work "La Pietá." The passage took the connection discussed above between religious imagery and popular faith further, not only by making of the boxer a modern saint, but introducing the notion of the shroud that, while covering the body, receives its imprint through a wound or other bodily fluids.<sup>598</sup> The association between canvas and shroud was similar yet different from the page or canvas treated as a skin, a theme that as discussed before Dittborn had seen occurring in Parra's works. Instead, by tacitly invoking as some kind of origin of painting the notion of "acheiropoietos," an image of a saintly figure not made by human hands, similar to the myth of the shadow in Pliny (and the relief), though more direct in its form of marking, Dittborn's inclusion of the biblical passage invited a reading of the stain and its relation to the body as an indexical mark.

Giorgio Vomero, a critic from the periodical *La Tercera* who described Dittborn's works "La Pietá" and "Lubricante Quemado" (Burnt Lubricant), as a "shroud of profane traces," first mentioned such a connection between the stain and the shroud.<sup>599</sup> In Vomero's view, the works presented themselves as icons of missing bodies, indexes of their object, and emphasized the relic's aura of necrophilia. It would only take one step and one follower of Dittborn to take this identification between the graphic mark (embodied in the stain), and the original object (the profane, popular body) to connect it to the mechanics of photography as an indexical technology of reproduction. This was the approach taken by Kay, who articulated a theory on the body in Dittborn's work based implicitly on the notions of the index and the abject.<sup>600</sup>

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<sup>597</sup> This is similar to George Baker's description of the video works of Norwegian artist Knut Asdam in which the stain appears as "a ghost as it were of form." George Baker, "The Space of the Stain," *Grey Room*, no. 5 (Autumn, 2001): 8.

<sup>598</sup> Mellado has mentioned in different texts that Dittborn's use of the "shroud" image first appeared in 1982, in the context of his artist book *Fallo Fotográfico*, yet the artist had been employing the notion since 1977.

<sup>599</sup> The latter work consisted of several burnt oil stains, also applied to the canvas and the human figure. Vomero, "El deshumanizado dolor en Dittborn y Leppe."

<sup>600</sup> I say "implicitly" because Kay had by 1979 eliminated in his texts all references to his European sources.



Kay's theory of "the body that stains" first appeared in his 1979 text *N.N. aUTOPsIA*.<sup>601</sup> Taking as a starting point the body as a producer of excretions, semen, urine, saliva, and pus, Kay indirectly drew on Kristeva's theory of the abject in order to propose a reading of the body as a matrix, a source of humid traces. By making the bodily fluids an index of the body, Kay was able to make of the stain the starting point of a graphic lineage, a sign "anterior to language, the somatic rudiments of the printing press, and the stammering of photography."<sup>602</sup> Speaking of the stain as a small child or, it could be added, a little savage, Kay's theory thus created an image of the body as a pre-verbal, pre-Symbolic site, and of the stain as a form of regression into this heterogeneous and natural, even "animal," space. Two years later, Richard took over Kay's concept of the stain and pushed the association to the pre-symbolic even further by stating that the stain's violence was manifested in the tensions it articulated between "nature/culture = body/language, pulsation/symbolic laws of conscious articulation."<sup>603</sup> As a somatic signifier, the stain pressed forth the "corporeal reminiscence of its flows –secretions, excretions- infringing the symbolic (socio-cultural) dispositive by the liquid resurgence in its interior of our own animal traces, censured in their pre-symbolic condition."<sup>604</sup> Drawing on Kristeva yet like Kay without fully acknowledging her sources,<sup>605</sup> Richard spoke of this somatic referent as returning the subject to the "most archaic phase of its genetic formation,"<sup>606</sup> some form of semantic "chora" filled with unruly libidinal pulsations. For Richard the stain's appearance in Dittborn's canvass operated a break in a cultural model she associated with language and social conventions, since the stain manifested repressed contents which she further associated not merely with the body but with "bodies expelled from history."<sup>607</sup> The stain thus became in Richard's theory the evidence of social and national repression, a privileged term capable of disrupting an imposed social order such as that of the dictatorship.

For Kay, the stain's subversion of order was derived instead from a Lacanian trope: that of camouflage. Lacan's association of the stain to camouflage was inspired in turn by Roger Caillois' essay from the 1930s "Mimicry and Legendary Psychastenia," in which animal mimicry such as the resemblance of a moth to a bark is compared to a schizophrenic form of boundary loss or entropy.<sup>608</sup> Drawing from Lacan's interpretation

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<sup>601</sup> The second corrected version of this essay in *Del espacio de acá*, of 1980, has become the source for later interpretations of Dittborn's works. Mellado, for example, later combined Kay's theories with that stated originally by Vomiero and articulated his own version of this sacred story in the form of the shroud.

<sup>602</sup> Kay, *N.N. aUTOPsIA*, 4-5.

<sup>603</sup> Richard, *Una mirada sobre el arte en Chile/octubre de 1981*, 20.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid.

<sup>605</sup> It must be noted that until 1986, most Chilean critics writing in catalogs did not quote their sources.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid.

<sup>607</sup> Richard, 21.

<sup>608</sup> It is important to note here the emphasis Caillois placed on the spatial experience of mimicry, since the loss of borders in the schizophrenic subject is spatial in as much the subject no longer knows where he stands and feels he is both inside and outside the space surrounding him. According to Caillois, in the

of Caillois' stain as a mode of emergence of the subject in the field of vision, where the subject is lost in the picture as a stain, Kay argued that the stain could be read as a "tactic of disguise," a form of rendering invisible the subject. According to Kay, subjecthood or the appearance of the subject as a whole entity was only possible through the negation of the stain, the rejection of those bodily fluids and of the pre-symbolic as an indistinct state. For Kay, the terror that the stain inspires in culture would be found in its denunciation of the subject's "absence," and idea Kay did not elaborate but which I would add is also the mark of a lack of boundaries, whether of the ego or of the body's, thus transforming itself into an index of a missing original.

These two readings lead me back to the question of primitivism, the marginal, and the body, and their conflation through the notion of excess in both Dittborn's works and its interpretations. In Kay's view, the traces of the body pointed to a state of disorder, a slippery and confused, "automatic" state of being.<sup>609</sup> The body emerged as an "other," the opposite of rationality and of discourse in a spontaneous form of marking, similar to the "latency" embedded in Richard's account of the stain. The image of Dittborn as a contemporary ethnographer, in search for otherness through socially inadequate subjects through which he displayed corporeal excess and the pre-verbal as an extravagant flow of meaning would seem to reinforce such a reading. But I would argue that it is through the stain as a more ambivalent image, that in-between, minor, slightly "hideous" or "morbid" aspect, that the apparition of the image in Dittborn's works and its identity as a singular, fixed thing was disrupted and questioned. Rather than merely posited as the 'other' side of language and culture, as its well-defined opposite that would sustain the dichotomy of identity formation (me/not me), the stains in Dittborn's works conformed and deformed the images, being within and without them.

In Dittborn's work "Muerte del nombre" (Death of the Name), the stain almost appeared like an error in the canvas, a clumsy interruption, a speck of dust in the midst of the formality of the typed, bounded names and the spectral appearance of the human faces. But this apparent slight of the hand was nevertheless intentional in its amorphousness: Dittborn's stains also changed with time, making the alteration of shapes and their state of passage more evident. The stain made the notion of limits uncertain as it became part of the canvas, spreading through it, yet was not quite the canvas itself. Simultaneously in and out, a stain creates a form that is not completely con-formed (from the Latin "conformare," to fashion of the same form), that seems to be decomposing, deforming with the passage of time. The stain brings the body closer to the corpse, what Kristeva calls "the most sickening of wastes,"<sup>610</sup> that corporeality that is in a state of transition, becoming nothing, being declassified.

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schizophrenic experience, "space pursues them, encircles them, digests them in a giant phagocytosis. It ends by replacing them. Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. (...) he feels himself becoming space." Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychastenia," trans. John Shepley, in *October: The First Decade, 1976-1986*, ed. Annete Michelson et. al. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 59-74, first published as "Mimétisme et psychasténie légendaire," *Minotaure* 7 (June 1935). In Dittborn's work there is a constant state of un-grounding, positing and at the time denying physical and imagined borders in social spaces.

<sup>609</sup> Kay, *N.N. aUTOPsIA*, 4-5.

<sup>610</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, trans. Leo S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press), 231.

That the stain in “Muerte del nombre” appeared next to a double set of crossed out names and their replacement, is not without importance. The stenciled names that were stroked out with a single line all began with the letter “c”, reinforcing the notion of an archive, with the name as the basis of a system of classification for subjects, and of the repetition of sameness. Instead, the names that replaced those crossed-out followed no particular order, starting with different letters, contradicting the alphabetical, encyclopedic form of organization, introducing disorder into the classificatory mode. All of the last names nevertheless were inflected by a sense of the ordinary, in their middle to low class associations (vera, carranza, cardemil, daza, miño, padilla), and the lack of a capital letter. A lack of connection, visual or of resemblance was emphasized in this juxtaposition of diverse double names, mimicking the lack of contours of the subjects represented. Such an ambiguity of the subject’s identity reinforced its condition as an element of society that is denied a form, expelled to its borders and abjected, violently excluded as “dehumanized social waste,”<sup>611</sup> stains in the larger social picture.

The first impression of the crossed-out names next to the male portraits reinforced the anonymity of the subjects and their interchangeable identity, particularly through the use of the ‘alias’ in crime, suggesting the fallacy of the proper name as designating uniqueness and a fixed identity. But the line that divided the name in two could also be interpreted as a displaced form of castration. Such a reading of the castrating line as a sign of the lack of the proper name is supported by the rendition of the portraits as severed upright heads, floating in their brown colored backgrounds, disconnected from their lower bodies as mutilated male members.<sup>612</sup> The head as the locus of knowledge, speech, and sight, could be easily transposed to a symbolic signifier of both the penis and more symbolically of the phallus, that enigmatic and imaginary function in Lacan’s theory that produces anxiety about the subject’s identity.<sup>613</sup> In the fear of castration stands a fear of loss of the individual’s sense of self as whole, and I would add perhaps a menace of disintegration, of turning back into something informe.

The relation between castration and identity was asserted through the obliterating line over half of the names. In its violent visual rupture, as a mark that is meant to erase and negate, the line signaled in Dittborn’s work a prohibition and a small death in terms of a denial of identity as given by the family name. For if the name marks the individual

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<sup>611</sup> Rosalind Krauss, ““Informe” Without Conclusion,” *October* 78 (Autumn, 1986): 90.

<sup>612</sup> In an analysis of Caravaggio’s paintings dealing with decapitation themes, Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit mention how decapitation is a disguised castration fantasy, stating that: “decapitation is the meaning of castration, for sexuality is originally implanted in the head; the phallus does the bidding of fantasy, sexuality is a *cosa mentale*.” In Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Caravaggio’s Secrets* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1998), 87.

<sup>613</sup> Lacan described the phallus as “that which is also incarnated in [the master signifier], which, of all signifiers, is the signifier for which there is no signified.” (Seminar 20: 80). According to Lacan, “the phallus is a signifier, a signifier whose function, in the intrasubjective economy of analysis, lifts the veil perhaps from the function it performed in the mysteries. For it is the signifier intended to designate as a whole the effects of the signified, in that the signifiers conditions them by its presence as a signifier.” Lacan, “the Signification of the Phallus,” in *Écrits*, 285. While the passage is seemingly obtuse, the phallus remains an imaginary situation or operation, yet one that gets “incarnate” in Lacan’s theory in the symbolic Father, the Name of the Father, the biological father, and other substitutes.

as such, it also stands for the family, giving a sense of belonging. And at the head of this lineage is the father, the subject who disseminates that name and bestows it upon his descendants, claiming authority over it.<sup>614</sup> The crossed out name could be understood then as a denial of what Lacan called the Name of the Father, a symbolic function standing in for authority and the law that positions the subject in the Symbolic order, the world of language and sociability.<sup>615</sup> The title of the work itself suggested a parricidal intention, “death of the name,” invoking the death of the father as much as its symbolic order, and following Barthes a death of the author in so far the question of originality in Dittborn’s work was also undermined.<sup>616</sup> Lacking a proper name is like lacking a signature, an original mark or matrix, a family. Without the name (of the Father), the subject is an orphan, homeless, other.<sup>617</sup>

Nevertheless, the line that crossed-out the name in “Muerte del nombre” did not completely obliterate and castrate. Dittborn still left traces of the earlier nomination, exposing it through the act of negation, and thus deferring and questioning the possibility of a secure identification of the subject. The crossing out line acted more as a barrier that seduces as it prohibits, that shows through what it excludes, a threshold that in the words of Jacques Derrida “is nothing firm, opaque, or uncrossable. It lets the inside (...) come into view –not the law itself, perhaps, but interior spaces that appear empty and provisionally forbidden.”<sup>618</sup> In Dittborn’s work there was a constant state of deferral: of meaning being secured and identity fixed, which was manifested in the inability of

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<sup>614</sup> It must be noted that in Chile it is to this day still in usage that unmarried women who have given birth give their own last name to their children. Since it is common to use both parent’s last names in official documents, these last names appear as, for example, Cornejo Cornejo.

<sup>615</sup> The only portraits of the show including names represented male figures.

<sup>616</sup> Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 147.

<sup>617</sup> Dittborn’s reiterative use of proper names in his early works could be connected to an anxiety of influence, and could be also related to the ambivalent and interchangeable use made by the artist of the words “painter” and “draughtsman” in his catalogues and artist’s books. While in his writings since 1990 Mellado has insistently pointed to the relation between Dittborn and José Balmes, noting on this anxiety, he has developed a political interpretation of the matter on one hand, and resolved to make of each figure the “fathers” of the “advancements” in Chilean art (what I would call its “conceptualization”). Insofar Balmes would be a representative of a radical form of painting in the Chilean context in the early 1970s, I agree with Mellado’s interpretation, but in the context of Dittborn’s early works, the reappearance of the proper name is not merely tied to a question of “liberating” himself from the ties of tradition, the institutions, and Balmes “ghost” as Mellado calls it, but a more general questioning of power, particularly through male authority and classificatory methods. Most interpretations of Dittborn’s work have continually made him into the father of Chilean contemporary art, and his commercial success abroad since the mid-1980s seems a testimony to this. But as I have been pointing in this chapter, the early works are much more ambivalent than is usually granted them, taking identity as a subject matter and means of operation in an ambiguous and provocative manner. While Dittborn has been an influential figure for several generations of Chilean artists, his status as “father” is a mythical construct that has been supported by the “avanzada” readings started by Richard, Kay’s uncontested interpretations, Mellado, and even Dittborn himself.

<sup>618</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Before the Law,” *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York, London: Routledge, 1992), 203.

finding closure, or even of progressing (as in the repetition of themes and even images: the anachronistic repetition). In this sense, the obliterated names and their apparent substitution by others would point to something inassimilable about the subject, to an endless and arbitrary chain of signifiers, to an emptiness that can be filled in with an inexhaustible series of other names.<sup>619</sup> The name thus acted in a similar manner to the bodies of the swimmers, tennis players, athletes, couples and families posing for the photographer's camera in the plaza, endlessly reproducible and exchangeable. Thus the name would stand as a proxy of identity, an unstable marker that gives individuality and denies it in the same stroke. Unlike the stain and its relation of indexicality to the body as embodied in the shroud, the name offers little connection to the object it designates, pointing instead to a relationship of meaning between the object and its trace that is socially constructed, and one that is fallacious for that matter.

Dittborn used a similar strategy of defacement and naming in a catalogue text for the 1978 exhibition presented in Colombia featuring several of his 1977 works.<sup>620</sup> The catalogue's text was titled "texto.sudario.mediacion" (text.shroud.mediation), making explicit the relation of mediation between the body and the mark/stain through the image of the shroud, while emphasizing the corporeality of both "text" and image. Even though the text was a rewritten version of the 1976 "The Running Omelet," it included an unusual addition in the last page: a list of words arranged in four columns, each word underlined, and some crossed out. Grouped under the title "material,mente" the words pointed to two different types of materialities: mediums and bodily traces (fig. 3.30).<sup>621</sup> Chinese ink, ruler, Vaseline, acrylic, oil, unprimed linen, cardboard, photocopy, chalk, were some of the words interjected with terms like scar, scratch, scrape, sore, skin, crust, and burn, the latter group effaced by "X" marks.

The headline under which the partially annulled words appeared invoked the problem of mediation and in-betweenness suggested by the exhibition's title, through the interruption of the flow of language and its apparently causal connection.<sup>622</sup> The subtitle "material,mente" could be read in several ways, with the comma acting as a strange hyphen and pause between two different words or a short gap in a single one. On one hand, the comma separated two seemingly opposed terms: "material" and "mente,"

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<sup>619</sup> In connection to the proper name and the act of naming as an entry into a classificatory system of differences, Derrida argued that to name produces a fissure in identity, a "loss of the proper, of absolute proximity, of self-presence." Yet he also continued by claiming, "in truth, the loss of what has never taken place, of a self-presence that has never been given but only dreamed of and always already split, repeated, incapable of appearing to itself except in its own disappearance." Derrida, "The Violence of the Letter," in *Of Grammatology*, 112.

<sup>620</sup> The exhibition took place in Bogotá, in Galería Sandiego, during April 1978. The exhibition and catalogue went by the title of "Dittborn. pintura, dibujo, graficaciones" (Dittborn. Painting, drawings, graphics).

<sup>621</sup> Dittborn's catalogue *Dittborn. pinturas, dibujos, graficaciones* (Bogota: Galería San Diego, 1978) can be found at the library of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

<sup>622</sup> In "The Violence of the Letter," Derrida argued against a genealogical mode of discourse by stating, in a manner that closely resembles Dittborn's strategies, that "in its syntax and lexicon, in its spacing, by its punctuation, its lacunae, its margins, the historical appurtenance of a text is never a straight line. It is neither causality by contagion, not the simple accumulation of layers." Derrida, 101.

material and mind, the traditional distinction between the base corporality of humanity and the intellect, body and mind. The conjunction of the two words nevertheless formed the single term “materialmente,” materiality or materialness, which the comma made more evident, thus returning the word itself (logos) to the realm of the body, perception, and the senses.

Such a pause in language and the emphasis on the material was also revealed in the choice of words on the list. All of the defaced terms dealt with different forms of bodily traces and borders: hematoma, scar, wound, skin, sweat. Their exclusion through the cross-out gesture only emphasized their carnality and liminal state, marking their presence through that act of visual disavowal. But this apparent disowning of the body was contradicted by the materiality of the procedures and mediums with which Dittborn was working and leaving evidently exposed: the roughness of sandpaper, the texture of the unprimed canvases, the harsh regularity of ruler and the carpenter’s square, and the stickiness of Vaseline. Like the title, the words seemed worlds apart, yet were joined by their explicit physicality.

In the catalogue text, slight changes to “La Tortilla corredora” also emphasized the material procedures of mechanical reproduction involved in the making of the works. In item 13, for example, Dittborn described photocopy as the “embalming of the photograph’s body,” speaking particularly of the effects of making photocopies out of photocopies as “automatically turning pale, calcinating, perforating, iodizing [as in a cast], draining, congesting, turning fragile, dehydrating (...), asphyxiating, oxidizing, burning (...) the crust of the photographic body, preserving it destroyed.”<sup>623</sup> While the words remarked on a process of flattening, in terms of taking away and corroding the body, sucking out as it were its life and fluids, the procedures were nevertheless eminently physical. These emphasized the corporeality of photography, or rather, gave photography a body, and reinforced the slippage between a flat reproduction with three-dimensional carnality. Photography was thus rendered corporeal, given over to desire and the pulses of repetition.

If by 1978 Dittborn had apparently renounced all signs of materiality in his paintings, rendering the body flat and denying through the crossed-out gesture in his text what he had emphasized in Parra’s catalogue the previous year, he was instead transferring physicality to the mediums he used: making the photograph, the weave of the canvas, and the stain speak of the body. And the body was presented as something informe, marginal, its limits unstable.

It is the question of displacement that interests me here and the effects it had on the understanding of graphic arts in the Chilean art scene in the years that followed as a minor genre capable of undermining the authority of high art. In Dittborn’s work this displacement became embodied in a translation of the body to its reproducible trace, a presentation of bodies as ruins, and the negation of a unified corporality through its appearance as a deformed stain, elements located on the outside borders of the proper and of progress. The slippage between bodies and technologies, and the assimilation of reproduction to corporeality present in Dittborn’s works, were not only conceptual but also vividly evoked as physical. They offered a passage from the corporal to the two-

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<sup>623</sup> Eugenio Dittborn, “texto.sudario.mediacion”, in *Dittborn. Pintura, dibujo, graficaciones*, no page number.

dimensional and back, associating popular means of reproduction with social bodies through the notions of the informe and the marginal.<sup>624</sup> That graphic arts still appeared as a minor genre within art in Chile, that it inhabited a problematic space too close to popular culture, and to the immediacy of the everyday, began being regarded by Chilean artists and critics alike as a way to confront received notions of proper forms and traditional categories in art. If in the early 1970s, graphic arts had entered the realm of painting through newspaper cutouts, as in Balmes, or through poster aesthetics in murals, being tied to a vanguard that was politically militant and socially oriented, that vein was not completely lost in the next ten years, but took a different, more conceptual path. Increasingly, graphic arts offered an alternative route to representing otherness, to questioning identity as a fixed, stable form. But it could do so when conceived and rendered as physical, extending itself and occupying space, deviating spatial and corporal norms. It is this extension of graphic arts and procedures into the everyday that will be analyzed in the next chapter, focusing on the works of Francisco Smythe and Carlos Altamirano in their relation to the city and its ‘marginal’ zones.

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<sup>624</sup> This physicality and its connection to society is what I believe makes Dittborn’s works explicitly different from the postmodern repeatability of photography, its self-reflection, and its connection to systems of signs as discussed by Craig Owens in essays such as “Photography *en abyme*,” in *Beyond Recognition. Representation, Power, and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 16-30. A similar position to Owens was taken by Nelly Richard when she characterized the use of photography within the “escena de avanzada” as questioning the production of signs and the systems upholding this production.

## Chapter 4: The Urban Landscape and the Body

If 1977 was a year of transformations in the Chilean art scene, this change occurred on two distinct fronts: Galería Época as discussed in the previous chapter and the newly established Galería Cromo. Later critics have grouped the artists exhibiting in these galleries as performing the same type of artistic operations and critiques of society and painting based on graphic art's documentary and serial qualities. Yet the parallels and interactions between the two groups were joined to profound differences in sources, imagery, and approaches to the graphic image.<sup>625</sup> For even though the works shown at Cromo of Francisco Smythe (1952-1998), Carlos Altamirano, and Carlos Leppe featured a graphic component apparently similar to that of Dittborn and Parra, this graphic element was related in the former to an experience of space and place that took the city as its context of emergence and drew from popular sources related to urban violence, spatial control, and detective stories. If the nation as macrocosms had been mapped by Dittborn and Parra, the artists at Cromo turned to the microcosms of the city and its interior life as a source of social critique. Furthermore, while geography and topography had been the guiding threads at Época, leading to a flattening of the body and a conceptual passage from the page to the skin, at Cromo it was the urban landscape and its disquieting underlife or shadow which acted as a springboard for the translation of the graphic mark from the printed page and incised support to a three-dimensional human action.

Different artistic sources were also invoked by each group. While the works of Vostell, Parra, and Dittborn at Época suggested an avant-garde lineage tied to European models, the works of Smythe, Altamirano, and Leppe exhibited at the new gallery run by the critic Nelly Richard seemed to draw on a specific Chilean tradition associated with the graphic arts. This tradition was established by Richard in the gallery's opening show in May 1977, titled "Cuatro Grabadores Chilenos" (Four Chilean Printers). Three members of an older graphic generation (Eduardo Vilches, Luz Donoso, and Pedro Millar) were joined by the newcomer Altamirano, implying a bridge between the two. This conjunction of old and new not only validated the works of the younger artists who would be exhibited there, but helped establish graphic arts as central to national artistic development and a self-reflexive critique.

But the works of Smythe, Altamirano, and Leppe would reveal this graphic tradition as being more complex and less pure than what Richard envisioned. The emerging conceptual scene that Richard later called "escena de avanzada" (advanced scene), was tied to a darker side of modernity in Chile tainted by popular knowledge. In the works exhibited at Cromo, this tradition was embodied in the *Lira Popular* (Popular

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<sup>625</sup> Even though two groups or alliances were forged in each gallery around two main theorists, V.I.S.U.A.L. in connection with Kay and what later became Grupo Práctica (Practice Group) in relation to Richard, there were many interrelations between the two groups. This will be discussed in relation to Parra and Leppe, which have rarely been treated by critics. One similarity is the production of catalogues that functioned as artists' books in both galleries.



Lyre), the physical experience of the city, and scientific/criminalist practices. In this chapter I will argue that if a “scene” was emerging in Chilean art, this was a crime scene, a theatrical space of violence and desire which had the city as its main setting and actor.

By 1977 many Chilean cities were changing. As Santiago was undergoing a series of modernization, the capital came to be regarded as the nation's microcosm in the dictatorship's eyes. These transformations were tied to a preoccupation concerning the capital's excessive growth and a series of reforms were enacted to endow the city with a new, clean, and efficient face in accordance to the nation's booming economic growth. Smythe, Altamirano, and Leppe referred to this metamorphosing urban landscape in their works by using a series of marks, photographs, and objects that exposed the city as a space of regulation and social control. At the same time, the city was seen as a space of misdemeanor and contestation where multiple desires, identities, and bodies surfaced.

By 1978, when Galería Cromo ended its activities, graphic arts seemed to have taken over the artistic scene. Smythe held a retrospective of his graphic works before departing for Italy on a scholarship, Leppe and Altamirano formed the group *Práctica*, which centered on serigraphic practices of reproduction, and the first *Salón de Artes Gráficas* (Salon of Graphic Arts) since the late 1960s was established. The latter showcased not only the works of Smythe, Leppe, Altamirano, and Dittborn, but also those of a new generation of younger artists who were building on the former's approaches to graphic languages. The Salon occurred a few weeks before another important event where graphic practices took center stage: the international exhibition concerning Human Rights at Iglesia San Francisco (Church of Saint Francis), which coincided with a symposium of human rights and the excavations of several cadavers of political prisoners. Bodies were surfacing everywhere in the nation and the prominence acquired by the corporeal was noted by art critics in the press. They saw two trends that summarized the events happening between 1977 and 1978: an increase in the representation of the body, which they labeled a return to humanism, and the dominant place acquired by graphic practices as they became the beacon guiding artistic experimentation in Chile.

#### 4.1. Internal Borders: San Diego and Francisco Smythe's Arcades

The critic Waldemar Sommer devoted two separate yet connected issues of his Sunday review column in *El Mercurio* to the parallel shows of Francisco Smythe and Wolf Vostell shown during the month of October 1977 in Santiago. The title of the articles was “Hacia nuevas formas de la razón plástica” (Towards New Forms of Plastic Reason), suggesting a shared break with past forms of plastic expression and an emphasis placed on a conceptual, “rational” approach to art. On a formal level, the two shows shared many elements, such as their display of graphic works including drawings and collages, and even the projection of a video.<sup>626</sup> In bringing together the two shows,

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<sup>626</sup> Smythe's video was funded by Instituto Chileno-Francés de Cultura (French-Chilean Institute of Culture), which as will be discussed in Chapter Six was the most important supporter of video art in Chile from the late 1970s to the beginning of the 1990s. It is interesting to note here that in an unsigned article on video art of 1976 in *Revista Apsi*, a relationship was established by the author between the critique of society performed by certain videos and the more general critique of mass culture made by Adorno and “the critique of spectacle and the showcase of Henri Lefebvre.” See “Cultura: I am making art,” *Revista Apsi*, no. 1, July 30, 1976, 8-9. While Lefebvre's works were not read or commented by Richard, Kay, or

Sommer additionally was drawing a bridge between artistic developments in Chile and abroad, perceiving in the works of both artists a growing dissatisfaction with image making. According to the critic, this discontent had culminated in the seventies in a “frenetic” radicalization of the desire to expand artistic limits, which went beyond the breakdown of the mediums’ borders characteristic of the early twentieth century avant-gardes. Instead, the new art was not just trying to dissolve boundaries, but was reaching towards the “root that nourishes the artist’s sensibility and contributes to define its personal forms.”<sup>627</sup> Even though Sommer did not mention that Vostell’s works preceded Smythe’s by at least a decade, which would have pointed to the belated coming of Chilean art to conceptualism, it was in his comparison between the two forms of “new plastic reason” that Sommer forged a clear distinction between the European forbear and his Chilean counterpart. The main difference Sommer saw operating in the works of Smythe and Vostell was certain “human warmth” present in the former, which instead Vostell would “renounce.” Such a characterization of a “cold” European style versus a “warm” or “hot” variant can be traced back to the previous definition of Chilean art (and by extension Latin American) of Miguel Rojas Mix (see Chapter One), a difference which the latter had based on a commitment to social concerns in contrast to a formalist approach.<sup>628</sup> But while Sommer did not elaborate on where exactly in Smythe’s works “humane sympathy” could be found, several critics perceived a return to a human content in current Chilean art, based on figuration and marginality.<sup>629</sup>

It could be argued that the element of “human warmth” in Smythe’s 1977 works was embodied in the choice of a “popular” subject matter for the exhibition: San Diego Street in downtown Santiago and its inhabitants. The exhibition consisted of collages, black and white photographs, drawings, and a video (shown at the gallery on alternating days), which offered a view of everyday life in what has remained to this day a popular commercial avenue in the midst of the capital. Because of its historical use as the main exit south of the city connecting to the principal avenue in the capital,<sup>630</sup> San Diego Street was associated with the transit of both people and goods. Since the early decades of the twentieth century, the shops established along the street’s edges were joined by bars,

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other theorists in Chile at the time, Smythe’s works are very close to the theories of space of both Lefebvre and the Situationists, particularly in finding in the cityscape specific psychological (or “psychogeographical”) characteristics.

<sup>627</sup> Waldemar Sommer, “Hacia nuevas formas de la razón plástica (I),” *El Mercurio*, October 2, 1977. Sommer compared the plastic situation of the time to that of music, arguing that while the dodecaphonic rupture of Schoenberg had been followed by decades of peace, this same movement had been disrupted in the sixties and seventies by composers such as Luciano Berio and Giorgi Ligeti.

<sup>628</sup> A distinction which has carried off to this day particularly in connection to Conceptual art, as can be seen in Mari Carmen Ramírez’ text “Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980,” in *Global Conceptualisms: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, exhibition catalog (Flushing, NY: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), 53-71.

<sup>629</sup> An example was the show “Cinco Expresiones de la Figuración en Chile” (Five Expressions of Figuration in Chile) in August 1977 at Galería Cromo, where Smythe participated along with the painters Roser Bru, Juan Dávila, Ricardo Irrázabal, and Benjamín Lira.

<sup>630</sup> Calle San Diego runs perpendicularly from the main avenue in downtown Santiago next to Universidad de Chile and ends in Gran Avenida (Great Avenue) where it connected to the railroad.

restaurants, and popular forms of entertainment from theaters to brothels, making the area known as “el zoco” or market. The longitudinal distribution of varied commercial enterprises along San Diego, and the liveliness and fluidity of the transactions taking place, particularly those of retail trade, even led the novelist Carlos Franz to call the street a metaphor of all the markets of Santiago.<sup>631</sup> Due to changes in the orientation of the streets during the 1970s associated with the construction of new and beautified walks in downtown Santiago, by 1977 several shops had fallen in disuse, and San Diego as whole had deteriorated into a space of marginality, delinquency, and cheap commerce.

As a whole, Smythe’s exhibition took San Diego as an exemplary evidence of a changing urban space, focusing on the close relationships between subjects and their environment. The drawings and collages, which combined photographs taken by the artist’s friend Pepe Moreno with graphic marks (such as stains, grids, and drawn annotations), documented the shops of San Diego along with their window displays, signs, empty thresholds, street stands, and arcaded passages. These formed the ‘natural’ backdrop for a series of portraits of local personages: vendors, prostitutes, homeless, charlatans, and shoppers, all photographed in a straightforward manner. The photographs had been subjected by Smythe to a series of manipulations, such as repetition and enlargement, the addition of grids, or as in “La Ciega” (The Blind Woman) of 1977 (fig. 4.1),<sup>632</sup> the inclusion of large stains and black areas of ink alongside a deconstructed color chart. The original photographs were published in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, framed by typed captions that described the specific time and place where they were taken, thus accentuating the images’ documentary status.

Critics regarded the works as ‘documenting’ the “urban landscape,”<sup>633</sup> a phrase drawn from parts of the titles of two works displayed. By resorting to these terms, critics were establishing an association between a traditional artistic genre concerned with the representation of a “natural” place, and a form of straight photography aimed at reproducing faithfully its subject. Though the description is useful, there is an implicit contradiction in the conjunction of the natural with the urban, which suggests a naturalization of the urban and the manmade. This incongruity was not noted by the critics, who also disregarded the relationships between the concept of documentation and graphic reproduction involved in the work. Smythe was drawing from the Dutch tradition of painting the cityscape as if it were a continuation of the land, a form of picturing or

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<sup>631</sup> Carlos Franz, “La Calle San Diego o el Espacio del Zoco,” in *La muralla enterrada (La ciudad imaginaria de Santiago de Chile): Ensayos sobre literatura urbana e identidad* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta, 2001), 123-139. It is of interest for the latter discussion on public space and agency in relation to Altamirano’s view of the city, that Franz described the word “zoco” in the following terms: “Zoco is a word of Arab origin, meaning market. But also “zócalo,” plaza. It is the symbolic place for exchange, fluidity.” Franz, 123.

<sup>632</sup> “La ciega” is reproduced in Waldemar Sommer’s article, “Hacia nuevas formas de la razón plástica (I),” *El Mercurio*, October 2, 1977, as well as in page 9 of the exhibition catalogue *Primer Salón Nacional de Gráfica* (Santiago: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1978).

<sup>633</sup> See, for example, the review of *Revista Paula* of September 13, 1977, and Smythe’s own statement of 1978: “I try to recuperate, to show the vestiges of the everyday man, the culture and subculture inserted in society. In an urban landscape that often enters our eyes in an unconscious manner.” Smythe quoted in Luisa Ulibarri, “Los héroes cotidianos,” *Revista Ercilla*, November 22, 1978, 37-38.

describing the environment that is close to mapping and topography insofar as they are based on the observation of physical ‘facts’ and their precise visual translation.<sup>634</sup> Such a descriptive intention was asserted by Smythe a year later when he described the “still lives” provided by the street (and by extension his own works) as “Vermeers.”<sup>635</sup> Yet the descriptive mode of his works was also linked to the photographic medium used by the artist. As a medium closely tied to documentation and an apparently objective representation of facts, photography could be regarded as a ‘testimony’ of a particular location at a specific point in time, tracing the ‘natural’ forms of the city.<sup>636</sup> It was this descriptive connection which allowed critics to speak of the works exhibited as a “photographic reportage”<sup>637</sup> of San Diego Street and its flora and fauna, and regard the work as documentary.

This documentary aim was nevertheless tainted, in the critics’ views, by the content of the works, the site itself. San Diego was described by Sommer as a “street sub-world” inhabited by entities resembling “human scraps,”<sup>638</sup> an urban landscape submitting people to its “pressures.”<sup>639</sup> The subjects photographed and then replicated in Smythe’s works seemed to support such views of the street as a sordid gutter where the human being was reduced to the status of a thing. In “Sábado, 12 P.M., Mercado Franklin” (Saturday, 12 P.M., Franklin Market) the juxtaposed photograph and drawing of a seller of rotten meat suggested a decadent market and an economy surviving on refuse, creating a contrast with the shop-window’s glittering commodity. Such urban debasement was also noted by the critic Giorgio Vomero. He regarded both the collages and videotape as “document[s] of a certain human and urban desperation,”<sup>640</sup> adding an element of social misery to the humane “warmth” perceived by Sommer in San Diego.

The choice of subject matter was regarded by critics as a form of provocation which was accentuated by Smythe’s ‘documentary’ presentation of a specific everyday reality in the nation. The works could in this way be understood as an inverted “mirror of

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<sup>634</sup> This is what Svetlana Alpers calls the “northern descriptive mode” which shares with photography several characteristics: fragmentariness, arbitrary frames, and a sense of immediacy. In Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, 43.

<sup>635</sup> Smythe in interview with Gonzalo Díaz, in Francisco J. Smythe, *Arte y Conciencia: Siglo XX* (Santiago: Universidad de Chile, 1978), 29.

<sup>636</sup> This position is similar to the “common sense” definition of photography provided by Roland Barthes as “message without a code.” Photography, according to Barthes, would be an *analagon* of reality, since the “message” it communicates is “the scene itself, the literal reality.” Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message,” in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 16-17.

<sup>637</sup> “Francisco Javier Smythe expone en Galería Cromo,” *La Tercera*, September 23, 1977.

<sup>638</sup> The original states: “The vision of a street subworld, with the impact of its horrendous commercial shop windows and its drowned characters that have something of human scraps, is tainted with colors and evocations of textures that testify to the Pop legacy [present in Smythe’s works].” Sommer, “Hacia Nuevas Formas de la Razón Plástica.”

<sup>639</sup> C.H., “Visión en tela de juicio,” *Revista Hoy*, October 19, 1977, 39.

<sup>640</sup> Giorgio Vomero, “Collages y video de Smythe,” *La Tercera*, October 20, 1977.

the quotidian world”<sup>641</sup> capable of “formulating a denunciation.”<sup>642</sup> Nevertheless, few critics attempted to make explicit what was “denounced.” An exception was Luisa Ulibarri, who summarized the accusation implied in the works as “the subject conditioned by his environment (...) where the language of the mass media or the objects of mass production assume the role of eye and object respectively.”<sup>643</sup> Thus, San Diego’s commercial identity was considered as symptomatic of a larger social situation, with the street serving as a microcosmic index of a public problem based on a growing spectacularization and objectification of society. Smythe’s photographs and drawings would operate as visual ‘proofs’ of the pervading commercialization of Chilean society from center to periphery, where objects and the means of spreading them acquired a life of their own.

The critique of commodification that Ulibarri saw operating in Smythe’s works is partly misleading insofar it does not distinguish between specific forms of capitalist expansion in an urban context at different times and places, but treats them as a singular force acting in a unique direction. The “language of the mass media” present in San Diego was different from that of the new centers of commerce developed at the time by the new mayors of the capital’s districts. If, in places like Providencia,<sup>644</sup> and even in the closer downtown environment of Paseo Ahumada, new malls and shops were set up along wide avenues and parks reflecting the apparently bulging Chilean market, San Diego remained tied to an earlier form of urban expansion and development that was by the late 70s considered to be lagging behind, and which I will argue was at the base of Smythe’s social critique. What San Diego presented was an internal urban margin, an interior border within the capital’s center which mirrored not the gleam of the new commodity but the opacity of the old and its resistance to transformation or disappearance.

It can be said that in its fabricated and particularly commercial aspect, the “urban landscape” is inserted in a larger environment of goods, production, leisure, and consumption associated with the expansion of the modern industrial city. By replacing the natural world with a geography of objects while inventing its own ‘natural’ formations and landmarks in the public space, the modern city produces its own terrains ready to be purveyed and explored by the mobilized city dweller. Such a reduction and transformation of nature in an urban setting was captured by Émile Zola in 1867 in the article “The Squares.” It is interesting to note that Sommer compared in passing Smythe’s works to the writings of Zola, in that both manifested an “inquisitiveness” and minute observation of their social surroundings that “congealed” in a naturalistic manner, like a

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<sup>641</sup> Ulibarri, 37.

<sup>642</sup> Vomiero.

<sup>643</sup> Luisa Ulibarri, 37.

<sup>644</sup> Originally a rural zone to the east of the capital dependent on the Municipality of Santiago, Providencia acquired its name from the convent of nuns of the Divine Providence that was located in its fields. After becoming its own municipality in 1897, Providencia was slowly developed as a residential district until in the 1950s it underwent a great urban expansion. This culminated in the area’s transformation into a new commercial and financial center in the 1970s marked by the passing of the first subway line.

photograph, their subjects.<sup>645</sup> While Sommer did not mention Zola's 1867 article, the comparison is useful for it points to a similar problem of urbanization and landscaping in the city associated with the growth of the market, mass production (not only of objects but of experiences, such as a walk in the park), and the spectacularization of everyday life. In "The Squares," Zola criticized the imitation of the natural world in the city, particularly the Haussmanization of Paris and its new parks. In a biting mode, Zola denounced the creation of artificial urban landscapes in the form of public parks, squares, and lawns with protected fields of flowers which "are on display as if in the window of a shop."<sup>646</sup> Such parks were produced at the expense of already existing gardens and attempted to offer a respite for the tired city worker in what Zola described as a comic operatic setting.<sup>647</sup>

Even though the documentary quality of Zola's naturalism brings it close to Smythe's descriptive strategies in relation to the latter's use of photography, a comparison to Eugène Atget is closer in terms of both artists' archival endeavors and their focus on the city. In his photographs of Parisian streets, people, and objects, Atget produced a documentation of an old city in the process of urban, economical, and social transformation while generating, however consciously or unconsciously, a catalogue of urban types, human and objectual.<sup>648</sup> In a similar way, in Smythe's works the photographed subjects were treated as urban "specimens" capable of being filed and catalogued either by the artist, a commercial photographer, or other social groups. Professions, street locations, architectural parts, shop displays, and even marital status were all treated by Smythe as infinite categories producing an abbreviated form of knowledge about their objects. The works thus appeared as bordering with the scientific, an effect exacerbated by the grid patterns superimposed by Smythe onto some of the

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<sup>645</sup> Sommer also compared Smythe's works with Degas' opera ballerinas, an interesting position if one takes into consideration Degas' interest in side views and marginal aspects of the modern spectacle. Sommer, "Hacia nuevas formas de la razón plástica (I)."

<sup>646</sup> Émile Zola, "Les Squares," *Le Figaro*, 18 June 1867, reprinted in Émile Zola, *OEuvres Completes*, ed. H. Miterrand, vol. 19 (Paris: Cercle du Livre Précieux, 1968), 298-9.

<sup>647</sup> Ibid. It is interesting to note that in *The Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord spoke of urbanism as a capitalistic refashioning of "the totality of space into *its own peculiar decor*," suggesting the creation of an "operatic" or spectacular stage setting. Nevertheless, in Debord the city seems to be less about high drama, than about a soothing decorative surface. See Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 121 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>648</sup> Much of the discussion regarding the artistic intention and character of Atget's photographs has centered on the institutional commissions he received and the purposes they were meant to serve, leading to a questioning of the notion of "author" and "oeuvre" (as has been Rosalind Krauss and Abigail Solomon-Godeau's positions). Yet, it is the centrality that the urban in its non-operatic state occupies in Atget's work which points, as Molly Nesbit has suggested, to an awareness of social discrepancies within an urban setting. See Rosalind Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Space," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985); Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Canon Fodder: Authoring Eugene Atget," in *Photography in the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Molly Nesbit, "The Use of History," *Art in America*, no. 74 (February 1986): 72-82, and Molly Nesbit, *Atget's Seven Albums* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

collages, assuming an objective, distanced perspective echoed in the artist's choice of using photographs already taken by another man.

Such an effect of 'distance' and apparent lack of subjective involvement on the artist's part was taken by critics and historians as an argument in favor of the documentary quality of the works on one hand, and a self-critical approach to art making characteristic of the emerging Chilean vanguard on the other. Nevertheless, these arguments tend to obscure the intertwined relations between observers and observed in photography in general, and the connection between Smythe's works, their modes of production, and their subject in particular. One example is the absence of interest in the authorial question implied in Smythe's use of another photographer's work as the basis of his own. While such an act could be read as an early form of appropriation, implying a citation as reproduction and a play with surfaces, Richard (and the readings that have built on her theories) cast the artist's use of photography as a mechanical form of reproduction, as part of a critique of artistic conventions, particularly its illusionism.<sup>649</sup> By arguing that photography merely "reproduces, [it] does not interpret"<sup>650</sup> the object under its scrutiny, Richard deduced that Smythe was exposing the illusionistic conventions underlying artistic practices such as drawing and painting, questioning the mediated reality they presented by contrasting them with the bluntness of photography.

This reading was supported at the time by Smythe's own description of his work as "doing away with the handicraft" and eliminating all traces of subjectivity from it.<sup>651</sup> But Smythe's works did not merely eliminate the author figure by replacing the subjective touch with the mechanical. As Molly Nesbit has pointed out, the difference between man and machine had since the 19<sup>th</sup> century been the main factor distinguishing artistic endeavors from industrial ones where the presence of the "author" could not be felt.<sup>652</sup> Rather, as the artist Gonzalo Díaz noted in an interview of 1978 with Smythe, in which the latter argued for the distance he adopted towards his work, the 'documents' were heavily treated, carefully composed, and visually interesting.<sup>653</sup> The inclusion of a series of handwritten phrases next to the photographs or their reproductions, from descriptive colors to materials and even, as noted by Richard, "historical mentions" such

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<sup>649</sup> Smythe spoke directly of this mode of appropriation in 1978, when he referred of taking an "already published photograph, the photograph of a reporter, in other words, one chooses the photograph from a fact that has already been made public. The photograph is intervened by the desire to correct or make reality more tangible. It responds to the in satisfaction of man in front of this. Photograph... present. Photocopy... reminiscence." Smythe, *Arte y Conciencia*, 47-48.

<sup>650</sup> Nelly Richard, text with no title in exhibition catalogue, *Smythe. San Diego* (Santiago: Galería Cromo, 1977), no page number.

<sup>651</sup> This was a position encouraged by the critical reception of Smythe's work, especially in the circle of Richard, Leppe, and Altamirano.

<sup>652</sup> Molly Nesbit, "What was an Author?" *Yale French Studies*, No. 73, *Everyday Life* (1987): 229-257.

<sup>653</sup> An example can be found in the following statement of Díaz: "nevertheless, [the work of art] is made aesthetically. In order for it to bother [the spectator] you need to contemplate it, and for these two things to happen, you need to show it in a gallery; in other words, to break with all of this, you have to fulfill all of it... Are you aware of the fallacy to which we are coming?" Gonzalo Díaz in Francisco J. Smythe, *Arte y Conciencia: Siglo XX*, 25.

as “Do you know Oldenburg?,” also brought back the author’s hand, artistic knowledge, and subjectivity into play, however conceptualized they appeared. Furthermore, like a contemporary ethnographer, Smythe was living in San Diego Street at the time, being part of that ambience he was distantly portraying, suggesting identification with his object. Thus, the photograph’s documentary inflexion was revealed as equally immersed in subjectivity and not, as Richard would have it, as an inherently demystifying objective apparatus of artistic (and by extension, social) conventions.

As Smythe was creating a system of social classification, the project took a specific aspect of modernity into focus, the marginality of the popular subject, and gave it a particular political connotation within the national context. A comparison with Benjamin’s flâneur is useful here, for not only do Smythe’s works bear a resemblance to the meanderings of the Parisian urban ethnographer and the specific locations favored by the German author, but because they also diverge in the question of distance. As the flâneur went “botanizing on the asphalt,”<sup>654</sup> collecting social specimens like a natural scientist, he interpreted the faces seen in the crowd like a physiognomist, reading them like indexes of character and social standing.<sup>655</sup> While adopting a scientifically detached position regarding his environment, in this detective-like act of social tracing the flâneur became another social ‘specimen’ and part of the crowd.<sup>656</sup> At the same time, according to Benjamin the flâneur felt certain empathy for the commodities displayed in the arcades and shop windows, an “empathy with exchange value” and “marketability.”<sup>657</sup> Though the same could be argued of Smythe in terms of becoming part of the crowd looked upon and becoming enraptured with the commodity, his own experience as a social transplant coming as an adolescent to Santiago from the southern provinces led him to identify with the lower class subjects recorded in his works, focusing on the banality of urban life and the discrepancies of modernization in the capital.<sup>658</sup>

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<sup>654</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire,” *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 4, 1938-1940*, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 36.

<sup>655</sup> “The phantasmagoria of the flâneur: to read from faces the profession, the ancestry, the character.” Benjamin, “The Flâneur,” in *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), M6,6, 429. This was extended to the city as a body and its city dwellers: “It would be profitable to discover certain definitive features leading toward the physiognomy of the city dweller.” Benjamin, in passage M14,5, 443.

<sup>656</sup> “Preformed in the figure of the flâneur is that of the detective.” Benjamin, M13a,2, 442 Benjamin saw a connection between the role performed by the flâneur and the narrative thus created by him of the city and the detective story, making of flânerie a “hunt,” a search for “secrets” hidden behind an aura of bourgeois or mass-produced respectability. See Benjamin, passages M11a,6 and M12a,3, 439-440.

<sup>657</sup> Benjamin, M17a,2, 448.

<sup>658</sup> In an interview before setting off to Italy, Smythe stated that the life or childhood experiences that could be found in his work were “the contrast between the provincial and the urban. Having being born in a province and coming to the developed city, going back, coming, finally establishing myself, made me be conformed by two worlds. More than a developed and a provincial medium, what became clearest for me were the truthful and the false in the environment and the ambitions and ideals of the people.” Francisco Smythe in “Francisco Smythe,” *Revista Paula*, February 27, 1978, 90-96. The interview was taken from Smythe, interviewed by Gonzalo Díaz, the original text to which I will refer to.



These contradictions were particularly evident in the series of works related to the covered arcades in San Diego as remnants of an older form of commerce and commodity spectacle that by 1977 was turning into a relic. As San Diego's arcades were slowly being supplanted by department stores in downtown Santiago as well as further east in Providencia, their dark passages were becoming ruins that, according to Smythe, displayed in the modern landscape "the vestiges of a whole civilization."<sup>659</sup> Smythe's archeological approach to architecture was seen in the work "Estudio para paisaje Urbano" (Study for Urban Landscape) of 1977 (fig. 4.2),<sup>660</sup> which presented in three stacked photographs a sequential view of an empty street on a Sunday next to a large trapezoidal area of wiped black ink.<sup>661</sup> Useless on a day which according to the Christian custom should be of rest from labor, San Diego appeared like a petrified ghost town, the liveliness acquired during the weekday through its users gone, while its architectural masses and corroded signs remained the only traces of human habitation.

Nevertheless, the works were less nostalgic about the past as suggested by the arcades than critical of the unreality created by these and the newer commercial centers in the city.<sup>662</sup> In the catalogue's photographs of San Diego's arcades, they are designated as "interiors and exterior interiors," suggesting a reversibility of the notions of outdoors and indoors effected by the commercial structures (fig. 4.3).<sup>663</sup> As they protected the consumer/pedestrian from the natural elements, the arcades produced an enclosed effect that mimicked in a miniaturized form the street's longitudinal axis and even recreated natural referents including the sky, as seen through the large glass and iron ceilings. Reduced to an involuted commercial landscape, the arcades were treated by Smythe as symbols of the landscaping of the city, particularly its placement into the service of capitalistic forces.<sup>664</sup>

For Smythe, urban landscaping was tied to a deeper dehumanizing movement in the city. This source of mental "disequilibrium"<sup>665</sup> leading to anxiety occurred when the

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<sup>659</sup> Smythe, *Arte y Conciencia: Siglo XX*, 29.

<sup>660</sup> "Estudio para paisaje urbano" is documented in the article by Joseph Kleinos, "Encuentro del hombre en la ciudad. Francisco Smythe: a la búsqueda del paisaje urbano," *Revista de la Universidad de Chile*, December 14, 1978.

<sup>661</sup> While different stylistically, Smythe's works are related at least in subject to Atget's albums on "Topographie de Paris" and even the "picturesque." For an analysis of Atget's works, see Nesbit, *Atget's Seven Albums*, 175.

<sup>662</sup> It should be noted though that there was a romantic element involved in the works. For Smythe, the "miserable and deteriorated" arcades presented a "fundamental" aspect of contemporary humanity which the newer shops did not contain. See Smythe, *Arte y Conciencia*, 28.

<sup>663</sup> The San Diego arcades were documented in Francisco Smythe's catalogue, also published in *Arte y Conciencia: Siglo XX*, unnumbered pages.

<sup>664</sup> Walter Benjamin had described the Parisian arcades as "a city, a world in miniature, in which customers will find everything they need." But this is a city turned endless corridors of shops as well as a labyrinth. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, passage A1,1, 31.

<sup>665</sup> Smythe, *Revista Paula*, 92.

natural world was replaced by “consumer society,” with nature transformed into showcases for goods and reality supplanted by the artificial signs of the commodity.<sup>666</sup> In this pseudo-natural world, real bodies were supplanted by their commercial semblances, as seen in Smythe’s series of photographic reproductions of mannequins in the shop’s windows, standing as cosmetic doubles of the female body (fig. 4.4).<sup>667</sup> The illusion of beauty and seduction invoked in the long eyelashes and the refined features of the plastic female heads was nevertheless fragmented, the head presented without a body or, in the case of the series on shop windows, the bodies reduced to prosthetic supports for clothes and merchandise. A phantasmagoric quality was evoked by Smythe through the inclusion in several photographs of a pink acrylic coloration, a synthetic form of imitating nature and the human body countered by the evident lifelessness and static quality of the figures, particularly in their lack of individuality. If the shops of San Diego manifested a dream world of desires as embodied in commodities, this spectacle made its simulated nature evident in the very materiality of its products and their exaggerated attempt to imitate nature, allowing for a break in the seamlessness of the dream (of beauty, of sex) presented by them.

The repetition of images in the collages also suggested the interchangeability of the products displayed under the logic of capitalism. Ceramic images of virgins, saints, and Christ figures were treated by both the shop owners and Smythe as objects equivalent to suitcases, their specificity annulled under the general sign of the commodity as an object existing for profit rather than utility, as seen in the price tags displayed next to them. Such logic of consumption also reached the human being in Smythe’s works though the image of the prostitute envisioned as a modern symbol of exchange and objectification. In several collages the sexual market was associated with other systems of exchange, with the prostitute’s labor treated as a commodity, her body made-up for display and offering an ‘experience’ of sex as a ware to be possessed by a male customer. But the prostitute also appeared as both a consumer and a seller, occupying varying positions within these intertwined markets. By buying goods and those same images of beauty and femininity displayed on the commercial street where she worked, the prostitute was left “look[ing] like the mannequin, the same whose underwear is exhibited in the showcase.”<sup>668</sup> If in the display and subjection to a male gaze and potential (yet fleeting) possession, the prostitute incarnated the spectacle created by the market economy, she was also part of its other end, an active consumer of images and products.

It could be argued that this activity was an illusion, since the prostitute’s own act of consumption would serve to reproduce the existing system where the female body

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<sup>666</sup> This is not to say that the commodity does not have a material and concrete reality, but that its production and consumption generate another sphere of reality guided by appearances and images (of a good life, pleasure, comfort, entertainment, for example). I follow here Debord’s note that “[T]he spectacle cannot be set in abstract opposition to concrete social activity, for the dichotomy between reality and image will survive on either side of such distinction. Thus the spectacle, though it turns reality on its head, is itself a product of real activity.” Debord, 14.

<sup>667</sup> Photographs from the mannequin series are documented in Francisco Smythe’s catalogue, also published in *Arte y Conciencia: Siglo XX*, unnumbered pages.

<sup>668</sup> C.H., “Visión en tela de juicio.”

remains an object of display and possession for a wage. In this sense, even though Smythe attempted to get closer to the world of prostitution by entering the threshold of the shop window and looking at the process of preparation of the prostitute before a client reached her, as in the gridded drawings of “Estudio de Camarín” (Study of Dressing Room), this was done from a male perspective that objectified the prostitute and looked only at the artificial nature of her make-up and life, without any attempt to question the male fantasy of ownership invoked by her figure.<sup>669</sup> The change from the photographic original to the drawings of the same series exhibited in a grid like pattern, manifested a rejection of mechanical reproduction for the artist’s touch and handling of the image, suggesting a combination of distance and lust in the regulation of the luring body through the grid and in a displaced form of possession through the ‘mapping’ gesture of the artist’s hand. But Smythe was also generalizing the prostitute’s body as an ‘other’ within the city. As he presented the prostitute as a subject exposed to the logic of the commodity and objectification like many others, Smythe was comparing her with other social ‘types’ produced by the modern capitalist city imagined as ‘other’, from delinquents to street vendors and blind peddlers.<sup>670</sup> In their ‘contaminating’ and ‘low’ origins, these types could be classified within the larger ‘genus’ of “marginal,” forming part of the urban as its refuse, the ‘other’ of capitalism’s spectacular self-image, dotting the urban landscape and defining its identity through its acts of exclusion.<sup>671</sup>

For Smythe, the pervasiveness of the commodity in the modern urban landscape created its own form of cultural colonization which had spatial implications. According to Smythe, the imagery found in San Diego’s shops and objects, in its signs and facades, was part of a larger set of popular representations that had “invaded Latin America [along] with the T.V., the soap opera, the popular prints, the cast figures, saints, and the conception of still lives.”<sup>672</sup> This imagery was residual, coming from the leftovers of other Western cultures in two senses: the genres had been imported from Europe first (and then North America) and therefore were at a remove from their original source of production, and in the second place they had apparently become a characteristic part of ‘popular’ rather than ‘high’ culture. For Smythe, the assimilation of these imports turned the modern Latin American city into a new type of “province” insofar it lagged behind the centers of commodity production, a situation which San Diego exemplified as “the last provincial street in the last province of the world.”<sup>673</sup> For Smythe, Santiago with all

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<sup>669</sup> To continue with the contradictions in Smythe’s works, Benjamin stated that “Love for the prostitute is the apotheosis of empathy with the commodity.” Benjamin, O11a,4, 511.

<sup>670</sup> In 1978, Smythe spoke of the 1977 human figures as “a simple object, and not a subject in the work.” Smythe, *Arte y Conciencia*, 38.

<sup>671</sup> Speaking of Atget’s photographs of ragpickers (*chiffonniers*) at Cite Doré, Nesbit states that the photographer was capturing and representing “[A]nother modernity, dark but not degraded, slipped into view, a modernity that shadowed all that gaiety on the boulevard, picking up its trash: the shadow knew, it looked, it smiled, and then withdrew. Rags were freedom.” Nesbit, 175. Even though Smythe was not looking at this darker side of modernity as a site of freedom necessarily, his interest in that ‘other’ interpretation of modern life echoes Atget’s work.

<sup>672</sup> Smythe, 29.

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.*

its modern aspirations was still parochial and dependent on foreign sources, receiving only second-hand scraps from other first world nations: even parts of the urban landscape (as in the arcades) were imported, making it twice artificial.

This form of cultural ‘colonization’ was represented in Smythe’s works as a spatial one linked to the reproduction of capitalistic relations. A history of colonialism and its economic underpinnings was invoked in the series of grids that Smythe incorporated into his drawings and collages, with the strict orthogonality of the grids evoking the regulation of the streets in downtown Santiago. These had been set out by the Spanish conquerors in the early sixteenth century to normalize the local landscape with an imported form of urban planning, establishing a matrix for other colonial cities in the territory. But not everyone respected this Spanish matrix,<sup>674</sup> for the capital had been razed by Mapuche Indians a few months after its erection, and had to be reconstructed by the conquistadors on the same site.<sup>675</sup> The act of founding as marking the land had to be repeated and in its iteration it denied once again the pre-existence of natives as having claims to own the territory. The superimposed orthogonal layout of the city asserted the self-endowed superiority of the Spanish over the ‘original’ landscape as it established a first form of territorial control based on material ownership of both land and men. By parceling out the land and its inhabitants in “encomiendas” as a form of economic retribution for the conquerors’ labors, the Spanish laid out not only the oligarchic basis of Chilean society, but an underlying form of social division into owners and owned.<sup>676</sup> This class division was still in place several centuries later, as manifested in an article published in October, 1977, which described the city as segregated with distinct zones of “marked social classes.”<sup>677</sup>

On the other hand, the socially restrictive aspects of urbanism and landscaping the city were manifested in the grid as a constructed form of physical and visual regularization, imposing a rational, standardized order onto a space. Just as San Diego

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<sup>674</sup> While the orthogonal model functioned as a matrix insofar as it was a model or type coming from Europe that was reproduced in the new world, the Spaniards also had to adapt their own model to the ones they found set in place by the natives, from Mexico to Peru. Sometimes these native models seemed similar to the European one, and thus proved easy to adopt. For an analysis of architecture in relation to urbanism as a tool of empire, see Valerie Fraser, *The Architecture of Conquest. Building in the Viceroyalty of Peru, 1535-1635* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Fraser mentions how the Spanish term for the center of the city, the “traza,” means both “plan” and “layout.” Yet I would add that when the noun is transformed into a verb (“trazar”) it becomes “to trace,” as in a drawing. Furthermore, when compared to a print, the “traza” would literally become the “matrix” of the city. See Fraser, 72.

<sup>675</sup> In a strange repetition of history, the city of Santiago was destroyed by the Indians guided under Michimalonco on September 11, 1541. The orthogonal matrix was repeated in all the original cities founded by Pedro de Valdivia in the new territories.

<sup>676</sup> The rationalization of the landscape was tied to the superimposition of names and forms, as the name “San Diego” itself attested: originally the Franciscan convent and school of Saint Diego had been located at the site. This act of renaming is connected to an act of claiming those lands, which Tzvetan Todorov analyzed in relation to Columbus’ urge to name the places he discovered or literally “found(ed)” in America: “nomination is equivalent to taking possession.” Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 27.

<sup>677</sup> “Mil hectáreas agrícolas pierde Santiago al año,” *El Mercurio*, October 3, 1977.

formed part of a larger urban network whose extension had been subdivided into coherent blocks, Smythe either subjected the whole composition of his works to a modular arrangement, with each drawing or reproduced photograph a single unit in larger mosaic, as in “Individualización de Carmen Salgado” (Individualization of Carmen Salgado) of 1977 (fig. 4.5),<sup>678</sup> combining drawings of a prostitute with frontispieces of buildings and commercial signs announcing parkas, or made the grid appear behind, above, and in-between the photographs and drawings as a frame. Such a regular formal element suggested an underlying or superimposed order on the bodies and objects up for display. This form of containment and distribution was laid onto the ‘natural’ world, as evidenced by the contrasts of materialities between the reproduced bodies of sellers, prostitutes, and buyers, and the grid’s static coordinates.

But the grid arrangement also mimicked the photographic frame, with the camera’s mechanism acting as a prior form of enclosing the subject and imposing a geometric form on it. This was particularly evident in Smythe’s catalogue, where several photographic proofs were arranged in grids, suggesting an order dictated by both the technique used and by the artist himself. The closeness of grid and frame problematizes the concept of the artist as an urban ethnographer and a detached documentarian, since the artist’s work could be compared to that of the urbanist, not merely studying the patterns of city life but separating its users into classes and designing spatial configurations for them. One of the reproductions in the catalogue of a photographer’s shop window presented this paradox as an inverted mirror of the artist’s own forms of spatialization. In the shop window, a series of ‘blocks’ of photographic portraits were created by combining four columns made up of three individual portraits of the same size with horizontal rows also displaying three times the same person. The whole grid of faces thus produced was then framed by a larger window case, creating from afar the illusion of a series of avenues and intersecting streets displayed in a map of the city or a taxonomical table.

Smythe’s works pointed to how the restraint implied by the grid could take multiple forms and uses. If orthogonal planning was characteristic of colonial urbanism in Latin America and was tied to territorial control, it could also be applied as a form of social supervision of space used by modern states to control population growth and be at the same time adapted to fit capitalistic needs. San Diego’s blocks had been subdivided in the late nineteenth century into smaller passages (“pasajes”) filled with small houses (“conventillos”) to magnify the density of this downtown location and provide housing for the laborers working close to the train that passed nearby. Later on, the blocks were interrupted by the covered arcades that multiplied its commercial avenues in a perpendicular and internal fashion, adding to the labyrinthine composition of what had originated as a grid. In this involuted expanding framework of housing and commerce, the window shop in turn became a smaller module and stage repeated endlessly in the street and inwardly in the arcades.

A similar view on the close ties between commodity and spatial design was signaled by Guy Debord in 1967. Speaking of modern European cities, Debord argued that “urbanism is the mode of appropriation of the natural world and human environment

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<sup>678</sup> A reproduction of “Individualización de Carmen Salgado” can be found in the article “Visión en tela de juicio,” *Revista Hoy*, October 19, 1977, in page 39.

by capitalism.”<sup>679</sup> For Debord, the modern city was conceived as a “free space of commodities” where distance between human beings was sought as a form of social control. While commodities were given free reign, usurping public and private spaces in their demand for attention, the city-dweller was left isolated and unable to act, especially since the regularization of space would prevent any large gathering of masses. While attractive, Debord’s position does not allow for many spaces of social interaction within a capitalistic landscape, insofar as workers and commodities are separated into irreconcilable poles where users are alienated from the space they inhabit. Even though for Debord spaces of dialogue exist within this capitalized cityscape,<sup>680</sup> these are subsumed under the realization of a proletarian revolution that, in becoming conscious of its alienated status, would take over the city and its planning into its own hands. In the meantime, the only alternative to spatial control suggested by Debord was “détournement,” defined as a method to achieve a “mobile space of play”<sup>681</sup> in the appropriation and re-signification of pre-existing spaces and objects. If the urban landscape could not be restructured immediately, social agents had to be content with its manipulation.

A similar critique concerning the polarization of urban experience can be made of Richard’s analysis of Smythe’s work in her catalogue essay for the exhibition. Richard argued that the architectural components in Smythe’s works made evident the control exerted by larger centers of power on the social body, both on a psychological and physical level. For Richard, the “order imposed by the geometric” element coming from both grids and architecture accounted for “a repressive act against space” by limiting it.<sup>682</sup> The inclusion of stains in the collages was for Richard a gesture of opposition against the grid’s regulatory frame, since the stain embodied an expressionistic and “incontrollable” escape from this superimposed organization.<sup>683</sup>

While Smythe’s conception of the urban landscape as ‘non-natural’ supports Richard’s interpretation and the perception of the grid as oppressive, both views can be critiqued insofar they deny the possibility of understanding urbanism and the space of commerce as spaces of connection and social interaction. In Richard’s view, space and its users were merely passive receivers of spectacles or receptacles of the humanly constructed grid which broke the ‘innocence’ or natural state of space.<sup>684</sup> The natural as

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<sup>679</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 121.

<sup>680</sup> According to Debord, the countryside was already conquered by commodification.

<sup>681</sup> Debord, 126.

<sup>682</sup> Richard, in *Smythe. San Diego*.

<sup>683</sup> This “liberating” gesture embodied in the stain stemmed, according to Richard, from Abstract Expressionism and particularly action painting, an influence also noted by Waldemar Sommer. Smythe instead related the stain to the influence of Balmes and the Spanish Tàpies, suggesting a continuation, as with Dittborn, of Informalism in the midst of an incipient conceptual approach. Smythe interviewed by Luisa Ulibarri in “Los héroes cotidianos,” 38.

<sup>684</sup> This is the type of ethnocentric critique that Derrida in *Of Grammatology* sees operating in Lévi-Strauss’ attacks on Western culture, yet which end up arguing for a condition of pure presence and therefore of pure

well as the city and its inhabitants were conceived by Richard as static forces, without taking into account how grids vary and serve different purposes, how social forces reshape the spaces they inhabit,<sup>685</sup> and how urban spaces carry over the traces of the past while being simultaneously open to change and erasure. Even though the power of the state as a producer of space as implied in Richard's argument had a direct role in the reorganization and planning of Chile's capital during the dictatorship, there were aspects of Smythe's works that suggested an interaction between more complicated forms and instances of spatial production that gave other social actors more prominence and took into account the contradictions and lapses in the texture of the city.

Such openness was first suggested by Smythe's own grids. These were never completely sealed off, but rather drawn in an unfinished manner and at times disguised under heavy black stained areas. In the collages, the drawn grids appeared anemic, barely sketched, suggesting an unreachable state of ultimate order as much as its inevitable presence.<sup>686</sup> Combined with the irregularity of the stain (which nevertheless always maintained a relation to a geometric form), the edge of the photograph, the axis of the grid, and the straight lines of roofs and walkways emerged in the works as the other side of the same coin, with the irregular and the regular present in one another rather than being distanced poles. In the collage "Estudio para Paisaje Urbano" (Study for an Urban Landscape), the trapezoidal stain opposed to the photographs of the street imitated the space of the sky as framed by the buildings, the stain not so much the opposite of the hard-edged architecture but conformed by it. The stain itself gave form to the geometric rigidity of the architecture, becoming part of its limit while appearing as animated by the excessive regularity and closure of the architectural environment. Their interaction suggested not an abolition of limits as Richard proposed, as in the stain 'contaminating' the geometric, but instead pointed to the interplay of their borders and their necessary connection within the cityscape.

The relation between geometric identity and the stains' irregularity as one of mutual transgression rather than complementary polarity found its echo in Smythe's representation of San Diego as an internal border within the structures of capitalism. For Smythe, San Diego retained the commodity aspect of the marketplace but in the form of a fair. The street was envisioned in the photographs as irregular, transitory, and fluid, filled with street vendors as well as illegal businesses, plagued with bad smells and lugubrious spaces.<sup>687</sup> With its combination of old wares and decadent products, as in the case of the rotten meat or the charlatan's un-functional objects, San Diego was posited as an anomaly within the capitalistic plan, a place that sold not the shining new commodity but

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(essential) identity in one of the polarized sides, which in the case of the French anthropologist would be the non-Western populations he visited and recorded.

<sup>685</sup> Or even the spaces they do not inhabit or do not even know, as in the case of travelers and European conquerors.

<sup>686</sup> Richard did point out, nevertheless, that the irregularity of the grids provoked an "interruption" in their regularity. Richard, in *Smythe. San Diego*.

<sup>687</sup> In 1978 there were several complaints about the bad smell, dirtiness, and abandonment of the site, mentioning also the number of "ambulant" commerce and insecurity created by it. See for example, "Comercio en San Diego," *El Mercurio*, July 27, 1978.

its opaque siblings.<sup>688</sup> While still oriented towards profit making and thus inserted in the market economy, and using all forms of disparate signs to announce them, San Diego's shops exemplified a tarnished reflection of commerce, its desolated decay literally embodied in its unhealthy components. The rotten meat sold by a street vendor reproduced in one of Smythe's collages, meat probably coming from the "Matadero" (the slaughterhouse) found in the neighborhood, also invoked the necessary contact with animalism, death, and even sacrifice demanded by the growing city, pointing to the underside of the hygienic modern city and its smoothly mechanical running.

Straddling against the regime's desired city as a clean and orderly space, San Diego was a space of difference within its revamped center. The relationship between the new and the old could be seen as one of encroachment of the latter into the former, yet the very centrality and persistence of the street and its forms of commerce pointed to the difficulty of establishing strict limits between an inside and outside of the city, or a center and its periphery. Unlike the shantytowns that were set up on the borders of the city (or as discussed in the following section, the dictatorship's efforts to translate the poorest sectors of the population to the city's margins), San Diego was a seam rather than a fringe, curling the borders inwards, folding over and doubling inside the city itself. Considered as a whole, Smythe's exhibition repeated this theme of involution and inversion: in the passages, in the "conventillos" and the thresholds, all reproducing in a labyrinthine manner the exterior, confusing inside and outside and upsetting clear categories.

The internal border as a physical, concrete, and also imagined space was intimately tied in Smythe's works to the bodies living within it. For Smythe, San Diego was part of an urban "unconscious" leaving its traces in the city's body yet remaining latent, beneath its surface, not fully perceived. This latency within the modern city took on a corporeal guise as it was translated into excessive passions, violence, and criminality which surfaced "when the environment pressures man and marginalizes him from culture."<sup>689</sup> Passion was treated by Smythe as a symptom of a discomfort and anxiety within the modern city, a way to escape its regularity and the civilized behavior expected from it through outbursts of murder, love, and rage. The urban landscape envisioned by Smythe was no modern Arcadia, but both the backdrop and catalyst of crime and excess.

This second facet underlining the 1977 exhibition had been treated directly by Smythe since 1974.<sup>690</sup> In June 1976, the artist presented at Galería Época drawings with

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<sup>688</sup> In the 1978 interview with the young painter Gonzalo Díaz, Smythe explained how he chose the "popular" window-shops of San Diego because those of the newly built commercial centers in Providencia were "too clean, too intentionally depurated, in other words, there is no passage of time, no deterioration, there is nothing, they don't represent anything." Smythe, *Arte y Conciencia*, 28. There is a similarity here with Atget in the artists' rejection of a bourgeois form of consumption as expressed in the department stores (and in Smythe's case, Providencia's shops) for the popular or working class spaces of consumption, which is related to what Molly Nesbit describes as Atget's documentation of a "low modernity."

<sup>689</sup> Francisco Smythe in "Francisco Smythe: Obras maduras de un joven artista," *El Cronista*, December 10, 1978.

<sup>690</sup> Smythe's early drawings of 1974 already manifest this interest in the body, as in the series of spare drawings in black and white with brief touches of gouache color made that year. These were portraits framed at the center of the composition, below which a written caption or epitaph was handwritten. The portraits referred to either cultural heroes of the popular classes, such as the Argentinean tango singer



ink on paper based on his collection of articles from the “crónica roja” (yellow press),<sup>691</sup> deriving his works’ titles from the crimes of passion, rapes, poisonings, and its actors as described by the press. The faces and bodies involved were those of the middle to lower classes, inserted into altar-like settings composed of boxes and pieces of furniture. The bodies were simplified in their outlines and contracted into areas of fleshy pink and greenish hues, partitioning the figures’ anatomical features and turning their faces into those of mechanical puppets. The outcome not only suggested the flattening effects of mechanical reproduction and their sources in the mass-media, from posters to chromes, but it also mechanized the human, rendering the body a docile assemblage of parts. Such an effect was doubled by the bodies’ further subjection to tight square grids, finely delineated in pencil within the flesh of the figures and their surroundings, a motif that as seen above was repeated in the San Diego series.<sup>692</sup>

The intimate scale of the portraits and their placement in what looked like interiors, triptychs, and shelves, brought crime to a quotidian setting, passing from the public realm of the press into the household. But the sense of ordinariness was countered by the titles’ reference to gruesome stories, as well as the placement within the boxes of strange biomorphic shapes suggesting fish and abstracted phallic-shaped organs.<sup>693</sup> Cut up and fractured in the drawings, the bodies were then displayed as trophies or family memorabilia, giving the scenes an aura of religious sacredness associated to ritual sacrifice. What seemed at first like ordinary portraits of respectable middle class people, as suggested by the draped curtains in the banal ordinary settings of a female portrait titled “Los sucesos en el crimen del rentista y su amante...” (The events in the crime of

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Carlos Gardel, or anonymous and marginal members of society, such as the poor and the deranged. Smythe’s friendship with Carlos Leppe (noted by Mellado, yet never analyzed by the critic), was important in the latter’s works and can be seen in Leppe’s continuous use of Gardel’s music and image as discussed in Chapter Six. For reproductions of these early works, see the exhibition catalogue *Francisco J. Smythe. Veinte Años de Creatividad* (Santiago: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1992), pages 33 and 34.

<sup>691</sup> In his interviews, Smythe spoke of how he had since 1972 followed the “lead” of the yellow press. See for example, “Exposiciones,” *Revista Paula*, 31 August, 1976, 38. In 1978 he specified his sources, stating that he generally used the newspaper *La Tercera de la Hora*. See Smythe, *Arte y Conciencia*, 33.

<sup>692</sup> The painter Rodolfo Opazo, Smythe’s former professor from the university who wrote the text in the 1976 exhibition catalogue, considered the drawings a “destruction of form” which was aimed at the “humanization of the environment where the human being acts.” Rodolfo Opazo, untitled text in *Exposición de dibujos de Francisco J. Smythe* (Santiago: Galería Época, 1976), no page number. According to Opazo, the use of the grid and geometrical figures would have worked to “subtract [from reality] what is common to it in order to individualize it and examine it,” revealing a new reality of man “who with his nature contaminates it and makes it sick, corrupts and eats it away.” Yet Smythe’s figures seemed less human than artificial. A light pink and sometimes greenish acrylic tone incorporated into the faces reinforced the *ersatz* nature of the images, even while suggesting the presence of flesh within it. The effect was one of the grotesque and kitsch, of two forms of artificiality, grids and acrylic, pressing the human figure and at the same time escaping its borders, superimposed and emerging from within.

<sup>693</sup> If in Leppe’s objects the boxes had trapped elements of the landscape and the chests with its open drawers acted as miniature coffins and reliquaries, in Smythe’s drawings the framed portraits enshrined rapists, a key keeper, and other delinquents as fetish objects.

the renter and his lover....) of 1975 (fig. 4.6),<sup>694</sup> was turned into a stage of lurking violence and erotic desire through the incorporation of the dismembered body parts and the captions describing passionate homicides taken from the press. Home and the common place were transformed into a space of violence and carnage, a miniature slaughterhouse adorned with exterior signs of respectability.

The duality between exterior and interior, and the passage from public to private realms, was incarnated in the drawing “La guardallaves” (The Key keeper) of 1975 (fig. 4.7).<sup>695</sup> In the gridded portrait of an old female concierge, the sitter’s shriveled mouth was repeated enlarged at the base of the framed drawing and juxtaposed to two phallic forms acting as dismembered offerings. While one of the body’s orifices was closed, the tightly pursed lips shutting off the mouth as a threshold, the two biomorphic shapes next to it suggested instead amorphous teeth or female genitalia, forcing open the body’s interiority for its display. As a toothless vagina dentata, invoking fears of castration and bad dreams, the body was turned into an image of disguised aggression, with sexually charged body parts convoking equally desire and destructive forces.

The fragmentation and altar-like setting created a fetishistic ambience that was repeated in all the drawings, either in the forms of multiple biomorphic parts floating around the portraits or as more evident body fragments revered by men. In “José Bustamante, alias el tío Pepe” (José Bustamante, alias Uncle Pepe) of 1975 (fig. 4.8),<sup>696</sup> the kneeling man trying to grasp with outstretched hands a severed female leg resembled the fish cut in a tubular shape, one of its ends clearly sliced by a knife, as in the work “Violador” (Rapist) of 1975 (fig. 4.9).<sup>697</sup> The insistence on the phallic shape, whether represented by something else as in the leg, or emasculated and flaccid, implied a masculinist position gone awry. Through the phallic shape’s repetition and parody as an amorphous mass its authoritarian effects seemed diminished, their multiplicity working in the drawings as a compulsive form of defense against fragmentation.

The need to repeat in relation to violence can be related to the work of the detective who returns to the scene of the crime to understand its workings. Like the flâneur figure who gathers information about the people encountered on the streets from the traces left by them,<sup>698</sup> the detective seeks out clues at the scene of the crime, graphing

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<sup>694</sup> “Los sucesos en el crimen del rentista y su amante” is reproduced in page 36 of the exhibition catalogue *Francisco J. Smythe. Veinte Años de Creatividad*, along with other works from the same series, such as “La guardallaves.”

<sup>695</sup> Though a complete version of “La guardallaves” is reproduced in the exhibition catalogue *Francisco J. Smythe. Veinte Años de Creatividad* in page 36, there are enlarged reproductions of details (especially of the grid pattern) in the smaller exhibition catalogue *Exposición de dibujos de Francisco J. Smythe* (Santiago: Galería Época, 1976), no page number.

<sup>696</sup> “José Bustamante, Alias el “Tío Pepe,” is reproduced in the exhibition catalogue *Francisco J. Smythe. Veinte Años de Creatividad* in page 36.

<sup>697</sup> “Violador,” is reproduced in the exhibition catalogue *Francisco J. Smythe. Veinte Años de Creatividad* in page 36.

<sup>698</sup> Smythe mentioned in 1978 the works of Claes Oldenburg “Five Studies of Cigarette Butts,” 1966, as an example of an artist collecting cigarette stubs from the streets and attempting to trace the character of the individual smoker from these found objects. See Smythe, *Arte y Conciencia*, 24.

its contours to bring order to the investigation. Smythe's works of both 1976 and 1977 recalled the detective returning to the scene in order to repeat in a belated manner the felony itself, particularly through the use of photography as an indexical sign providing evidence of the transgression. If the graphic mark could trace and circumscribe the underlying passions leading to it, what Smythe was presenting were crime scenes, marking environments leading to social disorder.

Smythe's fascination with criminality highlighted the composite makings of the urban setting. The city was imagined as both alluring and fearsome, eliciting social anxiety in its users as embodied in urban delinquency. This fear was evident in the series of articles published in Santiago between the end of 1977 and 1978 concerning urban changes in the capital, from the expropriations conducted to develop new areas and the eradication of poor families to the periphery, in which the city's excessive growth was directly linked to delinquency.<sup>699</sup> If the street of San Diego was a miniature cosmos of the city, symbolizing the presence of illegal behavior and a threat to social order, and the 1976 interiors were further incarnations of the everyday violence in an urban setting, Smythe's works could be read as embodying the fears evoked by these interior spaces as much as the desires provoked by them. For the scene of the crime described by the works was one which tied violence and passion, pointing to the deceptiveness of the "normal" within the urban setting and its inevitable connection to its other: the unlawful, the disordered, and the disturbance of rules.

Transgression was connected by Smythe to a popular subject emerging as a bourgeois ghost menacing to topple limits, a presence suspected of malevolence and disorder whose workings had been felt by the Chilean bourgeoisie in a not so distant past. This popular subject not only took visual form through graphic mediums but was built up from a series of referents stemming from vernacular graphic culture, establishing an identity between the two. In 1976, the popular subject materialized in Smythe's works as an amalgamation of caricature, icons, religious prints, and Cuban poster aesthetics,<sup>700</sup> bringing together the language of advertisement and propaganda with the vernacular, the devotional, and the political.<sup>701</sup> Their replacement in 1977 by photographic portraits and drawings based on mechanically produced images continued the path of identification

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<sup>699</sup> See, for example, the article on delinquency in La Vega, one of the markets in downtown Santiago, "Delincuencia en La Vega," *El Mercurio*, November 7, 1977. After the "return to democracy" the discourse on delinquency in the capital was maintained to create an animosity and wedge between the middle and lower classes, as discussed by the sociologist Tomás Moulian. He argues that a discourse of fear regarding the popular was aptly generated in a city with relatively low rates of crime to preserve these class distinctions. See Tomás Moulian, *Chile actual: Anatomía de un mito* (Santiago: Lom-Arcis, 1997), 129-143.

<sup>700</sup> It is interesting to note here the similarity of Smythe's 1976 works with those of the Colombian artist Beatriz González, particularly the latter's references to vernacular culture and violence through printed media and "Pop" forms.

<sup>701</sup> It is important to make a distinction here between Pop art and popular, for Smythe's works of the 1970s have constantly been characterized by Chilean critics as Pop art. The term "pop" has a slippery meaning, since it combines elements from advertisement, commodity, mass culture, kitsch, the banal and the everyday, while also containing aspects of high art and its institutions. The "popular" seems to be a term even more all-encompassing, addressing equally the public, a social strata, the indigenous or vernacular, and commerce.

with the popular through the mass character of the more modern photographic medium, its reproducibility and accessibility, while the drawings performed their own marginal position within the arts through their sketchy quality. In this way the popular subject was given shape and presence through mainly graphic forms that had an intimate tie with popular sectors and their imaginary, as well as a long-standing relation with politics and popular resistance.<sup>702</sup>

In Chile the most important antecedent for this identification between the popular subject and a graphic medium, as well as the connection between print culture and crime, was “La Lira Popular Chilena” (The Chilean Popular Lyre) (fig. 4.10).<sup>703</sup> Emerging during the mid-nineteenth century and ending its publication in the 1920s, “La Lira Popular” was a broadsheet publication written in popular poetic stanzas, made by and for the lowest classes, and sold in marketplaces in the capital and neighboring regions.<sup>704</sup> Deriving its form from Spanish broadsheets, “La Lira Popular” mingled contemporary news regarding politics with popular songs, religious biblical themes, love poems, and the narration of bizarre events and macabre crimes.<sup>705</sup> The texts were illustrated with large woodcuts, often anonymously produced, depicting in stark graphic form the gruesome and fantastic events described, sometimes accompanied on the margins by printed stamps coming from almanacs, devotionals, and spelling books that depicted saints, letters, and minute landscapes.<sup>706</sup> Unlike the smaller stamps’ more delicate linear

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<sup>702</sup> This relationship was not noted by even the most sympathetic and critical reviewers of Smythe’s works, who instead preferred to use the more neutral category of “pop” to describe his sources. In her catalogue essay, Richard did not mention the popular subject in Smythe’s works, even though she had made it a central component of her analysis of Dittborn’s delinquents, athletes, and indigenous characters a year earlier. Sommer was the only critic to refer to “posters” as an influence in Smythe, yet gave no explanation or details as to what posters he referred to.

<sup>703</sup> Several issues of “La Lira Popular Chilena” can be browsed online in the website Memoria Chilena. Portal de la Cultura en Chile, Dirección de Bibliotecas y Museos (DIBAM), posted 2004, <http://www.memoriachilena.cl/temas/dest.asp?id=literaturadecordellirapopular> (last accessed May 2, 2010).

<sup>704</sup> The poetic stanza consists of verses of eight syllables (known as “décima”) derived from Spanish popular poetry. The earliest important analysis of “La Lira Popular” was Rodolfo Lenz’ *Sobre la poesía popular impresa en Santiago de Chile* (Santiago: Anales de la Universidad de Chile, 1919). Lenz was the first scholar to take an interest in the broadsheets, and the scant information about its origins, forms of distribution, and production is known through his work. Since the 1990s, an interest in the literary and even sociological aspects of the “Liras” has been investigated, though there has not been a parallel analysis of its woodcuts and imagery. For an analysis of the Lira’s poetic content, see María Eugenia Góngora, “La poesía popular chilena del siglo XIX,” *Revista Chilena de Literatura*, no. 51, Departamento de Literatura, Universidad de Chile (1997): 5-27.

<sup>705</sup> For an analysis of “La Lira Popular” and its relation to crime and contemporary forms of justice, as well as a mention to San Diego street as one of the most violent places in the city, see Daniel Palma Alvarado, “La ley pareja no es dura: representaciones de la criminalidad y la justicia en la Lira Popular Chilena,” *Historia* I, no. 39 (January-June 2006): 177-229. Nevertheless, Palma deals mostly with the texts which the woodcuts illustrated, without taking into account the importance of the image as a form of communication to what were otherwise largely illiterate masses.

<sup>706</sup> Some authors’ names are known thanks to the study of Lenz. For example, Lenz mentions the poet Adolfo Reyes who worked with an “ordinary” army cutting knife on wooden plates, illustrating his own poems.

treatment derived from their graphic sources in engravings and chromes, the woodcuts often represented the figures in a simplified manner, their bodies roughly described by jagged large black areas, giving them an expressionistic and even brutish appearance that reflected the humble origins of their makers as well as the violence of the crimes portrayed.<sup>707</sup>

The broadsheet tradition was shared in many countries throughout the Americas during the turn of the nineteenth century, from Posada's illustrations in Mexico to the Brazilian print "talleres" (workshops). A sensationalist fascination with crime was exploited in all of these ventures, with a focus on the most gruesome moments of a crime or its most grotesque aspects.<sup>708</sup> Yet a main difference in the "Lira Popular" case was the representations' crudeness and the prominent place given to the image as a form of communication in comparison to the text.<sup>709</sup> If an illustration is generally regarded as supplementary or auxiliary in relation to the written text, broadsheets physically locate the image before written discourse, occupying nearly as much space as it and acting as an introduction to the script.<sup>710</sup> In the case of "La Lira Popular," the image was further made into an excess of discourse, a graphic overload not only by means of its magnified size but through the sensory disruption it provoked with the neatly organized columns of regular verses and the grotesque bodies it presented. To the regularity of the text in its typographical appearance and poetic form, "La Lira Popular" juxtaposed the obscene and strange, a contrast made more evident in the beautiful or saintly almanac images which

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<sup>707</sup> If there seems to be a similarity between "La Lira Popular's" woodcuts and the graphic works of a group like Die Brücke, the parallel is mostly a coincidence. The Chilean printmakers had been working since the 1850s and were inspired in their imagery by religious prints ("estampas"). Smythe's works reveal a connection to the religious insofar the 1976 drawings resembled "animitas," small altars left at the side of roads to commemorate the deaths and souls (ánimas) of people killed in brutal accidents.

<sup>708</sup> Patrick Frank has written in relation to Posada's broadsheet prints that there are several explanations for the popular fascination with violence, which would be related to their social function. Frank divides the latter into two main categories: to teach or impart a moral story and ask moral questions through a process of identification (what would I do in the same situation?), and to serve as a cathartic release for the viewer (we all [supposedly] desire to kill someone at some point, yet do not do it). According to Frank, the depiction of the "most shocking and depraved moment of the crime" would contribute to the image's cathartic effect versus their moralizing intention. See Patrick Frank, *Posada's Broadsheets. Mexican Popular Imagery 1890-1920* (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 1998), 20-39.

<sup>709</sup> Some of the differences between the Chilean case and other Latin American examples are economic and political. In Mexico City, one of the best documented places of broadsheet production, the workshops where Posada labored were part of an organized system with regular publications. The hiring of expert printmakers in Mexico also shows a different approach to the image that favored clarity and expertise, even though Posada combined more sophisticated printing techniques with the popular imaginary.

<sup>710</sup> In his work on eighteenth century engravings, Philip Stewart describes the characteristics of illustrations and the subordination of image to text in them. Basing his argument on a statement by Norman Bryson, where Bryson compares painting and literature as mimetic arts and explains that a painting's realism is established through an overload of sensory information (i.e. the addition of color, modeling, perspective), Stewart argues that in an illustration, the image is incapable of overwhelming discourse because of its "limitations in medium and dimensions," with engraving remaining "tied to and semantically determined by text." Philip Stewart, *Engraven Desire. Eros, Image, and Text in the French Eighteenth Century* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992), 13.

were treated as mere decorative marginalia. The predominance of crime and evil in the prints, as well as the crude, disproportionate forms and disconnected relations in which these were presented, evoked an excess of visual violence and a surplus of tactile elements surpassing logic and proper limits. The woodcuts fleshed out the contours of crime traced by the text and gave a body to the words in an extremely tactile manner.

Smythe's 1978 statements regarding his early works and choice of medium echo the aims of older Expressionist groups that restored xilography as a more direct medium of communication. Smythe described his approach as attempting to create a "brute," unelaborated form of drawing and art, disregarding all "aesthetic refinements"<sup>711</sup> in order to focus on the production of images with which to communicate directly with the viewer. Graphic art for Smythe meant using "the most elemental and simple materials,"<sup>712</sup> which allowed him to create a synthetic and depurated language with which to speak in the least mediated manner about the vitality of the quotidian. But according to the artist, this embrace of unskilled forms of popular graphics was not done for their expressionistic content but rather for the directness of their forms, the opposite of a "courtesan" type of art.<sup>713</sup> If Smythe is to be taken on his word, his identification with the popular and the crude was a formal way of dealing with a conceptual problem, insofar as the 'unrefined' stood for him as a rejection of traditional artistic parameters such as beauty and the creation of saleable objects.<sup>714</sup>

This conceptual approach to the question of expressionism and graphic arts was supported by Richard's arguments in her 1977 catalogue text, which Smythe often quoted.<sup>715</sup> According to Richard, Smythe was attempting to make the viewer aware of the processes and basic elements that formed part of the work and its visual system, exposing the armature of representation in order to criticize the illusionistic tradition in art. Most of the examples used by the critic were works that included annotations referring to elements making up the image, as in "La Ciega," or making extra-artistic references to the environment.<sup>716</sup> In this way, Richard could speak of the stain's spontaneity and the incompleteness of Smythe's grids as manifestations of a "break" in the "reconstitution of the image" which interrupted normal viewing and thus forced viewers to become aware of the work's constructed nature. The stain was regarded by Richard as a conceptual device standing in as a sign for the notion of 'expression,' rather than actually manifesting a feeling or emotion. In other words, the expressionistic tendencies in Smythe were conceptualized and reduced to the formal markers of a gesture.

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<sup>711</sup> Smythe, *Arte y Conciencia*, 15.

<sup>712</sup> Smythe, 36.

<sup>713</sup> Ibid.

<sup>714</sup> Smythe directly associated this approach in art with conceptualism, speaking of a rejection to the markets and "cultural assimilation" seen in Land-art, Arte Povera, Conceptual art, ecological art, and document-based art. Smythe, 37.

<sup>715</sup> For example, in page 38 in *Arte y Conciencia*, where Smythe directly mentioned Richard.

<sup>716</sup> Sommer also related the inclusion of words to Conceptual art, which he considered was tempered by the inclusion of Pop references in Smythe's works.

Such a conceptualization of the process involved in the making of a work, and the concomitant destruction of illusions in art expected to come from it, enabled Richard to explain away the “Pop” elements that were present in Smythe’s 1977 works. Richard connected the popular subject matter of that year’s exhibition to the use of a mechanical means of production such as photography, explaining how the latter generated a “testimony of passion,”<sup>717</sup> a ‘document’ of the underground lives of marginal subjects. According to Richard, passion was manifested in two main elements: criminality and the inclusion of the “pink acrylic color of the stains.”<sup>718</sup> These suggested for her the “violence of passion spurred by the flesh,” and were correlative to the stain’s alteration of the grid by “polluting” the spare order of photographic representation and by extension social order. Nevertheless, Richard’ introduction of the body and her association of it with delinquency was not developed further in her essay, as if exploring the causes of violence and their relation to the city, would in turn maculate her own Structuralist-inspired analysis. More importantly, Richard’s failure to address the body in depth was connected to her evolving discourse regarding the Chilean avant-garde scene, particularly its conceptual bent and the importance mechanical reproduction was to have in it as a tool of ideological demystification.<sup>719</sup> Smythe agreed with her in 1978, going so far as stating that in the new Chilean scene, artists like Leppe and Altamirano were also renouncing the “facture”<sup>720</sup> and craftsmanship of the work of art for a more conceptual and critical language, supported by the “introduction of the mechanical in the art work,”<sup>721</sup> such as the photograph and the printing press.

But in spite of such formal concerns, Smythe’s connection to the popular classes and the media, to the tradition of criminological representation and urban print culture, suggested a deeper interest in the other aspects of the cityscape, especially the representation of otherness in a contemporary setting. Smythe also spoke in 1978 of how through ordinary, contemporary materials (from photography to masking tape) he was trying to address current problems surrounding the human being, so that by denying the production of beauty in art and creating instead anti-art objects, he aimed at questioning the current socio-political and economic order.<sup>722</sup> For Smythe, this was a mercantile

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<sup>717</sup> Richard, no title, section IV of the text in catalogue *Smythe*, no page number. In her text, Richard continually used the phrase “the photographic recounting” as if the photograph was only a form of giving endless lists of referents within a story.

<sup>718</sup> Ibid.

<sup>719</sup> Why the body posed such a threat to order remained a question that Richard would solve more clearly in her analysis of Leppe’s work, as will be discussed below. Yet it is interesting to note that instead of pursuing this line further, Richard instead opted for focusing on the attack on artistic traditions that Smythe’s use of photography and language represented for her.

<sup>720</sup> Smythe, *Arte y Conciencia*, 36. Smythe spoke of the de-mystifying impulse in the same text, when he stated that the artist should “demystify reality and bring back to man his consciousness, presenting to him his own reality, in other words, the reality he lives daily... to confront him with it.” Smythe, 48.

<sup>721</sup> Smythe, 41.

<sup>722</sup> Smythe summarized his venture along two lines, “to show reality without altering its essence and to break with the handicraft of the work.” Smythe, 47.

system that had usurped beauty and replaced it with the aggressive language of the media and the commodity, a language he was in turn appropriating, fragmenting, and distorting, breaking down its 'realistic' effects and exposing its illusion of continuity, unity, and sameness.

By the end of 1978, when Smythe was given a retrospective at Compañía de Teléfonos in Santiago, he returned to the subject of the cityscape, this time using the still-life genre as the basis of his critique. The collage series combined scraps of quotidian objects, from plastic mantelpieces and bags to fragments of an old mattress, with photographs and photocopies of previous drawings and prints coming from albums, calendars, magazines, and passages from the press, as well as religious stamps, and postcards. Unlike the documentary aspect of the San Diego series and its focus on urbanism, the new collages centered on the urban landscape as reproduced by the media, reflecting an environment made up of only things and becoming pure surface. The human body and nature were reduced here to the copy of a copy, replaced by an environment of reproduced objects and signs of things. Even crime lost some of its passionate luster, as in one of the several collages titled "Naturaleza Muerta" (Still Life) of 1978,<sup>723</sup> where the photocopy of a newspapers' police blotter showcasing several portraits of men with their criminal description was neatly juxtaposed to torn and stained pieces of fabric, both crowning a large reproduction of a seventeenth century Dutch still-life (fig. 4.11). Watermelons, the Chilean flag, and miniature Arcadian pastures were all part of a random world of decaying surfaces, stand-ins for lived experience mostly coming from abroad. Relishing "degraded" materials that bore the marks of time's passage (yellowish photographs, stained textiles), and precariously pasting them to the page, Smythe presented commodities as the kitsch reproduction of life, their accumulation a "vestige of the social group to which they belonged."<sup>724</sup>

That Smythe was drawing on the tradition of the still life and using specific Dutch models fitted well with his intention to "mirror" the world of things in a manner appropriate to his own time.<sup>725</sup> For if in the seventeenth century Dutch Republic the artists were documenting the world and possessions around them by employing the visual apparatuses available at the time, from the microscope to the camera obscura, Smythe also followed this descriptive model in an updated manner. But instead of literally tracing with a pen the contours of the object, the object itself occupied the place of its representation or even its mechanically reproduced visage, in a manner similar to what Kaprow had predicted as the future of painting in his *Assemblages* text presented in the Vostell exhibition catalogue at Galería Época a year earlier. The modern assemblage and contemporary combine painting could be regarded in this sense as an 'extended still life,' its descriptive qualities not lost in the physical transformation. Smythe articulated a similar view when he stated that painting on canvas had reached its furthest limits and was a finished language. Yet unlike Kaprow, who regarded Pollock as the origins of this

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<sup>723</sup> "Naturaleza muerta" is reproduced in the exhibition catalogue *Francisco J. Smythe. Veinte Años de Creatividad* in page 37.

<sup>724</sup> Cecilia Fuentes, "Francisco Smythe: obras maduras de un joven artista," *El Cronista*, December 10, 1978.

<sup>725</sup> Smythe spoke in 1978 of acting as "an intellectual mirror of the social, in other words, not merely [a] sensitive one." Smythe, *Arte y Conciencia*, 35.



expansion of painting into the world and its transformation into an environment, Smythe considered that it was Warhol's use of repetitive models and silk-screening processes that had brought painting to an end, as well as the works of other North American Pop artists, from the assemblages of Rauschenberg<sup>726</sup> to the shaped canvases of Stella, including even the works of Lucio Fontana. In them there was no longer a translation from one reality to another, but a direct exhibition of the real in the work.<sup>727</sup>

And yet in Smythe's case, reality did not quite seem to supplant imitation or do away with illusion. The tangible objects presented in the collages were imitations of unreachable experiences (as in the reproductions of female head drawings by Leonardo da Vinci or Max Ernst's Nightingale nightmares, both available to the 'provincial' artist only through copies), while the graphic origin of most objects (as in the calendars) reduced them to flat, even decorative surfaces. If these later works aimed to re-present the real "still lifes" found in the streets of San Diego, they were passed through an aesthetic sieve which organized what Smythe saw as the random and unconnected in the urban setting. This could be seen in the same type of compositional format used by the artist a year before, where the individual objects and photographs were treated as distinct signifying units or frames, each forming part of a larger archive of images. The collages also reinforced their framed nature, recalling on one hand the effects of the showcase and shop-window while producing a distance from the everyday in which the individual components of the image were found, an alienating effect enhanced through the use of gauzes that half hid part of the images.<sup>728</sup> The documentary nature of Smythe's endeavor was brought to a clash with his conceptualizing trends and expressionistic references, reality remaining at a remove from its aesthetic representation.

Many critics noticed a formal distillation in Smythe's 1978 works and a further step towards a more conceptual language.<sup>729</sup> Luisa Ulibarri mentioned how even the notion of "drawing" was replaced in the artist's works by a photocopied double looking like anything but a drawing.<sup>730</sup> Smythe saw the 1978 exhibition as a culmination of his search for a simplified and direct mode of expression, and regarded the present moment as one of "redefinitions" in art. For Smythe, drawing was about marking the real, making

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<sup>726</sup> There is a great similarity between Smythe's works of 1978 and Rauschenberg's, even more so than Dittborn's 1977-1978 works. Smythe also randomly collected his materials from the streets surrounding his home as he strolled like a flâneur the urban landscape. The main difference with Rauschenberg at the time would be processes, and Smythe's systematic, box-like constructions which always retained a religious aura to them.

<sup>727</sup> Smythe, *Arte y Conciencia*, 47.

<sup>728</sup> Sommer was the only critic to notice the material similarity between Smythe's and Parra's works, particularly in their use of gauze. Waldemar Sommer, "El agua y el aceite en la interpretación de nuestra realidad," *El Mercurio*, November 26, 1978.

<sup>729</sup> See Sommer's review quoted above, as well as Rodolfo Opazo's comment in the interview with Joseph Kleinos, "Encuentro del hombre en la ciudad. Francisco Smythe: A la búsqueda del paisaje urbano," *Revista de la Universidad de Chile*, December 14, 1978.

<sup>730</sup> Ulibarri, "Francisco Smythe. Los héroes cotidianos," 38. Ulibarri was ambiguous about her own opinion when she stated that such a conceptualization of the notion of drawing "could be for some an extreme intellectualization, or, why not say it, an aberration." Ibid.

a “document” rather than actually tracing an image with a pencil on paper, while graphic arts in general were being redefined by the notions of copy and repetition rather than an original. Such a conception of graphic art was shared by other artists exhibiting that same year at Cromo under the curatorial lead of Richard.<sup>731</sup> A narrative was being woven in the 1977 Chilean art scene which made of reproduction its core weapon in the attack on traditional artistic values. And yet, as the graphic work’s processes and definitions were slowly deconstructed and expanded into the everyday, a parallel discourse on identity, location, and the cityscape was being articulated.

#### 4.2 City-escapes: Carlos Altamirano’s Urban Landscape and the Shadow’s Reflection

The interest in the city, urbanism, and the psychological spaces generated by it was also palpable in the exhibition of Carlos Altamirano’s works which followed that of Smythe at Galería Cromo.<sup>732</sup> The city provided a common thread running through both artists’ works which went beyond the shared turn towards the conceptualization of art, the point of view promoted by the gallery and its director Nelly Richard, or the use of graphic means of production.<sup>733</sup> Yet instead of turning to the popular subject as the archetype of the city’s margins and internal borders as Smythe had done, Altamirano concentrated on an anonymous crowd framed by larger structures and apparently subjected to vigilance and control. To the specificities of San Diego’s inhabitants and the neighborhood’s liminal identity, Altamirano posited decontextualized images of the city and its nameless dwellers within works whose materials spoke of the coldness of mechanization, urban regulation, and the sterility brought about by modernization in the metropolis. Nevertheless, even within such confining structures Altamirano posited the city as a space of meaningful encounters and transformations which was translated in his works through an increasing movement towards the space of the viewer and their interaction.

Titled “Santiago de Chile,” the exhibition consisted of nine large scale works that incorporated graphic marks in black metallic paint within steel squares that had been nailed together at the edges to form ample rectangular surfaces as in “Paisaje

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<sup>731</sup> Before departing to Italy in 1978, Smythe referred to a group of artists working with the same themes and concepts. He spoke of a coincidence of intentions, materials, and languages, as well as a consolidation of an aesthetic position which younger artists were beginning to follow. See Smythe, *Arte y Conciencia*, 26-27.

<sup>732</sup> The show took place between October 25 and November 30, 1977.

<sup>733</sup> Smythe mentioned specifically Leppe and Altamirano as working in an anti-craft manner. In the same 1978 interview, Smythe called this group of artists the “sociologists,” alluding to the growing theoretical orientation of art as well as the artists’ interest in social relations. See Smythe, *Arte y Conciencia*, page 36 and page 48. When asked in November 1977 what was happening in national art, Leppe responded that the most important artists were Dittborn, Smythe, and Altamirano, noting as well the role of Richard at Galería Cromo, as “giving tribune to Chilean critics, scholars, and artists through its monthly publications.” Leppe quoted in Jorge Marchant Lazcano, “Carlos Leppe. Acrílico + Plástico + Metal + Fotografía + Nylon + Barro + Luz Fluorescente,” *Revista Paula*, November 22, 1977, 38-41.

urbano/retrovisor” (Urban Landscape/Rearview Mirror) of 1977 (fig. 4.12).<sup>734</sup> The works included stenciled shadows of airplanes and people walking hurriedly along streets, as could be told by the multiple traffic signals, gutters, and crossing lines in the panels. These were painted, collaged in photographs, or incised on the steel surfaces as slashes that repeated in their shapes the lines of the sidewalks.

Like Smythe’s San Diego imagery, Altamirano’s models were not personally made. The images were derived from either photographs taken by another author following the artists’ directives or from the press, contributing to create an overall sense of anonymity and factual documentation.<sup>735</sup> Translated into the panels as dark shadows, the human figures had a non-descript aspect, lacking any individualizing attributes and forming anonymous crowds. Their stenciled shapes reinforced the industrial, pre-fabricated aspect of the images that was echoed in the sharp angles, highly finished polish, and modular repetition of the metallic surfaces.<sup>736</sup> Yet despite their industrial nature, the panels had a slight curvature to them, countering their static, smooth quality by acting as carnival-like distorting mirrors of their immediate environs and incorporating, however momentarily, the viewer into the work.<sup>737</sup> This extension of the work towards its surroundings was exacerbated in the two works that included large objects associated with the street, such as a “no trespassing” barrier and large black plastic bags which were placed on the floor in front of the panels. The objects and some reflective panels set up on wooden boards on the floor projected outwards towards the viewer, as in “Tránsito” (Transit) (fig. 4.13),<sup>738</sup> acting as a barrier in the first case and evoking forensic bags on the other.

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<sup>734</sup> Seven works were flat supports measuring between 100 and 150 centimeters, while the two others incorporated objects and got to measure two by four meters. One of the works, which I would strongly argue is “paisaje urbano/retrovisor,” was documented in “Del letrero al cuadro,” *Revista Hoy*, November 23-29, 1977, 44, and the same work is reproduced in *Chile Arte Actual*, in page 185, though in both cases the text does not indicate the work’s title.

<sup>735</sup> The photographs were taken by Jaime Villaseca who, as mentioned in Chapter Two, also worked with Leppe.

<sup>736</sup> The shadows were made by projecting a slide onto a surface that was then cut, becoming the template for the images which an industrial painter then painted onto the metallic squares that had been nailed together by a carpenter. For descriptions, see the exhibition’s review in *Revista Paula*, October 25, 1977, and C.H., “Del letrero al cuadro,” *Revista Hoy*, November 23-29, 1977, 44-45.

<sup>737</sup> Sommer was the only critic to notice that the panels were not “perfect,” but rather bulged at parts. He also mentioned that the shadows’ contours were not completely closed but revealed reworking. Sommer attributed these “insuficiencias” to a certain lack of skill or refinement in Altamirano, which he saw exemplified in the artist’s inability to complete and coherently fuse the collaged photographic elements with the rest of the composition. Curiously enough, for Sommer the only elements that humanized the works were the photographs. Waldemar Sommer, “Visiones de una misma juventud,” *El Mercurio*, November 13, 1977.

<sup>738</sup> “Tránsito” is the title given by Altamirano to the work in his retrospective catalogue *Altamirano. Obra Completa* (Santiago: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Ocho Libros Editores, 2006), which is documented in pages 172-173, though it must be noted that in the original exhibition catalogue of 1977 there is no work under that title. I would argue that “Tránsito” was originally “Cruce de peatones” because of the imagery involved and dimensions.

Critics reviewing the 1977 exhibition coincided in their appreciation of the works as revealing the oppressive, dehumanizing aspects of the modern city. This position was based on the anonymity of the figures presented, the choice of the crowd rather than the individual, and the “coldness of the great *urbe*” which was manifested in what Sommer called the “indifference of the street.”<sup>739</sup> The latter could be seen in the contrast between the cement and metallic structures of the city’s architecture suggested by the works and the figures’ organic shadows, which seemed enclosed within a concrete cage. On a formal level, the detached character of the city and its effects on its inhabitants was also evoked through the use of templates and stencils. As noticed by a critic of *Revista Hoy*, the human figure was reduced to a basic pattern through the stencil, becoming a unit capable of being repeated endlessly.<sup>740</sup> While the same could be said of a large part of modernist architecture, whose crisp geometric contours and modular arrangement of parts were suggested in the grid-like pattern formed by the panels, the critic instead connected the use of stencils in Altamirano to the creation of large advertisement signs and billboards, establishing a relationship between commodity production and the industrial city.<sup>741</sup> The sameness of the commodity form was translated into the homogeneity of the masses, a lack of individualization further related by the critic to Altamirano’s de-emphasis on the notion of artistic “originality.” This was achieved by denying the direct involvement of the artist in the production of the images and the work itself, resorting instead to a mechanical, collaborative or anonymous means of production.<sup>742</sup>

To the uniformity of the masses was added the cityscape’s own monotony and remoteness, which were interpreted by critics as by-products of urban regulation. In Altamirano’s works the apparently neutral traffic signage found in the streets appeared repeatedly in the modular metallic panels in painted or photographic form, its sparse geometry confronting the shadows of human beings. Several critics saw a form of repression operating in the traffic signs, insofar as the signals would control different forms of movement within the city, guiding conduct and determining the inhabitants’ flow through the streets.<sup>743</sup> Using arrows, lines, letters, numbers, and other seemingly innocuous graphic marks, traffic signals organize and orchestrate transit, coordinating the movements of large masses and vehicles. As a visual language that has to be learned in order to be shared, a point made evident in the road campaigns started by the Chilean

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<sup>739</sup> Sommer, “Visiones de una misma juventud.”

<sup>740</sup> C.H., “Del letrero al cuadro,” 44.

<sup>741</sup> Richard and Leppe also related the panels to billboards in the discussion held at the gallery in front of the works (see below), yet did not make reference to the stenciled technique as a mechanical form of reproduction.

<sup>742</sup> As in Smythe’s works, there was in Altamirano a rejection of handicraft, which the latter related to the contemporary environment characterized by mechanical reproduction.

<sup>743</sup> See, for example, Gaspar Galaz’ comments in the catalogue discussion, where he connected the materials used by Altamirano (steel) to the semiotics of the street signage: “the support gives a mechanical sense, the coldness through which, communication occurs. The oppressive.” Gaspar Galaz, in “Conversación acerca de las obras expuestas de Altamirano,” *Santiago de Chile*, exhibition catalogue (Santiago: Galería Cromo, 1977), no page number.

police in 1977,<sup>744</sup> traffic signs can be considered a form of inscription in urban surfaces, creating particular forms of legibility that are both consciously and unconsciously incorporated by its users, becoming a second nature in the cityscape.

Yet like other graphic inscriptions, traffic signals are also subject to erasure, redistribution and interruption, as exemplified by graffiti and other non-regulated forms of urban markings. While the latter became the center of Lotty Rosenfeld's actions in the city starting from 1979 onwards,<sup>745</sup> in 1977 the cityscape appeared in Chilean art as a passive receptacle of artificial marks and a confining enclosure. Altamirano's statements emphasized this position, as when he explained in relation to his 1977 works that "the citizenry inhabits among repressive forms of traffic signals, sidewalks, and cement constructions."<sup>746</sup> Both traffic signs and architectural forms were treated by Altamirano as signs conforming to an artificial language imposed on a certain space, disciplining and instructing the citizenry by molding behavior and spatial relations.

The conditioning of everyday experience in an urban setting had also been a theme in Altamirano's previous exhibitions. In his first solo show at Galería Paulina Waugh in September 1976, Altamirano presented fourteen black and white xilographies, a medium in which he had been working since 1975 after dropping out of his architectural studies and transferring to the Art School of Universidad Católica.<sup>747</sup> In the works, a series of schematically rendered individuals appeared isolated within large rectangular planes that acted as dramatically spare backdrops. An overall sense of theatricality was evoked in the artificial settings and the presence of podiums and microphones. When a few months later Altamirano participated in the first show of the newly opened Galería Cromo featuring the printers Eduardo Vilches (1932), Pedro Millar

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<sup>744</sup> At the beginning of 1978, Carabineros started a campaign schooling urban users in the correct language of traffic signals and proper urban conduct. The advertisements were shown on television, placed in posters and billboards on the streets, and printed in the press. There were also newspaper articles commenting on the general populace's lack of knowledge of basic traffic rules and the rights of passers-by, such as the right to the sidewalk. See "Desconocimiento del público del derecho a vía," *El Mercurio*, April 1, 1978.

<sup>745</sup> If the benefits of hindsight are a part of this work, they also apply to Galaz and Ivelic's response in 1988 to Altamirano's works, as will be discussed below in relation to Galaz in particular, who at first could not understand the conceptual nature of the artist's works. In *Chile Arte Actual*, the authors commented in a footnote that Rosenfeld began four years after Altamirano to "act" on the "painted sign on the street," unlike Altamirano's "represented signs." Besides the confusion of years, the footnote comes after a passage in which Galaz and Ivelic speak of Altamirano's 1977 works as "parodying the ruling of human conduct symbolized by the urban code that regulates the passersby's circulation. The established order, expressed in urban signs, was the scene for the transgressions provoked by street protestors registered in the photographic testimony." Galaz and Ivelic, *Chile Arte Actual*, 185. Parody is hardly a word befitting the seriousness of Altamirano's works and his conceptualization of the urban setting. It is interesting to note that in the book, Galaz and Ivelic jump over many important works of Altamirano, particularly the graphic works with which he won in 1980 the "Segundo Salón de Gráfica Nacional" (Second Salon of Graphic Arts) which will be discussed in the following chapter, or his collaborations in serigraphy with Leppe.

<sup>746</sup> Altamirano quoted in María Johanna Stein, "Exposiciones. Planchetas de urbanismo de Carlos Altamirano," *Revista Qué Pasa*, November 10, 1977, 61.

<sup>747</sup> Most of the works were destroyed by a fire at the gallery at the end of the exhibition. For the location of the surviving works see Altamirano, "Entrevista," in *Altamirano. Obra Completa*, 187.

(1930), and Luz Donoso (1922),<sup>748</sup> the individual was replaced by large crowds in his xilographies. The masses were simplified in their features and often cut off by large planes describing the linear contours of buildings' façades and the walls of urban structures, as in the work "Elevación/Escape" (Elevation/Escape), of 1977 (fig. 4.14).<sup>749</sup> Subway entrances, modern edifices, alleys, and precarious partitions reduced to their geometric shapes were juxtaposed to schematic renditions of street signs such as crosswalks and arrows. The overall effect was one of a city regulated by signs, its spaces confining and labyrinthine, while the actual destination of the figures was thwarted by the often fantastic constructions.

Altamirano spoke of the conditioning character of urban space in one of the questionnaires published alongside critical texts in the exhibition catalogue.<sup>750</sup> The artist referred to the urban landscape as "determining the condition of the men who walk through it," a space defined by "partitions-modules, synthesis of a saturated, asphyxiating, desolate, anonymous landscape."<sup>751</sup> The characters inhabiting these serial structures thus seemed like passive entities, following routes pre-designed for them, physically circumscribed and even lacerated by their surroundings. In her text on Altamirano's works, Richard also emphasized the regulation of the everyday by establishing a series of binaries, such as the natural landscape and a spontaneous flow as opposed to the urban landscape and a controlled distribution of space. For her, the only forms of alteration within such a cityscape were the presence of more obstacles, ropes and accidents interrupting the 'normal' flow of passersby, while the few options of escape from this imprisoning ambience were signaled by the staircases and entrances of underground subways.

While Richard's text focused mainly on the subject matter and its presentation, the critic also included a brief and tangential mention to the use of xylography as a medium. According to Richard, the use of "black and white" in Altamirano's works referred to the "character of the printed" word as in reportages and propaganda, as well as "the character of the photographic" seen in the inclusion of positive and negative values, and the general "character of the edited, published."<sup>752</sup> Richard then connected these characteristics to the public circulation of printed matter as a document; one with an accusatory character which she regarded was censured in the works by the presence of

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<sup>748</sup> The exhibition took place between May and June, 1977.

<sup>749</sup> "Elevación/escape" is documented in the exhibition catalogue *Cuatro Grabadores Chilenos* (Santiago: Galería Cromo, 1977), no page number.

<sup>750</sup> The texts had the following distribution: an introduction by Richard and two introductory texts by Waldemar Sommer and Emilio Ellena. These were followed by a text of Richard on Altamirano's works, questions to Altamirano, a text by Donoso followed by the questionnaire, a text of Enrique Lihn on Millar's works followed by the questions, a text of Ellena on the works of Vilches and the poll. Not so curiously, the presentation of the artists had Altamirano at the front and his teacher Vilches at the end, framing the catalogue.

<sup>751</sup> Carlos Altamirano in *Cuatro Grabadores Chilenos*, no page number.

<sup>752</sup> Nelly Richard, "Texto de Nelly Richard sobre obra de Altamirano," in *Cuatro Grabadores Chilenos*.

restricting black rectangles. Xylography was not valued for its intrinsic characteristics but rather for its conceptual relation of heritage to other forms of printed information.

Altamirano also spoke of his choice of xylography in the poll, stating that he was not interested in the specific material qualities of the medium, such as wood's grain. Rather, by choosing to work with prefabricated plates, he could center on the serial character of the printing process. Altamirano further mentioned the choice of black and white as denoting the documentary present in public media, values he associated with the photographic and the neutral. In an almost academic turn, Altamirano even mentioned how color "was essentially emotional [...] and would negate the documentary quality of the work."<sup>753</sup>

Richard's reference to the documentary and mechanical was foreshadowed in the introduction to the catalogue where she stated the principles guiding the gallery's endeavors. According to Richard, both the curatorial program and the production of catalogues would help to "elaborate a circuit of diffusion related to art" which would support its understanding, while trying to "pose a coherent vision of national plastic expression."<sup>754</sup> The gallery's choice of works would be based on the "transcendence of the phenomena" determined by them, as well as their contemporary nature and complexity. The critical texts in turn were meant to define the "meaning of the work and its modes of reading," a particularly interesting aim, insofar as it would determine which conceptual approaches were valid to understand the works of art.<sup>755</sup> Richard's own language was already defining the Structuralist and systemic approach to the work of art taken by the gallery and its texts, envisioning the art work as a machine with "rules for functioning" (its condition), inserted in a context whose relations had to be analyzed (its situation), and acting within a "field" creating "interferences" with other works.

Richard did not speak in her text of the current curatorship, which revealed a project of its own. By showcasing as the gallery's letter of presentation a group of well known printers from an older generation alongside a newcomer, Richard was asserting the existence of an enduring graphic tradition in the nation while endowing Altamirano with a graphic 'family' to support his own work.<sup>756</sup> Joining the works of older artists who had formed part of Taller 99, a Chilean graphic workshop modeled on Stanley Hayter's that had been established in 1956 by Nemesio Antúnez<sup>757</sup> and a fact not mentioned by the

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<sup>753</sup> Altamirano, "Encuesta/Preguntas a Altamirano," in *Cuatro Grabadores Chilenos*.

<sup>754</sup> Richard, "Introducción de Nelly Richard," in *Cuatro Grabadores Chilenos*.

<sup>755</sup> Ibid.

<sup>756</sup> The generational gap (twenty-eight years) is notable and it is interesting that the years of birth were included in the catalogue along with the artists' questionnaires.

<sup>757</sup> For a brief history of Taller 99 and other printing groups in Chile, see Mario Soro Vásquez, "El grabado en Chile 1950-1973 en la época de las planificaciones globales," *Chile Cien Años, Entre modernidad y utopía* (Santiago: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Servicios Gráficos Wuilicura, 2000), 120-129. It is interesting to note that both Vilches and Millar came from the southern "provinces," where print culture was still strongly connected to popular sources and social strata. Soro mentions briefly that there was an expansion of graphic practices into mediums like video, using Juan Downey as the only example of such a move, an argument I will return to in Chapter Six. Soro's position is deeply influenced by three authors,

curator, enabled Richard to recuperate a graphic tradition seemingly ‘lost,’ or at least buried in the Chilean scene under the prominence of Informal and Pop-inspired painting in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet Richard also gave this tradition a new connotation, displaying it as a central aspect of contemporary art insofar as it could be connected (through the work of Altamirano) to current languages of information and mechanical reproduction. Thus, the older expressionistic tendencies and even the artisanship behind the production of xylography could be overlooked so as to focus instead on the mechanical, the series, and the notion of the document.

Simultaneously, Richard was paving the way for a new generation’s point of departure spearheaded by Altamirano, as could be seen in the varying responses to the questionnaires. If Altamirano was interested in creating series which reflected for him a contemporary form of production, Millar instead stated that he was “nostalgic for the handmade,” and that he was seeking in his own classes at Universidad Católica to teach the knowledge of a technique. Only Vilches spoke of the serial and conceptual possibilities embedded in graphic art, explaining that the series allowed artists to work out a concept in multiple manners. The only thing that seemed to connect the artists besides the medium was a certain interest in the human being and its condition. This was given a political twist in some instances, with the human figure rendered in an abstract, symbolic manner in Donoso’s case, simplified into an iconic image in Millar (as in “Homenaje a Posada” (Homage to Posada) of 1975-76 (fig. 4.15), where a skull filled with holes not only alluded to the Mexican printer’s signature symbol, but to the political underpinnings of his work), or abstractedly suggested and cut off in Vilches as in his serigraphy “7 de abril 1970” (April 7 1970) of 1970 (fig. 4.16).<sup>758</sup> Nevertheless the abstracting tendencies of the three older artists contrasted markedly with the realistic references of Altamirano, particularly in the crowds depicted among the more simplified architectural contours, establishing even at a formal level a sense of departure.<sup>759</sup>

As Richard established the currency of graphic art in her own discourse by linking it to contemporary visual languages, she avoided mentioning how all the artists chosen in the exhibition were still working in a conventional graphic medium. The problem was indirectly solved in the two introductory texts following Richard’s, which spoke in general terms of the medium with which the gallery was opening its doors. The choice of the writers may seem at first odd, since the critic Waldemar Sommer and the printer Emilio Ellena seemed like the representatives of a conservative position coming from an institutional background (*El Mercurio* and Taller 99 respectively). Yet this can also be explained by the legacy Richard was creating in her discourse at the time, particularly through the continuity among diverse generations of a medium that had remained within the arts in a marginal position. In this sense, it is interesting to note that Ellena established in his text a history of Chilean graphic art that had its origins in “La Lira

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two of them undisclosed in his text: his own teacher, Vilches at Universidad Católica, Richard and her insistence on mechanical reproduction, and the only author named, Kay. See Soro, 128.

<sup>758</sup> Pedro Millar’s “Homenaje a Posada” and Eduardo Vilches’ “4 de abril 1970” are documented in the exhibition catalogue *Cuatro Grabadores Chilenos*, no page number.

<sup>759</sup> Notwithstanding, Vilches influence could be seen in the human “shadows” of Altamirano’s November exhibition at the same gallery.



Popular,” which he connected to the later emergence of Taller 99. Both instances would have acted as engines behind national graphic production, and their importance was historically supported by the similar examples of the popular workshops of Brazil at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the emergence in the 1950s of a workshop associated to the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro. Such parallelisms allowed Ellena not only to locate the Chilean developments within a larger hemispherical context, but to confirm the relevance of popular culture in printmaking,<sup>760</sup> and to assert the centrality of Taller 99 in the development of contemporary graphic arts. If Ellena’s pronouncement, “the roots of much of what happens in Chilean graphic art, as is the case in this exhibition, should be sought in Taller 99,”<sup>761</sup> seems disproportionate in relation to the actual effects of the workshop, his comments can be tempered by the fact that this was, after all, a catalogue and exhibition concerned with establishing foundations.

For his part, Sommer included in his text a phrase that could retrospectively be read as a prophecy and which demonstrates the efficacy that the new critical discourses were having on the Chilean art scene. The critic started by mentioning how Chilean art was living a “unique moment” in which young artists had turned to making black and white images after having learned their “craft” and an international language whose doors had been first opened by none other than Matta.<sup>762</sup> The series of current group and individual exhibitions featuring graphic arts, from prints to drawings, demonstrated how the “graphic manifestation has reached a certain hierarchy that has placed it side by side with painting.”<sup>763</sup> Thus, graphic arts had achieved not merely recognition but a whole other status as the brother (or ‘sister’) of the most worthy artistic medium, painting. Sommer’s text indirectly gave critical validity to Richard’s own project, providing objective facts for the shift in waters that was occurring in the art scene.

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<sup>760</sup> A special section had been devoted to “La Lira Popular” in the 1970 Graphic Biennial organized by Ellena who, as remarked by Soro, had an important role in the organization of the biennials from 1968 to the military coup. For more about Ellena’s role, see the footnote in Soro, 123. Soro was nevertheless not the first to note the connection between old and new. In 1979 Sonia Quintana had established this relation between the present and past graphic endeavors, when she spoke of an “underlying graphic culture” whose antecedents could be found in the 1960s and 1970s biennials. See Sonia Quintana, “Panorama del grabado chileno,” *El Mercurio*, March 6, 1979.

<sup>761</sup> Emilio Ellena, “Notas sobre dos momentos del grabado chileno,” in *Cuatro Grabadores Chilenos*.

<sup>762</sup> This is an interesting invention, since Matta’s influence on the Chilean art scene was minor and associated mostly with an oneiric form of painting. Matta has been a problematic figure in Chilean history, belonging by birth to the nation, keeping property in it, and yet completely disconnected from its art scene (except for a few political instances, such as the 1972 trip to Chile with his participation in mural workshops and his 1974 Venice Biennial demonstration against the military regime). The discomfort created by Matta’s “absence” from the local scene and his international importance, is reflected in the attempts to include him in an evolutionary history of Chilean art. The best example is the device used by Gaspar Galaz and Milan Ivelic in *Chile Arte Actual*: simply give a Matta a whole separate chapter that more or less corresponds at its beginning with the 1930s, so as to at least chronologically connect him to the first attempts at abstraction in Chilean art, and which ends with the start of the 1960s, relating him to the first conceptual trends.

<sup>763</sup> Waldemar Sommer, “Texto de Waldemar Sommer,” in *Cuatro Grabadores Chilenos*.

By the end of 1977, Altamirano had largely foregone the problems of xylography as a medium and instead expanded the graphic principles of reproduction onto the larger metallic plates. These supplanted the illusionistic construction beams and partitions that had characterized the artist's earlier works on paper, establishing more forcefully with their physical presence the alienating and "asphyxiating" conditions of the city as well as the sheen and industrial forms of the new architecture. If the mediums changed in Altamirano's works that year, the themes stayed the same, though they acquired three-dimensional form.

The prison-like ambience of the modern city was a theme associated by Altamirano with the regulation of movement within it. Such a view of modern spatial forms controlling behavior had been articulated by Michel Foucault in his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, where the author argued that "discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space,"<sup>764</sup> and prisons (particularly the "Panopticon") exemplify the spatial aspect of power and its control of the body. If in the Panopticon model, a confined area is subdivided into different spaces so as to better oversee and control the movements and actions of its inmates, the city could also be considered a large cage with its own cells and guidelines. In a work like "Avión" (Airplane) of 1977 (fig. 4.17),<sup>765</sup> an ever-present vigilant eye was evoked by Altamirano through the black shadow of an airplane (ambiguously seen from the ground or above) looming over a juxtaposed sequence of three photographs including two aerial takes of passersby's and one of an empty street below. Curved lines painted in black seemed to project the trajectories belonging to either the plane or reflecting those of the city walkers, suggesting cyclical, never-ending patterns. If the point of view of the photographs invoked fears of being followed in the streets and the monitoring of a person's actions, the rivets on the borders of the nine square steel plates also invited associations of a state of complete incarceration and physical restraint.<sup>766</sup>

While these situations could be extrapolated to the nation's own state of emergency and vigilance, particularly the idea of controlling movement of suspect characters and protecting the citizenry from devious social elements,<sup>767</sup> they could also be interpreted as referring to general urban problems affecting different capitals in the world, creating an ambiguity about the specificity of their criticism. Yet not only was the exhibition titled after the Chilean capital, but the photographs used revealed concrete places in it. Those in the catalogue were directly related to current concerns about the contradictory urban changes Santiago was undergoing, as manifested in the images from the new subway stations (fig. 4.18).<sup>768</sup> A process of modernization and beautification

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<sup>764</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1977), 141.

<sup>765</sup> "Avión" is reproduced in the catalogue *Carlos Altamirano. Obra Completa*, in page 169.

<sup>766</sup> Sommer, for example, mentioned in his review how the rivets reminded him of armored cars. Sommer, "Texto de Waldemar Sommer."

<sup>767</sup> The dictatorship was constantly reissuing decrees concerning the movement of the city inhabitants, denying them access to the streets at night with the "toque de queda."

<sup>768</sup> In an interview of 1980, Altamirano mentioned the "remodeling of Santiago and Paseo Ahumada" as "ideologically charged" instances of the city's history and identity. Altamirano compared the city to art,

backed by the dictatorship was changing the contours of the city and attacking several problems at once. The project attempted to eliminate zones of trouble and poverty from the growing central communes, relegating them to the city's new borders, while aiming to create conflict free zones of commerce in both the downtown and newer uptown areas, and develop arable terrains with housing projects.

These series of 'improvements' or urban solutions to problems of housing, poverty, crime, political dissention, and social control were encapsulated in the renovations of Paseo Ahumada begun that year. Paseo Ahumada was envisioned by the mayor of downtown Santiago as the first purely pedestrian street in the city's center, a boulevard that took its name from the commercial street of the original Spanish city layout that it replaced. The boulevard formed part of a larger plan of urban renewal that aimed at revitalizing the city's center by creating malls flanked not only by trees but by tall office buildings and new shops, thus bringing together market, labor, and public space.<sup>769</sup> As described by the poet Enrique Lihn in the prologue to his book of poems titled *Paseo Ahumada*, the boulevard was planned by the dictatorship as "the party of the economic upsurge, a space for urban decongestion,"<sup>770</sup> a grand urban spectacle marked by fountains on its ends, as well as kiosks, benches, and new shops in its borders. From a perceived state of decay, the city's center would be reenergized and transformed into an urban "oasis,"<sup>771</sup> receiving not merely a facelift but a new heart as was suggested by the journalist Luz María Astorga when she spoke of a "transplant" being done to the heart of Santiago.<sup>772</sup> By treating the city as an animated, organic being filled with arteries, it could thus be miraculously resurrected by the healing hands of a few trees, spurting fountains, and the commercial flow of capital. It was as if the dictatorship was reviving the Platonic comparison of blood circulation within the human body to fluvial movement, only this time the flow of pedestrian consumers was guided by the straight and fertile road of capital.<sup>773</sup>

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insofar as both were languages producing and reproducing ideological contents which had to be critiqued. See Ana María Foxley, "Plástica. Todo es válido," *Revista Hoy*, October 8-14, 1980, 47. The photographs of the subway are reproduced in Altamirano's catalogue *Santiago de Chile*, no page numbers.

<sup>769</sup> The mayor Patricio Mekis was behind the plans of urban renewal in downtown Santiago, two of which he announced on the inauguration day of Paseo Ahumada: the construction of a new boulevard, Paseo Estado and the creation of a highway bordering the Mapocho River. Mekis was only able to see to the inauguration of Paseo Estado a year later, dying in an accident in 1979. Nevertheless, his original plans for the Costanera were eventually completed.

<sup>770</sup> Enrique Lihn, *El Paseo Ahumada* (Santiago: Ediciones Minga, 1983). The book of poems was published in 1983, describing a situation changed from the remodeled aspect of 1977 and countering the hygienic policies of the city's mayor. Lihn's boulevard is a nightmarish labyrinth, inhabited by a series of social misfits, outcasts, poor, and even political dissidents. Lihn made the book launch at the site, making out of the social event a performance piece not dissimilar to those of the ambulant vendors. Nevertheless the poet was taken by the police, on the assumption that he was upsetting public order.

<sup>771</sup> Luz María Astorga, "Paseos. Ahumada busca su destino," *Revista Hoy*, September 21-27, 1977, 18-19.

<sup>772</sup> Ibid.

<sup>773</sup> Simon Schama has analyzed the life and 'origins' of fluvial myths that persist in Western culture, making interesting connections between the life-giving qualities associated with rivers and imperial

Paseo Ahumada's construction was nevertheless filled with conflicts. The new boulevard had not only eliminated an important avenue of transportation and interrupted traffic and commerce, but it was heavily guarded by the police (and their dogs), a situation that continued after its opening as street beggars and ambulant vendors began filling the space. Furthermore, only a few days after its inauguration in November 23, 1977, and a few weeks after Altamirano's exhibit began, a series of rules were published in *El Mercurio* concerning the boulevard's flow and usage.<sup>774</sup> Among the regulations were prohibitions to ambulant commerce and the presence of the "needy" in the street, a situation requiring police patrol and marking a class division that was echoed in the expensive foreign items on sale in the boulevard's shops. Even though Paseo Ahumada had originally been planned as a form of "humanizing" the city's center, the rules as who could effectively participate in it spoke of different intentions.

A generalized interest in social divisions and the growth of Santiago was one of the characteristics of 1977. Alongside the urban plans presented or finished by the government, there were meetings of architects and urban planners taking place all year long.<sup>775</sup> Some of these countered the rapid changes advocated by the Ministry of Housing which involved extending the city limits, seeking instead different models of growth and urban expansion.<sup>776</sup> New proposals aiming at regulating urban development and preserving not only natural but cultural landmarks were discussed in "Jornada sobre la ciudad y su medio urbano" (Congress on the city and its urban medium) on November 9, 1977 at the National Museum of Fine Arts (MNBA),<sup>777</sup> and by the architect Pastor Correa at the Museum of Contemporary Art earlier in October.<sup>778</sup> The fact that many of these talks were taking place in art institutions rather than governmental ones is of importance, for in 1979 the museum would be attacked by several artists as a symbol of institutionalization and inaction. Yet it was in these artistic institutions that the spheres of

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domination, especially in the Americas. Simon Schama, Part Two, "Waters," in *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 245-382.

<sup>774</sup> See related articles in *El Mercurio*, "Inaugurado Paseo Ahumada," November 23, 1977, and "Reglamentan Paseo Ahumada," November 29, 1977.

<sup>775</sup> The first Biennial of architecture took place for example between July 28 and August 27, 1977 in Santiago. The talks and conferences extended into 1978 and 1979, for example in the "First Colloquiums of urban traffic" in March, 1978.

<sup>776</sup> In 1978, as a solution to the urban problem, the Ministry decided to expand the city's limits, using cultivable terrains. More will be said on this measure in Chapter Five.

<sup>777</sup> See, for example, the chronology of urban changes in Santiago read in congress by Gustavo Munizaga Vigil, "Cronología sobre urbanismo y diseño urbano en Chile: 1872-1977" (Santiago, Chile: no publisher, 1977), 23. It should be noted that at Universidad Católica, the art faculty was joined and dependent to that of architecture.

<sup>778</sup> There were a series of related articles appearing in the media from October onwards connected to the theme of the city and its urban problems. Some were more apocalyptic than others, as seen in *El Mercurio*'s headline of October 2, "Santiago, una ciudad en crisis" (Santiago, a city in crisis) which stated that 30% of the city was in a state of deterioration. Other articles centered on the city's overcrowding, disproportionate growth, and segregation, while there were also studies on rural poverty. At the Museum of Fine Arts' conference, a special space was dedicated to the problem of rural migration to the cities.

art and urban practice were initially brought together and supported, while emerging artists were locating their critiques within a more reduced gallery context.

If Paseo Ahumada aimed at decongesting the downtown area and improving its aspect, the new subway in Santiago extended those objectives. Publicized as one of the grand achievements of Chilean modernization, the subway's first stage had been completed in 1975 (passing below the main artery of the city's center) and received its first extension, from the government's house at La Moneda to El Salvador Avenue, in 1977.<sup>779</sup> Altamirano filled the pages of his catalogue with photographs of the new stations, entrances, mechanical escalators, rails, signs, and staircases, transforming the catalogue into an independent work that commented on the exhibition.<sup>780</sup> Under the title "Nueve Relaciones Inscritas en el Paisaje Urbano" (Nine Relations Inscribed in the Urban Landscape), Altamirano presented nine collages (fig. 4.19) referring to the changing cityscape. The collaged works were composed in eight cases of a large photograph which was either juxtaposed to a single horizontal band with smaller photographs from a contact sheet (as in "Bajada-metro I," "Bajada-metro II" and III), placed alone along with directional signs ("Rieles"), combined with other photographs ("Flechas" and "Escalera mecánica I" and II), or subjected to a grid pattern ("Interior + cuadrículado" and "Reja + cuadrículado").<sup>781</sup>

As in Smythe's San Diego works, the orthogonal grid suggested an underlying system of regulation and physical coercion, similar to the modules of the exhibition's steel panels and endlessly repeated in the subway's architecture. The latter acted as a rigid frame for the human figure appearing in the photographs, limiting and encasing with its uniform rectilinear space the fluid transit of bodies. By photographically framing the architecture from extreme angles, Altamirano was able to exacerbate the constructions' severe appearance, accentuating their perfectly linear contours as well as the geometric patterns and directions created by them. In this way, the incessant horizontality of the staircases' steps broken only by the vertical legs of people coming from the lighter exterior into the station could be contrasted to the chaotic horizontals of the streets outside as in the bands of contact sheets, or compared to the subdivisions of gutters, the arrangement of seats and handles within the subway cars, or the position of bodies following those of the safety lines in the platforms. By chopping off the heads of the subway's users, rendering the crowd anonymous, and adding series of lines, arrows, and grids, Altamirano reduced the subway's structure to its underlying geometric plan and its implied forms of physical control.

Even on the cover of the catalogue there was a combined sense of efficiency, sanitary regulation, and restriction. The cover consisted of a single square photograph of the subway's exit doors, which seemed enlarged by means of the low angle from which the photograph was taken. Spare and identical, towering as a contemporary fortress, the

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<sup>779</sup> In its first stage and line, the subway passed under Avenida Libertador Bernardo O'Higgins, starting at San Pablo and ending at the Central Station with a second extension that year running to the presidential palace of La Moneda.

<sup>780</sup> As in Smythe's case, the works were accompanied by a video, funded by the Instituto Chileno-Francés de Cultura.

<sup>781</sup> The nine collages of 1977 "Nueve Relaciones Inscritas en el Paisaje Urbano" are illustrated in Altamirano's catalogue *Santiago de Chile*, no page number.

subway's doors suggested in their square solid shapes an impenetrable force encased in a modern language of the grid. The modular organization was iterated in the horizontal beams of the ceiling, the vertical piers on the side walls, and the distant square railings, creating a hall of mirrors effect of infinite reproduction. Even though the title of the exhibition referred to Santiago, the station could be anywhere, identical to possibly other stations in the same line or to those in other nations.

The effect of inaccessibility produced by the doors was mirrored in the catalogue's back cover, where part of a map showing Santiago's streets was hidden from view by a black vertical rectangle located at its center (fig. 4.20).<sup>782</sup> The map came from the yellow pages and showed the city in a fragmented form, with grids superimposed on different areas and letters placed at the margins to facilitate the search of a particular locality and address. The black rectangle at the center acted as a visual hole, denying access to the map while turning the city into a site of lack, nullifying part of its identity and the map's own usefulness. Yet the rectangular emptiness could also be read as an inverted white canvas, not only suggesting the void left by a "tabula rasa,"<sup>783</sup> but the black figure acting like a line, a blindfold, a wound or a tomb, interrupting and transforming the city's representation. Even the title "Nine inscriptions on the urban landscape" suggested that the city was like a page, ready to be inscribed with multiple signs and marks, allowing for both forms of conditioning of behavior and its transformation.

Against the confinement, passivity, and conditioning of the city dweller through these systems of signs and architecture, Altamirano opposed different forms of urban resistance and agency. The most obvious were the scenes that some critics labeled as "street incidents" (in 1988, Galaz and Ivelic called them "protests") which evoked another kind of street behavior. Unlike the works where the black figures appeared following directions issued from above, in "Tránsito" (Transit) the large shadows of men and women running seemed to be going in the opposite direction to that signaled by the small photograph of a street sign's arrow and a distant view of large highway billboards. But most striking was "Incidente" (Occurrence) of 1977 (fig. 4.21), a photograph of a man with a bleeding head supported by two people collaged in front of a larger photograph of a street crossing in downtown Santiago.<sup>784</sup> In these works the regular movements invoked in the other panels were countered by opposition coming from city dwellers whose specific faces could be seen, inviting a different reading of the street as a space of action and individuality while also evoking a more direct form of physical repression.

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<sup>782</sup> The map acts as the back cover of Altamirano's catalogue *Santiago de Chile*.

<sup>783</sup> While the word "censoring" also comes to mind, the black rectangle as a repressive, effacing component seems more pertinently applied to a work by Altamirano such as the 1981 "El Mercurio 16-2-81/17-2-81," where the first page of the eponymous newspaper printed on the day mentioned in the title, was covered with a large black rectangle. The edition featured the portraits of men and women labeled as "assassins" by the newspaper. The work was sent to the IV American Biennial of Graphic Arts, celebrated in Cali, Colombia and appears documented in the exhibition catalogue *IV Bienal Americana de Artes Gráficas = IV American Biennial of Graphic Arts* (Cali, Colombia: Museo La Tertulia, 1981), no page number.

<sup>784</sup> "Incidente" is documented in *Chile Arte Actual*, in page 184.

But it was the concrete spatial extension of the works within the installation and its combination with the reflective surfaces of the metal that suggested a more direct form of agency. This expansion was noted by two critics of *El Mercurio*, Sommer and Isabel Cruz, who commented respectively that Altamirano's work performed a "movement from the paper to the metallic sheet,"<sup>785</sup> which left behind "an intemporal bi-dimensionality to reach a tri-dimensionality with the character of an event, for which [Altamirano] uses objects and interposed figures."<sup>786</sup> The works appeared as verging between an environment and a combine-print, insofar as they brought together the use of real objects arranged in space with the modular and serial character of the graphic work and the mechanical reproduction of the stencil.<sup>787</sup> The barrier in "Carretera" (Highway) of 1977 (fig. 4.22)<sup>788</sup> and the black plastic bags filled to resemble human bundles in "Paisaje urbano" (Urban Landscape), seemed to come out from the painted shadows on the metallic plates' surfaces, giving body to the two-dimensional marks and street signs on them and reaching outwards towards the viewer. A corporeal relationship was established with the spectator through the panels' placement on the ground, generating continuity with their surroundings by incorporating the viewer and time through the reflections.

In 1987, Galaz and Ivelic spoke of Altamirano's use of objects as finally doing away with the canvas, supporting their own theory regarding the construction of the Chilean avant-garde as a departure from painting. According to the authors, in the 1977 works "the hard support [of the metallic plates] displaced the canvas over a stretcher and put in crisis the concept of the canvas on an easel."<sup>789</sup> But Galaz and Ivelic's position was based on the idea that Altamirano was still somehow painting and critiquing the medium by including objects in a Rauschenbergian mode,<sup>790</sup> instead of noticing how the works

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<sup>785</sup> Sommer, "Visiones de una misma juventud."

<sup>786</sup> Isabel Cruz, "Montaje de Carlos Altamirano, Galería Cromo," *El Mercurio*, November 6, 1977.

<sup>787</sup> Interestingly, the critic Ana Helfant noted that Altamirano had "brought a tendency that had still not appeared in Chile," one which was "not a novelty in the exterior, but is for our environment." Ana Helfant, "Grabados de Carlos Altamirano," *El Cronista*, November 27, 1977. Yet for Helfant the novelty was not the installation considered as a medium or the inclusion of the viewer in the work, but rather the subject matter, "an art that attacks the great city and its multiple problems." Conversely, Helfant called the use of sceneries "less interesting, since plastic materials, often used abroad, do not add anything to the artist's expression." *Ibid.*

<sup>788</sup> "Carretera" and its original installation is documented in *Copiar el Edén*, in page 181, though without a specific title besides the exhibition's name.

<sup>789</sup> Galaz and Ivelic, *Chile Arte Actual*, 184.

<sup>790</sup> This is the main undisclosed argument behind *Chile Arte Actual*. It is found in the inclusion of a large section on Rauschenberg's works in the third section of Chapter Three titled "The Transgression of Limits," which focuses on the critique of painting performed in the Chilean scene through the inclusion of objects in the canvas. The progression the authors make is fascinating in its inventiveness, for they start with the 1960s works of Brugnoli (the "pegoteados" or overalls), following with some examples of Parra and Guillermo Muñoz (1956), and then jump to 1985 to Rauschenberg's visit and exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago, creating their own international hinge that would somehow support and validate the Chilean efforts of artistic conceptualization. Rauschenberg is thus posited as the "pater familias" of Chilean conceptual art, for the following sections deal with the arts of 1974 onwards as resulting (indirectly) from Rauschenberg's belated influence. It is interesting to note here that the authors do not

were based instead on graphic procedures and supports, such as the use of stencils (to paint the shadows) or using repetition (in the modular panels). The only person to notice this continuity with graphic art was the printmaker Eduardo Vilches who, in the discussion between five panelists visiting the exhibition published in the 1977 catalogue, commented on how Altamirano's works were still operating as "grabados" (prints).

The talk included three artists from two different generations, Leppe, who was the youngest, Vilches and Mario Irarrázabal,<sup>791</sup> as well as two critics, Richard and Galaz, and Felipe Casat. As in the first exhibition of Galería Cromo, Richard tacitly proposed a continuum between an older tradition embodied by Vilches and Irarrázabal, and a younger one, supported by Galaz, Leppe, and herself. But it is interesting that as one of the youngest critics, Galaz was at that point extremely conservative in his opinions regarding Altamirano's incorporation of objects, manifesting a discomfort with the presence of the metal plates, which for him broke with the "nexus that unites the different elements"<sup>792</sup> in the work, forcing the viewer to "make an intellectual elaboration."<sup>793</sup> For Galaz, the collaged photographs lost their impact due to the presence of the metal, acting as unrelated "aggregate" elements with no specific meaning in themselves or in relation to the work.<sup>794</sup> According to Galaz, the incorporation of a three dimensional object fell in the same 'aggregate' or excessive category, reaching an uncontrollable "baroque" element.<sup>795</sup> Instead, Leppe sided with Richard in his opinion, mimicking Smythe's own turn to the latter's conceptualization of his work.<sup>796</sup> According to Leppe, the photographs acted as a "document-reality" within the "pictorial reality" of the metal plates which, following Richard's interpretation, were like "billboards" referring back to the reality of the streets as signs.

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mention that there had been previous exhibitions of Rauschenberg's prints in 1976 and 1977 at Instituto Chileno-Norteamericano (Chilean-North American Institute), perhaps, I would add, because no objects were included.

<sup>791</sup> Irarrázabal was a sculptor who had been purged from Universidad de Chile by the dictatorship. Altamirano had been working since 1975 in a studio in Irarrázabal's house in Peñalolén, along with a group of young artists from the University. See Altamirano, "Interview," in *Carlos Altamirano. Obra Completa*, 186.

<sup>792</sup> "I am a little bit shocked by the rescue of the object and its placement in the work. The presence of the real object seems to me obvious and narrative. The easel kills the illusion for me." Gaspar Galaz, in "Conversación acerca de las obras expuestas de Altamirano," in *Santiago de Chile*, exhibition catalogue.

<sup>793</sup> Ibid.

<sup>794</sup> "The problem is that I do not clearly understand the trajectory, the jump from the photograph to this world of the metal or the world of the black color; the unions are not clear, and perhaps it is important that they are unclear." Ibid.

<sup>795</sup> Ibid.

<sup>796</sup> Another important factor never mentioned in accounts of the period, is how both Leppe and Altamirano moved in to a workshop in Richard's backyard in 1978, the year in which they developed their only explicit collaborative work.



Both Leppe and Richard stated that photography presented reality in a direct, even objective manner, whereas painting re-presented that reality.<sup>797</sup> While for Leppe the photograph acted as a document “ripped off” from reality and was therefore a “piercing document” of it, for Richard the aggressiveness of incorporating a photograph into the work laid not in the latter’s subject matter but in the violence performed to the larger notion of “Art,” which she even capitalized. Richard’s focus on the attack to painting can be seen her interpretation of Altamirano’s new works as performing a break with older humanistic references that would be associated with the pictorial tradition, stating that the artist had gotten rid of the prior “metaphysics” by opting for a conceptual approach rather than centering on the individual human being.<sup>798</sup> Richard explained the presence of the objects in the canvas as giving the works a “Pop dimension rather than [a] conceptual [one],” a curious explanation that undermined the expansive potential of the works. In her construction of an avant-garde scene, Richard was in 1977 looking only at mechanical forms of production as the harbingers of the radical in art through their opposition to the hand-made (or document versus illusion), without paying attention to how graphic practices were being conceptualized in the art scene.

Instead, the relation between the object and graphic art was noticed by both Vilches and Irarrázabal, though from different perspectives. According to Irarrázabal, Altamirano’s works created a “compound into which one will enter,”<sup>799</sup> rather than being presented as a regular work of art that could be wrapped as an object and taken home. Even though for him the works still could be related to prints, there was something less “conventional” in their elaboration and physical presentation. For Vilches, on the other hand, the environmental qualities of the works were derived from an aspect that went unmentioned by the other commentators: the surface of the metal plates which acted, in their shine and reflective quality, as a “mirror.” Vilches noted how the reflection of the plates incorporated the viewer into the work, complicating the relation to reality asserted by Richard. Questioning whether Altamirano had considered its effects, Vilches spoke of how “just like photography is a reflection of a reality, there appears the other reality of the spectator in the work. The spectator is incorporated into the work, in a given moment.”<sup>800</sup> By adding a temporal dimension to the work, or as Vilches mentioned, layering several temporalities that included that of the viewer, the work expanded into “real” space and time. If Altamirano’s works resembled in this Michelangelo Pistoletto’s “Mirror paintings,” they were also distanced from the Italian artist’s mirrors and

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<sup>797</sup> Leppe stated, for example, that “photography recuperates reality and painting represents reality,” while Richard followed stating that “the introduction of photography is in itself a new aggression towards the phenomenon of representation in Art. What matters to me is the photographed reality in relation to the figural reality; I am interested in how photography is a mechanical mode of production in relation to the manual mode of representation.” Leppe and Richard in “Conversación.”

<sup>798</sup> “Man is not identifiable: they are silhouettes and when they are not, they are only fragments of bodies, generally.” Richard, “Conversación.”

<sup>799</sup> Mario Irarrázabal, “Conversación.”

<sup>800</sup> He continued: “This is interesting, because one is placed in different planes: the plane of the anonymous painted figure, the plane of the photographed subject that can be recognized, and the plane of the real subject that is in the moment of looking at the work.” Vilches, in “Conversación.”

silkscreened photographs through the opacity of the ‘shadows,’ the imperfect roundness of the steel panels, their fragmentation (rather than unified surface appearance), and the inclusion of objects literally reaching towards the viewer.<sup>801</sup>

Vilches’ interpretation of the works is important for it points to two central aspects involved in the expansion of printmaking techniques into the everyday conducted by Chilean conceptual artists. First, according to Vilches, Altamirano’s works were “still operating as prints” in an evident formal level, insofar as the slashes incorporated in the metallic surfaces were similar to those made on an engraving by cutting and inscribing a design onto the metal plate. But Vilches also regarded some of the problems manifested in the works as “the logical consequence of someone who is passing for the first time from one material to another, from one support to another, from one conception to another.”<sup>802</sup> Vilches was pointing to how artists like Altamirano were performing a translation of conceptual and material questions that had their root in graphic practices, transferring the problems to be solved in a white page to the arena of the three-dimensional object. These issues had to do with the concepts of “matrix,” “copy,” and “series,” with the stencil for example operating as an expandable matrix, similar to the steel modules which created in turn ‘editions.’<sup>803</sup>

While Vilches saw three different planes of reality operating in Altamirano’s works, namely the photographed reality, the represented/painted reality, and the reality of the viewer, their intersections complicated and multiplied the relations between them. First, the metallic panels were connected to the photographs in their reflective character, producing a double of the exterior world. The fact that some of the panels had a canvas-like size accentuated their relation to a window, opening up views into a new space. But their mimetic character operated on different levels, for the transposition of reality carried out by the photograph was static (and similar in this to a painting or print), whereas the reflections of the mirror-like panels were evanescent and subject to change depending on the movement of the objects or subjects placed in front of them. Thus, the simulacrum produced by the metals was not only of a divergent order but it incorporated, as mentioned by Vilches, another temporality into the work: that of the viewer’s present.

Similarly, the painted shadows brought with them another level of representation. As a “primitive form of photography,” shadows also “write” with light, though they do so by negation. Shadows are the absence of light, an ephemeral interruption of a light source that casts onto a surface the ‘blank’ double of an object. Altamirano “fixed” these shadows onto the panels and rendered them opaque, so that unlike the mobile “shadows” of the concrete viewers, those painted in black on the panels presented a fossilized form of action. The difference between these two types of reflections was expanded by the

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<sup>801</sup> From 1962 onwards, Pistoletto began using polished stainless steel sheets to which he pasted silkscreened images.

<sup>802</sup> Ibid.

<sup>803</sup> By 1977 Vilches was also experimenting in his classes at Universidad Católica with these concepts, though he continued working on a two-dimensional support. It would be his students, from Altamirano to Soro, who would later expand these practices. Altamirano would often refer in his interviews to the influence of Vilches in his own work, since he had taken his first printing and color classes with Vilches at Universidad Católica.

distortions provoked by the curved metals, which altered the appearance of the viewers. The latter were reflected in a liquefied manner, their contours dissolving and adopting new shapes, their own identity transformed and unfixed. If the masses were presented in a passive state, dense and unknown, the viewers' reflections suggested an infinite state of variation, transience, and actual action.

Richard spoke of the slashes cut by the artist into some of the panels as establishing a relation of "fugue" or "escape."<sup>804</sup> The term is related to the Spanish phrase for "lines of flight" derived from perspectival schemes, "líneas de fuga," which refers to the orthogonals that lead into the 'vanishing' point (thus the Spanish "fugue"). In one of the few references to the subject matter of the works, Richard mentioned the different forms of "escape" presented in them, from those of cars, sidewalks, highways, to those of the characters, alluding to the use of linear perspective and the constraining aspects of the city's architecture. Yet the examples chosen by Richard as exemplifying "fugues," such as street gutters or the subterranean, referred back by means of their shapes to both the grid and the bars of a prison. Nevertheless, the concept of escape is interesting, for if Altamirano was questioning the illusory reality of the canvas as Richard argued, he was doing so by exposing and undermining the notion of recession into space implied in linear perspective as advanced in bi-dimensional works of art while simultaneously bringing the work outwards to envelop the viewer through the reflections and their literal unfurling in time and space.

Altamirano's spatial extension and activation of the viewer's perception should not be romanticized, for there are numerous points related to the works' isolated nature. A few critics pointed out this contradiction, such as the mention in *Revista Hoy* of how Altamirano was "detour[ing] the commercial efficiency [of billboards] to another field of signification, emphasized by the "translation" from the advertisement in the public and open space of the highway to the private and closed space of the gallery."<sup>805</sup> In the conversation held in front of Altamirano's works, Leppe mentioned the contradiction between bringing an object into the gallery and the actual reality existing outside this institutional space. Speaking of an act of "translation" of the language and object from the streets, Leppe spoke of how the works were still perceived as works of art, their materiality regarded "at a distance, seen from a precinct or a room. This does not work at the level of the street."<sup>806</sup> According to Leppe, the concrete reality 'out there' should thus not be confused with its transfiguration in the enclosure provided by the gallery. It would be only two years before Altamirano would take his own body and markings to the 'real' streets. Leppe would do otherwise, turning his own body into an unfolding work of art and inscribing it in a different kind of space.

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<sup>804</sup> While Altamirano later spoke of Lucio Fontana as an influence in his work, the slashes were more clearly related to both an aggression performed to the support, as mentioned by Galaz, and to printing practices.

<sup>805</sup> C.H., "Del letrero al cuadro," 44.

<sup>806</sup> Leppe, "Conversación."

#### 4.3. The Scene of the Crime: Carlos Leppe and the Theatricality of Violence

Leppe's November-December exhibition at Galería Cromo seemed a compendium and culmination of the previous shows at the gallery as much as of his own work. Yet the exhibition added to the former's conceptual bent a complicating theatrical element. For to the prominence given in the past two exhibitions to photography, mechanical reproduction, and the concept of the document, Leppe was appending a performative, eminently subjective, corporeal, and staged character that countered the stark and distanced objectivity of his counterparts. Flamboyant in its expressiveness and spare in its elements, Leppe's exhibition seemed both close and distant from those of Smythe and Altamirano, bringing together the graphic mark and its three-dimensional incarnation with a specific metaphoric conception of the Chilean nation, the city, and the bodies within it.

Though the show did not at first seem to be directly related to the urban landscape, references to the city and specific spatial structures within it appeared in most of the thirty-two objects, collages, boxes, and panels presented. Public structures such as baths, hospitals, hotels, jails, cells, and waiting rooms emerged either in the titles or in the photographs and photocopies making up part of the collaged and object-based works. They also surfaced tacitly in the materials used, from the bathroom tiles and metallic seats invoking the ambience of a hospital, to the wires and metal plates combined with the photographs of doors, windows, and the contours of buildings referring to objects and sights making up the city. Most spaces alluded to an in-between quality, acquiring a liminal status, being spaces of passage rather than dwelling. Even the series of apartment buildings caught by the photographic camera loomed as austere and generic backdrops of urban construction, waiting for the appearance of some action or narrative. The city was envisioned as in a state of suspense, static scenery rather than a space of activity.

The narratives were provided by the series of photographs of Leppe's body and the organic objects present. On one hand, some of the collages were filled with images of human bodies, from portraits to fragmented parts, alive and in recumbent states, at times juxtaposed to reproductions of knotted electrical wire systems, suggesting the effects of electrification on the corporeal,<sup>807</sup> or creating cross-like shapes. On the other hand, the body was evoked through organic materials within the box-like, confined rectangular spaces made up by acrylic modules. These encased objects went from the natural (cactus plants, earth, stones) to the man made (leather strips, plastic, fish hooks), alluding to body parts through their shapes as in the phallic forms of the cacti in "elemento de rescate: cactus" (Rescue Element: Cactus) of 1977 (fig. 4.23).<sup>808</sup> The body also surfaced in the

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<sup>807</sup> In his catalogue text, Cristián Hunneus noticed the close relationship between body, materials, and space in Leppe's works, stating that the "convulse nervous system of the individual exposed to the most intolerable limit experience [in the photographs], is manifested in the uncovered wiring system of the neon tubes that illuminate more than one work. The electric network appears as a nervous system of a society that emits and receives orders of action and repression which condition behavior." Cristián Hunneus, "Cuatro años por el cuerpo de Leppe," *Reconstitución de escena*, exhibition catalogue (Santiago: Galería Cromo, 1977), no page numbers.

<sup>808</sup> "Elemento de rescate: cactus" is documented in the article by Jorge Marchant Lazcano, "Carlos Leppe: Acrílico+Plástico+Metal+Fotografía+Nylon+Barro+Luz Fluorescente," *Revista Paula*, November 2, 1977, in page 41, with photographs by Jaime Villaseca.

tactile qualities of the materials, from the flaccidness of the hanging volumes in “Reposo Absoluto” (Absolute Repose), to the actions and verbs invoked by the objects and photographs (such as hanging, catching, or wrapping). It further emerged in the materials’ symbolic transpositions, as in the gauzes and adhesive tape suggesting skin, wounds, and the hospital’s function. In the work titled “elemento de rescate: piernas” (Rescue element: legs) of 1977 (fig. 4.24),<sup>809</sup> the surface of the photograph that revealed the artist’s legs covered with gauzes was also arbitrarily patched up with adhesive tape.<sup>810</sup> Such metonymic translation further occurred in the imprisoning ambience suggested by the multiple box-like works and in the installation itself. The later was defined by large, vertically set aluminum plates with polished surfaces revealing large holes and screws, arranged as walls and partitions that impeded or guided the viewers’ movement within the exhibition’s white cube (fig. 4.25).<sup>811</sup>

Most critics spoke of these material transpositions as evoking specifically claustrophobic spaces. Both Richard in her catalogue text and Sommer in his Sunday review in *El Mercurio* mentioned how the sterile nature of the materials, objects, and even methods used by Leppe created a disinfected, distanced appearance associated with the hospital.<sup>812</sup> This indifferent cleanness and stringent homogeneity was related to the white tiles and tubs in the photographs evoking bathrooms, or to the dim, buzzing, white and bluish light of the neon tubes spread throughout the installation and some works. The harsh artificial light reminded critics of the neutrality of hospitals, jails and even bordellos, and the installation was described with phrases such as “imprisoned by a claustrophobic wrapping,”<sup>813</sup> “cold efficiency,”<sup>814</sup> “the aseptic as an aggressive element,”<sup>815</sup> and “incarcerating order.”<sup>816</sup> Leppe’s serial manner of working (as in the

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<sup>809</sup> Leppe’s work “Elemento de rescate: piernas” is partially documented in the artist’s catalogue *Reconstitución de escena*, no page number, and in the article by Luisa Ulibarri, “Leppe: La realidad aséptica,” *Revista Ercilla*, December 14, 1977, 59.

<sup>810</sup> The plinths on which the small sculptures stood established a sense of continuity with the sculptures and objects shown by Leppe in 1975, some of which had been reworked and presented again, like “reposo absoluto.” The connection was also thematic, particularly in the constrained environment created by the cases.

<sup>811</sup> One of the metal plates can be seen in the article “Leppe: la realidad aséptica” with Leppe posing next to it.

<sup>812</sup> Sommer for example spoke of “a sterilizing instrumental: the acrylic cover, the metals’ brilliance, the implacable steel screws, the gauze and fabric,” Waldemar Sommer, “Con Carlos Leppe a través de rupturas y sublimaciones,” *El Mercurio*, December 25, 1977. Richard spoke of “easily sterilized, washable materials. Among the precautions taken of immunization is the exclusion of wood as a material that can be impregnated.” Nelly Richard, “Texto: Richard,” in *Reconstitución de escena*. The critics arrived nevertheless at different conclusions regarding the presence of the gauzes, hospital references, and the body, as will be discussed below.

<sup>813</sup> Luisa Ulibarri, “Leppe: la realidad aséptica,” *Revista Ercilla*, December 14, 1977, 59.

<sup>814</sup> Sommer, “Con Carlos Leppe a través de rupturas y sublimaciones.”

<sup>815</sup> María Teresa Diez, “Carlos Leppe: la asepsia expresiva,” *Revista Paula*, December 6, 1977.

<sup>816</sup> Richard, “Texto: Richard.”

series of portraits and the boxes titled “Serie de la policía”) also contributed to generate an ambience of rigid homogeneity, with the blocks of metal, acrylic, and even photographic paper evoking an industrial setting and a mechanized view of space, experience, and the corporeal. In Leppe’s works, this form of regulation seeped into the everyday, being achieved physically through the implementation of severe, standardized, and restraining forms in both public and private realms, from the cityscape to the bathroom.

Even though the references to hospitals and claustrophobic spaces through the presence of gauzes and wounds had been prominent in Parra’s October exhibition at Galería Época, only Sommer saw a connection between the former and Leppe’s works. According to Sommer, this relationship was only found in the materials used, since in terms of production the works varied greatly: the materials were left in a “primitive” state in Parra, while in Leppe they were “apparently subjected to an elaborated and complicated metamorphosis.”<sup>817</sup> It is interesting that in spite of the similar violent treatment of the body in the works of both artists critics saw in Parra a restorative act of mending and instead regarded the wound and gauze as the reflection of an aseptic and thus indifferent (“more elaborated”) mode in Leppe. This difference underscores the presence of an underlying gender distinction associated to the use of conceptual languages in Chilean art and criticism at the time.<sup>818</sup> The absence of discussion about this contrast is even more surprising when the artists’ catalogues are taken into consideration, for Leppe included collages with gauze strips, textiles, and photographic reproductions of his body acting as illustrations to the theoretical texts in a manner that closely resembled Parra’s earlier “visualizations” of Dittborn’s texts. And yet, it could even be said that the violence applied to the graphic images was stronger in Parra’s acts of tearing and dé/collage, whereas in Leppe the images (partially) retained their unity. Nevertheless, critics viewed Parra as the nurse of Chilean art, while Leppe was the white-frosted doctor ready to go to analytical surgery.<sup>819</sup>

One of the most important connections between the artists was the spatialization of the body that they were performing. In the case of Parra, this spatialization was achieved through the mapping of the Imbunche metaphor into the national territory and in the case of Leppe by means of a theatrical transposition of public space into the private realm with the body as a mediating site. This substitution could be seen in Leppe’s choice of spaces like bathrooms and hospitals that referred on one hand to locations of corporeal transit and temporal retention where the limits between private and the public tend to be confused (from identification with the site to questions of ‘ownership’). Even though they could be considered places of encounter, bathrooms and hospitals are also standardized

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<sup>817</sup> Sommer, “Con Carlos Leppe a través de rupturas y sublimaciones.”

<sup>818</sup> While Richard’s analysis of transvestism in Leppe’s works could be considered an exception, she was nevertheless not dealing with the gender of the “boys” she then supported. See below for Richard’s analysis of Leppe’s self-portraits.

<sup>819</sup> Luisa Ulibarri for example, described Leppe’s workshop as a “mixture of an engineering office –with a room for projections, calculations, and studies- and a hospital with an operation table which is where he finally executes [the works].” Ulibarri, 59.

sites or non-places where social life is reduced to controlled interactions.<sup>820</sup> On the other hand, the hospital and the jail in particular spoke of enclosures where some form of ‘deviance,’ from physical and mental illness to social ‘irregularity,’ is treated and corrected. The sites where Leppe’s actions and objects were located thus spoke of corporeal states of in-betweenness and difference, spaces and bodies suspended in states of exception and ambiguity.

The most important spatial reference was embedded in the title of Leppe’s exhibition and the work given the same name: “Reconstitución de escena” (Scene Reconstitution) of 1977 (fig. 4.26).<sup>821</sup> The title alluded to a crime scene and the following police investigation during which the crime’s location is revisited and its actions are reenacted. Deriving from nineteenth century police practices, and particularly from the criminal analysis of Bertillon, a “scene reconstitution” involves the use of photographic evidence taken at the original crime ‘scene,’ descriptions of the events made by witnesses, as well as blueprints and plans of the crime’s location.<sup>822</sup> These graphic elements are used to trace the crime’s site and attempt to ‘fix’ the acts that occurred in the same location. This impermanent form of securing the crime within limits finds its emblem in the figure of the deceased person that is traced onto the floor with chalk, repeating in its contours the position in which the body was found.

In Leppe’s homonymous collage, two panels were juxtaposed showcasing a single portrait of an unidentified man (presumably the artist) on one side and the photographic reproduction of a male body lying on the white tiles of a bathroom, cornered between a bathtub with broken tiles and the seat of toilet, repeated four times. With hairy and bandaged legs splayed, one leg projecting at an angle towards the viewer, and the face, torso, and thighs covered by a white sheet, the body seemed to have been only recently concealed from the intruding gazes of outside spectators. While the separation of the panels into two parts alluded to a diptych and thus to a religious altarpiece, it also created a sequential connection between the two scenes and bodies portrayed, as if one were an image ‘before’ the crime and the other its ‘after’ effect. Yet the narrative created was ambiguous, for the identity of the characters was uncertain and their apparition, whether in full figure or disguised by a sheet, impeded the recognition of a concrete assassin and

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<sup>820</sup> Marc Augé uses the term “non place” to refer to specifically “postmodern” sites where identity and a sense of history and contingency are absent, such as modern supermarkets and airports. A non-place is opposed to a “place” which Augé defines as “relational, historic and concerned with identity.” I borrow the term non-space here because its transitory temporality and similar appearance can be related to Leppe’s choice of intermediary spaces such as hospitals and bathrooms. Marc Augé, *Non places. An introduction to an anthropology of supramodernity* (London, New York: Verso, 1995), 77-78.

<sup>821</sup> “Reconstitución de escena” is partially documented in Leppe’s exhibition catalogue *Reconstitución de escena*, in the cover and with variations in multiple pages.

<sup>822</sup> Alphonse Bertillon was a French police officer with anthropological interests who developed a system of identification for criminals in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century which became known as “anthropometry.” The system was based on the classification of certain corporeal characteristics (height, cranium width, eye color) which could be recorded onto cards holding profile and frontal photographs of the criminals. Bertillon then established a systematic standard for crime scene photographic evidence, also based on measurement, this time of the objects and space within the scene before it was disturbed. His brother, Alphonse Bertillon, developed a system of classification for the causes of death still used to this day with some modifications.

his victim.<sup>823</sup> Identification as the primary aim of the scene reconstitution was frustrated, leaving instead only the undecipherable traces of a crime.

If in a scene reconstitution the dead body is replaced by its traced contours, demarcating the specific location where it was found, in Leppe's reconstruction the apparently murdered subject was still visible in the repeated photographs. The concrete body evoked the scene reconstitution's theatrical reenactment and projection. As a set-up of past events, the reconstitution is in itself a temporal representation, attempting to repeat a present moment (the 'now' of the crime) that is already absent. Its theatricality is derived from the reenactment of a previously existing sequence of events in the present by actors (be them detectives, witnesses, or artists) who play the parts of the drama as in a stage. In this way, the crime scene's re-presentation imitates the original, incarnating the crime in a belated way. In Leppe's reconstruction, the artist was applying a regressive method which allowed him to physically reproduce the scene by starting from the empty replica of the body's silhouette, populating the space with bodies and restoring its three-dimensionality by bringing the scene back to life as an event.

The silhouetted body characteristic of crime scene reconstructions also speaks of absence by signaling the space of death. With its contours, it points to the body's last fall, denouncing the presence of crime. Like the specter of a person, the silhouetted body manifests an attempt to circumscribe the limits of crime and fix, for a short time, its shape. In its memorialization of the event, the traced contours resemble the mythical origins of art in the delineation of a departed lover's shadow onto a wall and the adding volume to the image.<sup>824</sup> If art's origins are related to shadows, to the disappearance of the body and its recreation, Leppe's own works were related to this original scene of death and representation.

Repetition and reproduction were embedded not only in Leppe's collage "Reconstitución de escena," but in the whole exhibition. The crime's reconstitution referred to a more general need to repeat the effects of a traumatic event and the inability to accurately represent it. Leppe's title and work recalled the workings of memory and the unconscious as explained by Freud, particularly the existence of a "primary scene" which is traumatic, experienced in a voyeuristic fashion, and repressed.<sup>825</sup> Yet the primary scene gets inscribed in memory and is activated "a posteriori," manifesting itself through symptoms and displaced reenactments. The fixation of the scene on the subject's psyche and the need to repeat the traumatic would emerge according to Freud as a defensive system against the trauma provoked by the original.

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<sup>823</sup> The only two critics to describe this specific work, Sommer and Hunneus, had differing opinions regarding the identity of the man in the single portrait: for Sommer he was the crime's perpetrator, for Hunneus the victim. Hunneus also mentioned how the dead body was both exhibited and hidden by the white sheet. Hunneus, "Cuatro años por el cuerpo de Leppe."

<sup>824</sup> I am referring here to the story of the Corinthian maid who on the eve of her lover's departure was helped by her father, Buthades, to trace and fill in the contours of the man's shadow traced on the wall as a reminder of him. For different versions of the account see, Victor I. Stoichita, *A Short History of the Shadow* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1997), 11.

<sup>825</sup> While for Freud the primary scene was connected to sexuality, particularly the infant child's fantasy of parental copulation, I use the term here in a more expanded manner, to signify any traumatic type of event that offers a rupture of experience.



In Leppe's collage, the repeated image of the draped body accentuated the traumatic nature of crime and the difficulty in reproducing its effects of death and absence by deferring the moment of the murder itself. Instead of impacting through its numbers, the serialization of the image tended to subject and restrain death, distancing it from its content. Leppe's anesthetic gestures were similar to those provoked by the disaster scenes of Andy Warhol in their mechanical insistence on gazing at the reproduction of violence. While not necessarily 'tamed,' the original 'scenes' could be replaced by flat, endless surfaces where the traumatic becomes part of a decorative pattern.<sup>826</sup> Repetition in Leppe evinced the futility of the reconstructive operation of the crime scene: the reenactment could merely imitate the original in a flawed manner, showing how the traumatic could not be fully represented but only looked askew.

The importance of trauma in the images was remarked by two critics writing in Leppe's catalogue: Cristián Hunneus and Adriana Valdés. Hunneus delved on two series of works: the portraits of Leppe taken by Villaseca, where the artist's body was caught in movement and thus shown distorted, blurry, and in painfully contorted poses, and a group of collages and boxes in which the body's photographic reproduction was lacerated, broken apart, and attacked by nails, wire, perforations, or even the reddish color of a Kodalith plate. Hunneus described the works as enacting a "fusion and confusion of [an] internal trauma and [a] collective trauma."<sup>827</sup> While not expanding on what traumatic event, either private or public, was recounted, Hunneus pointed to a displacement occurring in Leppe's works that projected onto the artist's body and its representation the marks and symptoms of trauma.<sup>828</sup> Instead, Valdés directly interpreted Leppe's recurring representation of the violated body as an eminently social one. Focusing on the works that were presented in the boxes titled "Serie de la policía" (The Police Series) of 1977 (fig. 4.27), Valdés noted the "censuring" elements in the reproductions: eyes and bodies of anonymous men and women were removed or denied through rectangular black bars, leaving the subject's identity exhibited yet veiled.<sup>829</sup> According to Valdés, a process of identification with the victims was enacted by Leppe insofar as his reproduced body seemed to suffer from the torments of torture. Such identification was even taken to the level of the materials employed by the artist, in the twisted wires and torn photographs where "violence [was] also exerted" and the "tormentor's trace left."<sup>830</sup> The body in

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<sup>826</sup> In his review of Leppe's exhibition, Sommer spoke of "a surface effect" created by the works.

<sup>827</sup> Hunneus, "Cuatro años por el cuerpo de Leppe."

<sup>828</sup> Implicitly though, Hunneus was alluding to the repressive effects of the dictatorship, the aggression, and even the tortures well known but not commented upon, as in his mention to the artist's body distorted by "electroshocks."

<sup>829</sup> The work "Serie de la policía no. 3" of 1977 is reproduced in *Margins and Institutions*, in page 40. A detail from a work belonging to the series "Serie de la policía" is reproduced in the reprinted version of Valdés catalogue text in Adriana Valdés, *Memorias Visuales. Arte Contemporáneo en Chile* (Santiago: Ediciones Metales Pesados, 2006), 23.

<sup>830</sup> Adriana Valdés, "Exposición: operaciones," in *Reconstitución de escena*.

Leppe's work became a vulnerable surface manifesting the repressed as symptoms and subject to as much reconstruction as the crime scene.

Yet Valdés also noted the ambiguity and even at times the reversal of roles between the executioner and the victim in the series of agitated photographs (fig. 4.28).<sup>831</sup> This ambivalence could further be seen in the works showing Leppe with his face disguised behind a black mask, his visage either that of the torturer or the tortured, pointing to another level of authorship and identification, regarding the artist and viewer. For Valdés the association of the artist with the “censured body”<sup>832</sup> signaled his bond with a larger social entity, a collective body in pain. But according to the critic, the roles of either torturer and tortured could be assumed by everyone looking at these images, according to their own (private/unseen) actions.

Leppe's display of his body as an object of spectacle made of the viewer an active agent in the identification process. The collaged bodies that had parts of their faces and eyes crossed off with black bands in “Serie de la policía” (and Leppe's use of a black mask in the portraits) alluded to an inability to witness as well as a need to see and represent. The viewer was left as a voyeur of these tormented scenes, in a dual position of actively engaging as witnesses with the scene of crime and passively watching them from afar, manifesting a desire to look associated with scopophilia.<sup>833</sup> Sommer commented on the voyeuristic aspect of the work “Reconstitución de escena,” relating it to Proust's Baron de Charlus and his visit to a brothel in *Remembrance of Things Past* to spy on his lover.<sup>834</sup> While this reference was meant to support the artistic value of Leppe's works, the connection made in it between murder and desire, the witness and the voyeur, points to the slippery distinctions between these subject positions and the ambiguity of Leppe's images. If Leppe seemed to become at times the object of violence and then its perpetrator, the viewer was invited to assume his or hers own desires and investments in front of them.

While Valdés regarded Leppe's acts of enclosing, covering, regulating, and mutilating the reproduced body as displaced metaphors of psychoanalytic origin

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<sup>831</sup> Some of the photographs from “proyecto de asfixia” (project of asphyxia) are reproduced in Leppe's catalogue *Reconstitución de escena* within a larger photographic contact sheet.

<sup>832</sup> “The censured body –of Leppe- takes distance from its identity and assumes the different and ambiguous poses of the tormentor. A body without eyes (...) alas, a social body.” Valdés, “Exposición: operaciones,” in *Reconstitución de escena*.

<sup>833</sup> Valdés also spoke of voyeurism in the context of Leppe's self-portraits, arguing that this self-reference was not narcissistic, but rather the notion of “being a voyeur of oneself” was used by Leppe to make of the body a material for the artwork. See below for a discussion of the portraits in relation to narcissism and disguise.

<sup>834</sup> Sommer indirectly pointed to the social and political implications of the work by stating: “That (...) the image with the duplicated victim –the cadaver under a sheet in the midst of the most sordid scenario- and of the surprised victimary causes tortuous mental associations, is a problem that escapes the limits of art. Nevertheless, it seems to us that the said “Reconstitución de escena,” is a plastic replica of certain Proustian hotel frequented by a certain Charlus.” Sommer, “Con Carlos Leppe a través de rupturas y sublimaciones.”

symbolizing corporeal acts of repression and violence,<sup>835</sup> Richard's catalogue text focused instead on the conceptual and material origin of such operations and their relation to space.<sup>836</sup> The transpositions of materials and actions were read by Richard as more abstract, semantic forms of displacement, so that 'gridding' implied a restraining social order, from street organization and cages to school notebooks, while the photographic frame and cropping was related to a guillotine, both actions ordering and repressing reality.<sup>837</sup> But more important were the specific "interventions" present in the works: denying, creating obstacles, transferring, rectifying, wearing down, annulling, and abstracting. All these actions were meant to "intercept" the development, growth, being and appearance of a material, suggesting a physical form of incarceration and repression. In the subjugating state created, where the body was trapped, confined, and lacerated, Leppe's works resembled those of Altamirano, as both were presenting an imposed social and physical order onto the human body and its surroundings.

Even though Richard's analysis is filled with spatial metaphors, for the author Leppe was negating the context in which these objects surfaced. By cropping the body, fragmenting its parts, and "annulling" the object's surrounding "landscape" through the insertion of black backgrounds and distorting acrylic plaques, Leppe was "affirming the figure and denying its context, revealing and at the same time hiding (...) projecting the figure as the only element rescued from reality."<sup>838</sup> Yet as Richard's own analysis demonstrated, Leppe's works were constantly suggesting specific spatial referents, creating a stage-like setting for the appearance of the human figure, as in her mention of the "stage design determinations" used in the installation, such as the neon lights. If a concrete location was not signaled by Leppe as the background of his actions, other spaces of restraint, order, and purification were clearly proposed, from those concerned with hygiene and health, to those involved in the disciplining and the regulation of bodies. The body was not fully isolated from the contingent (particularly in "Reconstitución de escena," whose partial reproduction acted as cover and back of the catalogue), but rather the spatial was displaced as the body was endowed with spatial coordinates and treated by Leppe as a contested territory.

The emphasis given by Richard to the body through the denial of context, allowed her to focus on the body's presentation as a site of ambiguity and excess.<sup>839</sup> The latter

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<sup>835</sup> For Valdés, "the series tells a story, not in its images, but in its operations with the images. With them an argument cannot be threaded, but it can be known that this is about violence." Valdés, "Exposición: operaciones."

<sup>836</sup> Even though her text was titled "Reconstitución de escena," the eponymous work was not mentioned by Richard, nor was death or torture directly referenced. Richard, "Reconstitución de escena."

<sup>837</sup> Thus for Richard "to grid is to repress" and "to cut is to repress." Ibid.

<sup>838</sup> Ibid.

<sup>839</sup> Referencing the work "El perchero" of 1975, Richard established a relation of continuity between Leppe's earlier and newer productions through the representation of the body. The similarities between the works consisted of the presentation of the body's accidents or faults (hair), the projection of masculine elements (phallic cacti), the sterility of the ambience recreated (rocks, gauzes), the violence exerted on the body (nails), and finally its "ambivalence" in terms of gender.

characteristic was made in implicit reference to the series of nine portraits titled “Gertrude Stein: cita-objeto” (Gertrude Stein: quote-object) of 1977 (fig. 4.29), where Leppe appeared in a three-quarters, half-length portrait, with a nude torso, his face made up, lips painted, and his hair parted sideways in an old-fashioned feminine coiffure.<sup>840</sup> The portraits were partly modeled on several photographs that Man Ray had taken during the early 1920s of the American patron and writer Gertrude Stein in Paris displaying a manly, heavy woman dressed in simple yet still female clothes. Leppe’s works nevertheless also referred to Man Ray’s photographs of Barbette, a celebrated transvestite who could pass as a beautiful woman in the 1920s Paris, and even Duchamp’s gender transformations.<sup>841</sup>

The most important and novel aspect of Richard’s analysis of the body was the paragraph dedicated to transvestism and gender ambiguity, a theme also touched rapidly upon by Hunneus. For Richard, the appearance in the photographs of a subject that presented both male and female attributes was a general sign of “ambivalence,”<sup>842</sup> whereas for Hunneus the transvestite exercised a specific form of “aggression to the function established for each sex, a desire to transgress it.”<sup>843</sup> For Richard instead, the transvestite did not merely transgress boundaries but performed a fusion of opposites, a “double synthesis of masculine and feminine (through the conjugation of their complementary attributes) and of the natural and the social (through disguise as a recourse),” thus embodying gender ambiguity. While Hunneus ended the discussion with a reference to the “biological impossibility of realization [of the transvestite’s fantasy],” Richard noted that the transvestite’s “restitution of unity in his equivocal corporeal dimension” was an artificial one, based on the illusion of being another.<sup>844</sup> Thus, for Richard transvestism was a practice of simulation and dissimulation, providing a false façade and an ambiguous identity which did not end with biological determinism.

For Richard, the transvestite’s artificiality was denoted by the use of a costume, through which a specific sex was concealed and a different one disclosed. At the time Richard did not develop this argument further, yet in 1980 the disguise became central to her concept of resistance through excess, particularly a corporeal overflow of

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<sup>840</sup> In Leppe’s catalogue *Reconstitución de escena* there are several reproductions of the photographs taken by Villaseca of Leppe with made-up face for “Gertrude Stein: cita-objeto” of 1976 mixed with images of electrical cables in a contact sheet. In page 26 of *Cuerpo Correccional*, Richard identifies one of them as a fragment of the work. Similar portraits were used by Leppe in object-based works like “Objeto-Anzuelo” (Object-Hook) and “Objeto Conducente” (Conductive Object) where a semi-nude Leppe with a painted face and swept hair appeared in groups of four above a predella made up of objects. The portraits were also layered in some collages with a flesh colored Kodolith plate and a picture of a small urinary, a reference to Duchamp. See Hunneus’ and Sommer’s description of the work “Uniratorio” (Urinal).

<sup>841</sup> Hunneus is the only author to refer to “Man Ray’s transvestite” in his text as one different from the Gertrude Stein model, though he did not name or explain who this man was.

<sup>842</sup> Unlike Valdés who was explicit about her psychoanalytical reading, Richard’s early texts do not make open references to her sources, whether they were psychoanalytical or based on the ideas of Kay (as discussed below). While Richard used the term “ambivalence,” she did not deal with its psychoanalytic definition, the feelings of aggression and live simultaneously experienced for an object.

<sup>843</sup> Hunneus, “Cuatro años por el cuerpo de Leppe.”

<sup>844</sup> Richard, “Reconstitución de escena.”

boundaries.<sup>845</sup> Under this point of view, a disguise could be read as something extra added on to the body, a theatrical element exaggerating its attributes that would accentuate the irreverence of the corporeal and its threat to order. But in 1977 Richard related the concept of corporeal excess to the materials used by Leppe, which functioned as isolating elements denying the presence and traces of the body. Thus, the tiles that could be washed and the gauzes that potentially may contain blood and be cleansed could be read as performing a similar function to that of the metals and acrylics protecting the self from any corporeal pollution. The body was envisioned by Richard as a site of material excess and “seduction,”<sup>846</sup> a point made explicit in reference to Leppe’s use of colored Kodalith plates in some collages: blue and pink. For Richard, blue stood for “frigidity, lividness,” and was opposed to the rosy pink of the flesh. If blue reminded Richard of decomposed flesh, turning purple due to violence, pink in turn was an element provoking “license” and “participating of the carnal.”<sup>847</sup>

Richard’s interpretation of the transvestite as related to corporeal excess reveals an incipient feminist reading which the critic would only apply to Leppe’s works at the time. Instead, in her treatment of Altamirano’s works Richard adopted a neutral mode, without emphasizing their gender components (the same could be said of her work on Smythe). The comparison between the Leppe and Altamirano’s critical reception is useful, for they were not only working in close quarters at the time and had befriended Richard,<sup>848</sup> but were using the same materials and conceptions regarding image making. Yet in Richard’s analysis of Leppe, there was a turn from the apparently neutrally gendered terminology used to describe Altamirano’s employment of metals in particular, to their description as “phallic” elements. Richard emphasized the carnality in Leppe’s works’ even though, as mentioned by Sommer and Valdés, a flattened out “surface” effect was also achieved through them. This surface appearance was enhanced by the cold, aseptic, ‘clinical’ mood of the whole exhibition, which have it a conceptual aura endorsed by Richard.<sup>849</sup>

A point of coincidence between the two artists was nevertheless laid out by Richard in Leppe’s catalogue in relation to photography. Inasmuch as the body was presented in its photographed condition, Leppe was also replacing a manual form of representation for a mechanical one. Richard argued that while both the pictorial and the

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<sup>845</sup> By 1980, Richard would polish her theory, adding more theatrical elements to her analysis of transvestism, as manifested in the 1980 book *Cuerpo Correccional*. She later reworked these ideas and connected them to other developments in the Chilean scene, establishing in the 1981 *Una mirada sobre el arte en Chile* a first sketch of the 1986 work *Margins and Institutions*.

<sup>846</sup> Richard, “Reconstitución de escena.”

<sup>847</sup> In her analysis of Smythe’s works, Richard had given prominence to the pink acrylic color used to taint the photographed human bodies, also speaking of carnality and its artificiality.

<sup>848</sup> Leppe’s *Reconstitución de escena* catalogue is dedicated to Richard. Furthermore, the two artists were working along with the critic in the production of the catalogues at Galería Cromo, offering a counterpart to V.I.S.U.A.L. at Época.

<sup>849</sup> Leppe’s own references to the writers Alain Robbe-Grillet, James Joyce, and Stéphane Mallarmé as influences supported this “avant-garde” reading of his works. See Ulibarri, 59.

photographic mediums required the knowledge of a technique, a “savoir faire,” in the case of photography this knowledge was only present during the early stages of the image’s production or its latest phases of development. The most important moment, that of taking the picture, was given by the critic an entirely mechanical, objective character whereas a painting always demanded in its manufacture the presence of facture. For Richard, the photographic camera was able to “destitute man in the demiurgic function he occupied before in front of reality,”<sup>850</sup> effectively replacing the human hand, touch, and expressiveness with the mechanical. By resorting to photography, Leppe was apparently renouncing conventional modes of art making for a more aseptic and disinterested language, just like Altamirano had done a month earlier.

Though Richard did not analyze the consequences of such an option at the time, she realized the problem proposed by Leppe’s work in terms of his eminently subjective approach to the mechanical image. If Leppe was renouncing the subjective in terms of technique and medium, he was instead opting to place his own self forward as the main subject and object of reflection, and was doing so by exaggerating the corporeal. Richard would momentarily solve the conflict by arguing that the removal from the manual was “compensated” by Leppe’s “insistent physical intervention, his obsessive acting in front of it [the camera].”<sup>851</sup> Even though this was a contradiction of Richard’s own argument of a complete avant-garde disowning of the expressive in favor of a semiotic analysis of society’s signs and systems of meaning through strictly mechanical means, the problem was not touched upon by the critic, a situation that points to the complicated place Leppe and his works would play within the model of Chilean artistic advancement that Richard was developing. For Leppe was placing the body in the foreground of artistic discussion, marking its symptoms as related to those of the national social body, while questioning the notion of personal and public limits by looking at the body as one of the first spatial enclosures experienced by a person. And this was an active body, in a state of change, highly individualized and personal yet intimately related to the social. Furthermore, if the body in the works of Smythe, Altamirano, Dittborn and even Parra, could be read as a flat, reproducible corporeality, subjected to the forces of capitalism and social control, Leppe instead was bringing back the temporal and spatial dimensions of it through the performative character of his works.

The discomfort presented by the corporeal in the context of an emerging avant-garde theory privileging aseptic conceptual languages, can be seen in Richard’s and other critics’ oblivion of the references made by Leppe to Man Ray’s work with transvestism and gender indistinction.<sup>852</sup> Though Hunneus and Valdés mentioned Man Ray in their

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<sup>850</sup> Richard, “Reconstitución de escena.”

<sup>851</sup> Ibid. The paragraph where this quote is found is one of the shortest of Richard’s text, and acts as a rapid explanation and bridge to her analysis of the pose and the take. The latter is clearly derived from Kay’s theories of photography explained in 1976, particularly the idea that there is a connecting desire between the photographer (and his gaze as abstracted in the ‘camera’) and the sitter posing.

<sup>852</sup> The only critics to make a reference to Man Ray explicitly were Hunneus and Valdés, though others such as Luisa Ulibarri mentioned the “celebrated portrait of Gertrude Stein” without alluding to the photographer or which of the several portraits taken by Man Ray of the American writer was implied. Richard did not mention any relation between the title of the work “Gertrude Stein: cita-objeto” and Man Ray at the time and in her *Margins and Institutions* the work is also forgotten. Similarly, Leppe’s Stein

texts, none spoke of the underlying referent in these works: Marcel Duchamp and one of the most important transvestites of art, Rose Sélavy. The fact that the urinal present in some collages and the work titled in the same way, has not been connected to Duchamp by critics to this day remains remarkable, not only in light of the transvestite image continually employed by Leppe since 1975, but also in relation to the 1979 work that directly quoted Duchamp's tonsure (discussed in the next chapter). That the Duchampian referent was constantly present in Chilean art yet undisclosed, is an element that remains to be analyzed, particularly in view of the option for another European set of fathers: from Vostell in 1977 to Beuys in 1979.

There were two models of transvestism posited by Leppe in his self-portraits. The first was the explicit reference to Man Ray's photographs and the second, the implicit allusions to Duchamp's alter ego, Rose Sélavy. In Man Ray's case there were three different types quoted by Leppe: the gender lack of distinction present in the Surrealist "Anatomies" of 1930, the portraits of a masculine Gertrude Stein (which included a double portrait of her sitting in front of Picasso's portrait of the author, others of the sitter alone or at home with her partner Alice Tokas), and the portraits of a feminine Barbette.

Man Ray's works in gender uncertainty were quoted by Leppe in the installation "Exit Box-Emergency Door" of 1976 (fig. 4.30).<sup>853</sup> The work consisted of a folded chair covered with a white sheet which was placed next to a plinth supporting an acrylic case. The latter contained a cactus plant lying on top of a piece of gauze underneath which was a layer of stones. Behind the chair and pedestal was a white vertical panel on the surface of which were pasted in a grid multiple reproductions of an identical portrait of Leppe. In it, Leppe appeared with his head turned back so that only his shoulders, neck and the contour of his chin could be seen.

The pose quoted Man Ray's "Anatomies," contributing to the creation of an indeterminate gender in terms of the sitter. Unlike the portraits of Leppe as Gertrude Stein, in "Emergency Door" any references to corporeal hair or biological attributes were eliminated, reducing the possibilities of determining the sitter's gender based on physical elements connected to a sex. The sexual ambiguity of the human body was in turn supported by the distorting effects arrived at through the pose, where the violence of a stretched neck and tense jawline helped "deconstruct the familiar aspect of the human body and redraw the map of that terrain we considered well known"<sup>854</sup> as argued by Rosalind Krauss in relation to Man Ray's originals, thus creating an unrecognizable, animalistic, and "informe" visage. The hierarchical position of the head as the seat of knowledge and rationality was denied in this erasure, which instead allowed for the emergence of a grotesque body.

The distorted head of Leppe's citations further suggested a form of castration insofar as the phallic contours of the pointed chin and broad shoulders of the model

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work is not mentioned by Galaz and Ivelic in 1986, and Mellado has not referenced this connection either in any of his writings on Leppe. Duchamp goes completely unmentioned in this context.

<sup>853</sup> "Emergency Door-Exit Box" is documented in the article by Jorge Marchant Lazcano, "Carlos Leppe: Acrílico+Plástico+Metal+Fotografía+Nylon+Barro+Luz Fluorescente," *Revista Paula*, November 2, 1977, in pages 38 and 40, with photographs by Jaime Villaseca.

<sup>854</sup> Rosalind Krauss, "Corpus delicti," *October* 33 (Summer 1985): 33.

mimicked the soft outlines of an upturned penis. The head as one of the most assuring locations for identity appeared to be missing, emasculated, and cut off from view. This lack not only negated the head's authority in the topographical hierarchy of the human body, by turning the latter into an acephalus, a monstrous headless figure, but also denied the viewer a point of identification with it. With a missing recognizable human gaze to return the viewer's own, the body was turned strange, unfamiliar, and repressed. The act of cropping could be read as a castrating device, the cut effecting a separation of the body from its environment, evidencing a lack present in all photography.<sup>855</sup>

Leppe's photographs also contradicted the evocation of escape embedded in the work's title. As the artist denied the face any expression or outlet by completely effacing it from the image, he complemented this act of repression through a series of graphic bars and white lines superimposed onto the photographed bodies. The acephalus was further multiplied and laid out on a grid pattern, given a serial number, each figure converted into the inmate of a prison, interchangeable and classifiable elements.<sup>856</sup> The grotesque was thus contained, restrained within bars, similar to the way in which the cactus plants and other natural elements were confined in the boxes. The phallic cacti were also subject to a symbolic castration and repression in the denial of their function, or context, and their placement in a horizontal, unnatural position, further separated from the stones through the gauze.<sup>857</sup>

The second model of gender indistinction used by Leppe was that of Gertrude Stein. This prototype was derived from Man Ray's photographs which exhibited Stein as a manly woman, a "hommese"<sup>858</sup> with a monumental body, masculine poses, and nondescript clothes. Nevertheless, Stein's model was not that of a transvestite as suggested by Richard's own references to the work, insofar as Stein never ceased to appear as a woman or even adopt female garments in her everyday life,<sup>859</sup> no matter how monastic or severe they may have been.<sup>860</sup> She in turn did not attempt to become a man, even though her exterior appearance may suggest the adoption of butch aesthetic as did her lesbian relationship to Alice Toklas, who in turn took on the role of the woman in the partnership. Leppe's 'quote' of Gertrude Stein in "Gertrude Stein: cita-objeto" related

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<sup>855</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981).

<sup>856</sup> In his work on discipline and prisons, Foucault gave four characteristics of corporeal discipline on relation to space: enclosure, partition, functional sites, and the interchangeability of elements in a series and classification according to rank. Foucault, 141-149.

<sup>857</sup> In her psychoanalytical reading of Leppe's metaphor, Valdés interpreted the erect, prone, and severed cacti as stand-ins for phalluses and fears of castration, from the "terror of the vagina dentata" to real physical violence as implied in the torture scenes. Hunneus also made a reference to a "collective castration" in his text in relation to the work "reposito absoluto" (Absolute repose).

<sup>858</sup> John Richardson and Mary McCully, *A Life of Picasso, I* (New York: Random House, 1991), 408.

<sup>859</sup> A different position is adopted in her writings, where she assumes a male identity.

<sup>860</sup> The monastic qualities of Stein's clothes in relation to her gender ambiguity and challenge to conventions regarding gender are noted by Robert S. Lubar in his article "Unmasking Pablo's Gertrude: Queer Desire and the Subject of Portraiture," *The Art Bulletin* 79, no. 1. (March 1997): 70.



instead to a state of gender fluidity rather than transvestism, insofar Leppe performed the reverse of Gertrude Stein's image, appearing in the photographs as a feminized man. By taking on the external elements connected to femininity such as makeup and hairstyling, while maintaining exterior signs of masculinity as in the hairy chest, Leppe was questioning the socially constructed character of both categories and the problem of 'naturalizing' any of them. As he centered on social codes determining sexuality and brought them together in his person, Leppe seemed to be resisting the tendency to align sexuality along anatomical features, manifesting a break in the self-enclosed definitions of gender.

The concept of the mask rather than the transvestite, as used by Valdés in her catalogue text, is more appropriate to describe the ambiguity of Leppe's images in relation to the Gertrude Stein model. According to Valdés, Leppe was creating a "false desiring identity" by adopting another's pose as a costume, "parodying" the pose of "a woman who had posed as a man."<sup>861</sup> Insofar as Leppe portrayed himself in an indefinite gendered manner, in-between the categories of man and woman, he was emphasizing the play acting involved in such an act of mimicry and the prosthetic nature of make-up. If the mask is a form of disguise where the interpreter's identity is only hidden from view yet not fully rejected (since the identity of the mask is only momentarily adopted), Leppe's works can be interpreted as pointing to the performative character of identity, to its transience and instability when directly related to corporeal, biological, and sexual objects.<sup>862</sup>

The third model present in Leppe's portraits and the only concerned with transvestism proper was that of Barquette. The series of photographs taken by Man Ray of the Parisian transvestite showed Barquette in the act of becoming a woman. In a sequence Barquette was presented as a dandy, followed by his adopting all the feminine accouterments associated with the female sex, to his final appearance as a slender young blond woman. Leppe in turn would only adopt or display in the photographs the intermediate stage of becoming another, probing the transitive verb, caught in the act of transformation rather than presenting himself fully in the guise of a woman or 'finished' piece. Unlike Barquette, Leppe did not do away with the appearance of the male, but created a fissure in the illusion of gender transformation implied in the transvestite figure. Rather than producing a fantasy of a stable identity, whether female or male, Leppe stood in the gap, reveling in the artificiality of the mask and physical alterations, pointing through this exaggeration of the female and male anatomical marks to the instability of the relationship between exterior corporeal signs and a given sex.

The second line of influence and model which may have also served Leppe as inspiration was Duchamp and his alter ego Rose Sélavy.<sup>863</sup> Duchamp's well known

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<sup>861</sup> Valdés, "Exposición: operaciones."

<sup>862</sup> From the mask to the 'masquerade' there is only a fine line, the masquerade being a dissimulating performance adopted by the feminine subject, which has been recently read by feminist writers as a play on the social norms and images associated to gender. See Mary Ann Doane, "Masquerade Reconsidered: Further Thoughts on the Female Spectator," in *Femme Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York, London: Routledge, 1991), 38.

<sup>863</sup> The fact that Duchamp goes unmentioned in Leppe's works, in contrast to the explicit quote of Man Ray, does not make the argument of a possible influence speculative, insofar Leppe had already in the same

female persona was also an example of a man parading as a woman, with Duchamp adopting specific visual signs attributed to the femininity (make-up, feather hats, and rings) to be photographed by Man Ray. The softly focused photographs of Man Ray played on Duchamp's delicate features, such as his long fine nose, to accentuate the illusion of gender transformation. Yet unlike Leppe's transvestite, Rose Sélavy authored works of art and became the female 'double' of Duchamp, to the point of even signing some works while in Leppe's case the female persona was only partially adopted in the portraits, never quite reaching the stage of full illusion or alter ego. Nevertheless, there is a coincidence in both artists' impersonations, insofar as Duchamp was emerging in the 1920s as an important figure within Parisian and American artistic circles, and would become by the 1960s the surrogate 'father' of conceptual art through his ready-mades.<sup>864</sup> At a time when fathers were being sought and replaced within the Chilean art scene, Leppe chose a 'feminized,' transvestite Duchampian model rather than the patriarchal, authoritative, and masculine figure of the 'real' artist/author Marcel. Instead of a generative father, Leppe was presenting a transvestite mother, opposing it to the other masculine model proposed at the time for the local avant-garde: Vostell.

Leppe's transvestite mother was an undecidable one in terms of gender. This was a mother with a penis, a phallic woman, which could be considered a regressive form of male cross-dressing, since the cross-dresser is an 'improved' version of a woman, because of the possession of a 'real' penis. Nevertheless the cross-dressing gesture and choice of a transvestite generative model manifests an anxiety regarding gender roles, the problem caused by gender uncertainty, and the fears of homosexuality in male subjects. If Leppe's patriarch was a transvestite, or his mother a feminized man, the model of authority he was proposing was flawed, incomplete, and lacking clear contours.

This gender anxiety was present in the critical appraisal of Leppe's works, which emphasized the artist's "narcissism." Instead of dealing directly with the problem of gender fluidity and transformation, critics chose to attack Leppe based on his insistent interest in his own persona, his exhibitionism, and what appeared to several writers as a cult of self.<sup>865</sup> Self display was connected by critics to a narcissistic obsession associated

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exhibition quoted the work of another artist, the Spanish Villalba for the subject matter and even composition of "Elemento de rescate: piernas." Leppe had been in contact with Villalba's works through the artists' participation in 1975 in the painting contest of Cagnes-sur-mer, in whose catalogue a similar work by Villalba of bandaged hanging legs against a dark background could be seen. Leppe even named Villalba as one of his artistic influences in an interview of 1977. See Marchant Lazcano, "Carlos Leppe: Acrílico+Plástico+Metal+Fotografía+Nylon+Barro+Luz Fluorescente," 41. This relationship has gone unnoticed by all Leppe's commentators, which I would argue is connected to the emphasis made by critics like Richard on his originality within the Chilean scene.

<sup>864</sup> Leppe quoted Duchamp's most famous ready-made in his work "Elemento de rescate: urinatorio" (Rescue Element: Urinal), where the white urinal (Duchamp's fountain) was transformed into an abstracted phallic shape. For the 1978 agenda of the publishing house Lord Cochrane, illustrated with the graphic works of contemporary Chilean artists, Leppe presented a drypoint impression in which a mechanical looking hand pointed with its index finger to a series of stenciled numbers painted in a variety of colors, closely resembling Duchamp's "tu'm" painting.

<sup>865</sup> It is significant that in a four-page article on Leppe's career and 1977 exhibition in *Revista Paula*, the writer spoke of Leppe's performances and use of the body as having an "humoristic-ridiculing" element, interpreting the transvestism of earlier 1975 works like "El Perchero" and the 1977 photographs as comic situations. Leppe responded to each question in an evidently exasperated manner, arguing that "I doubt that

with women, to a pathological engagement with the self.<sup>866</sup> Curiously, in describing the exhibition and speaking of the presence of cacti, the critic Pierre Randall mentioned how the “phallic element [in Leppe’s works] contrasts with the narcissistic character of the exhibition,”<sup>867</sup> establishing a counterpoint between the evidently phallic shapes of cacti and the “feminized” choice of focusing on oneself. But the selection of the self as the object of affection and contemplation in Leppe’s works was more complicated than the establishment of a mere association with feminine traits. If we return to Valdés’ example of the double positions assumed by Leppe of torturer and tortured in the blurred photographs, it can be seen that the artist was playing with ambivalence regarding the object of affection, manifesting both love and hate towards the object represented: his own body, the body of the generative mother/father, and by extension the social body (the mother/fatherland).<sup>868</sup> This ambivalence signals the difficulty in the relations between self and other, marking a contradictory relationship in the identification of the viewer with the work as well.

While it could be argued that Leppe was establishing in this cross-dressing gesture a homosexual subject position and aligning himself with homosexuality, the choice of an incomplete or dual nature points rather to a play with the codes of sexuality and to the fluidity of gender. Leppe was also engaging with homosexual fears and desires, which were particularly poignant at the time in Chile. The dictatorship had enforced strict laws against homosexual behavior whether in public or private,<sup>869</sup> asserting the heterosexual family as the nucleus of a healthy national lifestyle, a position supported by the Catholic Church.<sup>870</sup> The strict division of gender roles within the family nucleus assigned by the regime, with the virile ‘soldiers’ protecting the Chilean family while the mothers nurtured it, provided a context where the trespassing of categories was punished.<sup>871</sup>

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a serious, conscious, mental work, where what is sought is to give an account of pain, of wounds, could be considered a ‘comical’ act.” Marchant Lazcano, 41.

<sup>866</sup> Luisa Ulibarri for example spoke of the “narcissistic repetition of [Leppe’s] own face, body, extremities,” Ulibarri, 59.

<sup>867</sup> Pierre Randall, “Carlos Leppe en la Galería Cromo,” *El Cronista*, December 25, 1977.

<sup>868</sup> Giorgio Vomero for example spoke of the “masochism” present in “Reposo absoluto” which showed within a box a portrait of the artist accompanied by three hanged bags in the shape of phalluses. At the top of the box, a light bulb with a blue light illuminated the scene. Vomero, “El deshumanizado dolor en Dittborn y Leppe.”

<sup>869</sup> Article 365 of the Chilean Civil Code of Law, written in the late 1800s, establishes “sodomy” as a criminal act.

<sup>870</sup> Allende’s government was not very different, particularly in terms of the characterizations of gay groups as “faggots” in the press. Nevertheless, an incipient gay movement was emerging in 1972, as manifested in the first gay march in downtown Santiago.

<sup>871</sup> There are few official documents regarding the assassinations of transvestites and homosexuals during the dictatorship, but in the Informe Rettig there are descriptions of bodies found in excavations in the North of Chile, where several male bodies were found wearing female dresses.

Leppe's direct presentation of his own body in a transvestite state posited a problematic figure in a patriarchal context, confusing the boundaries between male and female roles and their corporeal representations. Occupying two and more positions at once, Leppe was playing out gender as undefinable, incomplete, and subject to private and public manipulations. Rather than positing an original sexuality for the body, Leppe's photographs of the corporeal in transition, changing, captured by the camera as a sketch, proposed instead an image of the body as a site of incessant production and reproduction. The repeated images of Leppe in various acts of transformation, duplicated in the catalogue as endless rows of contact sheets proofs, acted as reflections of the need to repeat present in constructions of self and the construction of social norms regarding gender. While Judith Butler argued that gender is a performative act, since gestures, social norms and codes are repeatedly inscribed and reenacted on the body, Leppe emphasized the links between such social relations and the biological. Butler's position is similar to that of Valdés, when the latter spoke of Leppe's use of his body as a "working slate" and a disguise in relation to the construction of different imaginary bodies. If as Valdés stated, "the photographed body is the trace of a stage in the constitution of successive imaginary bodies, products of desire,"<sup>872</sup> the act of objectification performed by Leppe posed the body as a site of construction and marking, a place where both social marks are inscribed as codes (of dress, of 'proper' behavior), and repressed states manifest themselves as 'symptoms' in the psychoanalytic sense.

Repetition and its fallibility as a guarantee of a unified subject were further implied in the series of quotes and imitative gestures in Leppe's works. The desire to repeat extended from the appropriation of other artists' works (Duchamp's "Fountain"), the imitation of poses (Man Ray's "Anatomies"), to indirect references to artistic gestures or procedures (from the ready-made to the collaboration between Man Ray and Duchamp), as well as in the underlying material character of the works in terms of their eminently reproducible photographic state. This citation of past works and their re-elaboration in a different context, pointed to the slippages of authority that Leppe was performing in his works, negating and at the same time apparently re-enforcing his own role as 'original' artist. Taking earlier avant-garde models as signs to be appropriated and reused at will and refusing a transcendental meaning to them, while at the same time disrupting artistic conventions in the Chilean context by presenting the 'unrepresentable' (from torture to transvestites), was a form of reenacting the modernist notion of disruption and novelty.<sup>873</sup> But the quote in Leppe was never exact;<sup>874</sup> instead it was removed and represented in another context, reopened for other uses.

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<sup>872</sup> Valdés, "Exposición: operaciones."

<sup>873</sup> A similar argument has been made by Willy Thayer and Pablo Oyarzún regarding the role of "avanzada" in Chilean art and Nelly Richard's position within it as performing a "cut" with the past. See their articles in *Arte y Política*, eds. Pablo Oyarzún, Nelly Richard and Claudia Zaldívar (Santiago: Lom, Arcis, 2000), particularly Thayer's discussion of Richard's merger of "advanced" and "avant-garde" and the "novelty" brought by the coup in "Crítica, nihilismo e interrupción. El porvenir *Avanzada* después de *Márgenes e Instituciones*," 47-62.

<sup>874</sup> Richard wrote on her essay, though with a different intention in mind, that the photocopies used by Leppe "deteriorated" the originals.

Substituting fathers for mothers made the question of originality and origins even muddier. While the inclusion of the word “quote” in “Gertrude Stein: cita-objeto” accentuated its derivative gesture, testifying to its lack of originality, the replacement of the transvestite for the father/mother opened the possibility of questioning the role of the author as a (male) seminal source. If the ‘original’ model in “Gertrude Stein” was already of dubious gender identity, its Chilean ‘copy’ was not only flawed in its non-identical repetition, but challenged the disseminating gesture of the father, particularly through the (homo)erotic relation established between sitter and photographer, Jaime Villaseca.<sup>875</sup> The use of the word “object” in the title not only referred to the hooks presented in a box below (invoking images of castration), but posited the artist as subject and object of the photograph, passive and active, object for the look and subject of transformation. Making a spectacle of himself, Leppe was giving the viewer authority and yet retaining his own power of enunciation as author, presenting and re-presenting himself, offering his body as an object (like the hooks, which can also be considered traps for the viewer) but one in states of transformation.

Richard’s reduction of the problem of authorship (with the author as “demiurge”) to the distinction between photography and painting in terms of their material facture was countered by Leppe’s works. If the photograph buried the ‘author’ through its reproducibility, it was also through cropping, placement, lighting, and timing that photography put in question its mimetic character, denying its objective aspect, and showing itself as incomplete and subjective. Leppe’s works questioned authorship not only through the mechanical metaphor, but by refusing to let go of subjectivity and even problematizing its agency.

The most important aspect of this refusal was Leppe’s recuperation of the corporeal, its placement in tension with the surface images, and its representations. To this day, the greatest problem faced by critics of Leppe’s works has been how to reunite the mechanical, the flatness of the images, their reproducibility, and their connection to ideological systems of signs with the subject as a corporeal agent and thus as a contingent entity acting within a specific context.<sup>876</sup> Leppe’s reproduced body put in tension the language of reproduction, and its connection to memory and identity, with the actual living bodies that became its subjects of representation. In 1977 Sommer summarized the tension found in Leppe’s works by describing it as “an evident passionate content [that] is poured in the visceral images (...) which are presented in a very aseptic and cold plastic

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<sup>875</sup> The violence implied in the works’ distorting and emasculating gesture also emerged in the distorted five “Portraits” of Leppe’s body by Villaseca. In the portraits Leppe’s contours were fused, opened to the surrounding environment, his body merging with the background, denying the subject’s identity. The blob formed by Leppe’s body could also be read as a stain, a mark of the (male) body.

<sup>876</sup> Most of the authors revising the writings of Richard, and Richard herself, have still not dealt with the contingency problem presented by the “avanzada” works. The fear of “illustration” is best captured in a commentary made by Diamela Eltit, a member of C.A.D.A. and collaborator of Rosenfeld, who stated in 2007, “they [Richard, Leppe, Altamirano, and Dittborn] felt panic in front of politics. Not in terms of a fear of repression, or the political signs that each work contains, but in terms of the contingent politics that could aesthetically hinder and limit their works. Therefore everything was like that, indirect, because there was this panic of the pamphlet.” Diamela Eltit, quoted in Federico Galende, *Filtraciones I. Conversaciones sobre arte en Chile (de los 60s a los 80s)*, 223.

idiom.”<sup>877</sup> If Leppe’s language was minimalist and conceptual in its analytically reductive character, the bodies presented in this way spoke of multiple subject positions, of desires, death, sexuality, confusion, and transformation.

Leppe was pointing to a politics of the body not merely by displacing images of the nation (as repressed, as enclosed, or the body as façade/building) into his corporeality, but by reflecting on the body as a political site of inscriptions, repressions, and symptoms. If the body can be understood as “a surface on which is written ‘subjectivity’,”<sup>878</sup> a place where the repressed takes one of its visible forms, the body was presented in Leppe’s works as a site of contesting, performative markings and acts of framing. In this sense, the graphic component derived from mechanical procedures was not merely a contestation of artistic traditions in Leppe but a displaced sign of subjective formation where repetition (of what gets inscribed as much as of what gets erased) plays a fundamental role. The violence of the graphic mark, whether by cutting into the blankness of the page, incising a plate, or transforming a surface, was evoked in the multiple acts of brutality in the images: dead and tortured bodies, hanging phallus, emasculated heads, crime scenes, the somatic effects of politics.

#### 4.4. Graphic Violence and its Everyday Extensions: From Ernesto Muñoz to the First Graphic Salon

By the end of 1977, graphic art forms seemed to have taken over the Chilean art scene, displacing painting as a primary medium of expression. This position of prominence was attested by the critic Giorgio Vomero in December, when in a review of Dittborn and Leppe’s exhibitions he spoke of the different graphic expressions presented in them as exemplary of a contemporary medium attuned to the current time insofar as they were “inscribed in our graphic and technological world.”<sup>879</sup> For the critic photography and the “television screen” came to embody the present time “as the expression of anti-reality, a photo-culture”<sup>880</sup> which the works of Leppe and Dittborn made manifest. Painting instead was perceived as “anchored” in the past, lagging behind the immediacy that graphic languages seemed to convey, a currency shrouded nevertheless in a conceptual language.<sup>881</sup>

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<sup>877</sup> Sommer, “Con Carlos Leppe a través de rupturas y sublimaciones.” Sommer interpreted this as a sign of maturity, insofar Leppe achieved an equilibrium between his “excesses,” “delirious fantasy,” and “irrational exuberance.”

<sup>878</sup> Amelia Jones, “Rose Sélavy and the Male Artist,” in *Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 184.

<sup>879</sup> Vomero, “El deshumanizado dolor en Dittborn y Leppe.”

<sup>880</sup> Ibid.

<sup>881</sup> Painting did not disappear in the Chilean scene, yet a part of it was affected by a more conceptual approach. Thus, at the beginning of 1978, a short article in *El Mercurio* spoke of a “new figuration” in plastic art, embodied by Altamirano, Bru, and Smythe as well as the painters Balmes, Cienfuegos, and the graphic artists Juan Downey, Eduardo Garreaud, and Lotty Rosenfeld. “Nueva figuración: una tendencia plástica de hoy,” *El Mercurio*, February 12, 1978.

The impact of photography in the contemporary world and art, particularly through advertisement and commerce, was noted by a variety of writers speaking of its current importance. While Sommer related the spread of photography to a consumer society whose effects were being captured by Neo-Dadaist works, particularly Pop art,<sup>882</sup> John Szarkowski was quoted in the same newspaper as stating how artists who had originally been trained as painters had increasingly turned to non-traditional forms of art making (such as Happenings, Conceptual art, Systems art) and had come to regard photography as an integral part of their work.<sup>883</sup> Though the currency of photography seemed to reside in its direct translation of the everyday world and documentary quality, which according to Szarkowski was tied to its illustrative functions, the author regarded the expressive (and thus artistic) potential of photography as its most enduring quality. Coming from the Museum of Modern Art's Department of Photography, Szarkowski had been engaged in elevating the status of photography as art, adopting a formalist point of view that contested the "illustrative" and mechanical character of the medium.

The spread of photography as the basis of a new graphic art was first confirmed in March 1978 in an exhibition of works by Ernesto Muñoz (1952) taking place at the newly inaugurated Galería CAL.<sup>884</sup> Titled "Acciones y Documentación sobre el Suceso Beuys" (Actions and Documentation of the Beuys Event), the exhibition featured collaged works based on photographic reproductions of Joseph Beuys, his works, and contemporary German events as presented in the printed media, all of which were juxtaposed to postcards revealing mail-art connections, seals, and hand-written passages.<sup>885</sup> While similar to Smythe's collages in their amalgamation of discarded everyday elements and vernacular graphic references, the inclusion in Muñoz' works of a series of references to Beuys, particularly photographs of the artist in his well known felt hat and canvas suit, transformed the compositions into small icons where the figure of the German artist was suspended. Sommer referred to the exhibition as an "homage" to Beuys, whose "face lends itself to serve as hero of any plastic exhibition,"<sup>886</sup> making a connection between the artist as teacher and avant-garde guru, heroic and worshipped.

Such heroic countenance and Muñoz' own reverential treatment of it was evident in the work "Beuys y su estrella invitada" (Beuys and his invited star). The work pitted against each other a portrait of Beuys and of Ulrich Wegener, the German police officer who directed the counter-terrorist group GSG 9 and was part of the hostage liberation in

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<sup>882</sup> A phenomenon Sommer considered particularly American in character. Waldemar Sommer, "El Neodadaísmo y el alma norteamericana," *El Mercurio*, February 19, 1978.

<sup>883</sup> John Szarkowski, "La fotografía: un nuevo tipo de arte," *El Mercurio*, March 5, 1978.

<sup>884</sup> The gallery was opened in December 1977 by Luz Pereira, who had before the military coup directed Galería de Bolsillo. CAL was an acronym for Coordinación Artística Latinoamericana (Latin American Artistic Coordination) and its curatorial program was run by Richard in 1979.

<sup>885</sup> In 1981, Muñoz received a formal mail-art invitation from the Netherlands and continued making mail art, in a way antedating Dittborn's airmail paintings. For a copy of the invitation see the special Dossier on contemporary art "Dossier Especial Rumbo '81, No. 35," *La Tercera*, November 24, 1981.

<sup>886</sup> Waldemar Sommer, "Los artistas chilenos y la expresión conceptual," *El Mercurio*, April 2, 1978.

the Lufthansa airplane hijacked in October 1977.<sup>887</sup> The charismatic face of the artist, whose ideas on heat and human connection had mythically emerged from an airplane crash narrative and his own participation in the German air forces, was contrasted with the serious expression of the general and his counterterrorist practices as alluded to in the presence of airplane reproductions.<sup>888</sup> In their respective roles as teacher and commander, both men could be read as father figures, the first of contemporary avant-garde happenings based on ritual and systems of communication, and the latter of military counterterrorist strategies. If at first Beuys appeared in an idealized light, the military and authoritative connection between the two men gave the works a slightly menacing character.

Though Muñoz was proposing Beuys as another father figure for the Chilean conceptual practices countering the influence of Vostell as proposed by V.I.S.U.A.L. group, it was the connection to other American sources of Conceptual art which were captured by critics. Sommer, for example, discussed Muñoz' exhibition in relation to the new conceptual languages adopted by Chilean artists, from Dittborn and Parra to Leppe, speaking in particular of Muñoz' turn towards the photographic documentation of a model where less emphasis was placed on the image's transformation than on its presentation. Sommer devoted two separate articles to the subject,<sup>889</sup> associating this type of documentary work with the international rise of Conceptual art, whose roots the critic found in the ready-mades of Duchamp and the 1960s Minimalist works that "rejected the symbolic content of art for the more literal."<sup>890</sup> Art as idea and "idea art" were the terms used by Sommer to describe an art that renounced the object in favor of concepts which found visual expression in photographs and other forms of "graphic" documentation. Sommer then distinguished the works of Chilean artists as not being exactly a manifestation of "idea art" but rather, as showing a few traces of these international developments.

While it would not be Sommer or Muñoz who would expound on Beuys' theories regarding social sculpture and its political consequences, the emergence of a new possible artistic father for the Chilean avant-gardes and a new gallery to support them had deep resonances in a new generation of artists who began exhibiting graphic works in 1978 and 1979. This could be seen in the series of exhibitions promoted at CAL such as "Nueva Gráfica Chilena" (New Chilean Graphics) at the end of June in 1978, featuring the works of Elías Adasme and Patricia Figueroa. Even though the claims to novelty expressed in the title were not evident in the collages shown, which were made up of

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<sup>887</sup> For a description of Wegener's participation in the GSG 9 and the Lufthansa episode, see J. Paul de B. Taillon, *Hijacking and hostages* (CA: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 125-138.

<sup>888</sup> As noted by Isabel Cruz in a scathing and conservative criticism of the works, one of the guiding characteristics of Muñoz works and its references to postcards, media, and Beuys was the desire to communicate. Isabel Cruz, "Comenzó la temporada," *El Mercurio*, 19 April, 1978.

<sup>889</sup> The articles were published on April 2 and 9. In the same newspaper, Alicia Legg also wrote on the subject, suggesting the increasing presence and importance assigned to conceptual trends. See Alicia Legg, "Más sobre arte conceptual," *El Mercurio*, April 16, 1978.

<sup>890</sup> Sommer, *Ibid.* Sommer's position echoed that of Michael Fried in "Art and Objecthood" published ten years earlier in *Artforum*. See Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum*, no. 5 (June 1967): 12-23.



photographic materials, cut-outs from the press with images of aerial disasters, identity cards, as well as graphic markers from street signs to stenciled letters, an association was made by the artists between the documentation of everyday life and a form of political criticism.

The year 1978 proved the importance acquired not only by photography-based works but also that of Leppe, Altamirano, Smythe, and Dittborn as its main exponents.<sup>891</sup> While the artists did not participate in solo shows that year, their presence was felt and asserted in the first *Salón Nacional de Gráfica* (National Salon of Graphics) which took place in October.<sup>892</sup> Organized by the Art School of Universidad Católica and taking place at the Museum of Fine Arts, the Salon was a contest of drawing and printmaking which drew more than 500 entries and presented the works of fifty-five artists, confirming the prognostications of graphic arts' preeminence in the Chilean scene.<sup>893</sup> Representing the university in the jury was the renowned abstract painter Mario Carreño and the printer Eduardo Vilches who had invited Emilio Ellena (the organizer of the three prior Salons of graphic arts before the military the coup and writer in Galería Cromo's first exhibition) and Nelly Richard to form part of it. The presence in the jury of not only moderate institutional figures, as Nena Ossa and Carreño, but also of Vilches in his role as a teacher and artist, and of Richard as an advocate of the avant-garde, evinces the network of relations that were being built in the Chilean scene at the time, connecting the old with the new and the institutional with the experimental.

The winners of the Salon's main prizes were not unexpected given the critical evaluation their shows had received during the previous year. Roser Bru won the Salon's main prize with the work "In Memoria" of 1978 (fig. 4.31),<sup>894</sup> a series of prints that juxtaposed the photographic portrait of a man with both date and time scribbled in a faint calligraphy, suggesting his possible disappearance, and two large sweeping black and white, positive and negatives contours of a man seemingly dead, all the elements

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<sup>891</sup> The position occupied by Parra began to wane under the all-over presence acquired by male artists in 1978, even though she participated in many of the same collective exhibitions. Writing in *El Mercurio* at the beginning of 1978, Nena Ossa, current director of the Museum of Fine Arts, stated that "an art that criticizes society has begun to emerge, the most interesting of the last years, that of Carlos Leppe, Catalina Parra, and Roser Bru." It is interesting that along with Leppe and Parra, Ossa placed Bru who, as discussed in relation to Dittborn, represented an older generation. In her review, Ossa also mentioned the importance of Vostell and the graphic works of Robert Rauschenberg shown that year in Chile. Nena Ossa, "Mirando 1977 hacia atrás," *El Mercurio*, January 8, 1978.

<sup>892</sup> The show opened on October 6, yet the names of the winners were already known by late September. See the article by Sonia Quintana, "La gráfica señala los nuevos rumbos del arte," *El Mercurio*, September 24, 1978.

<sup>893</sup> In his review of the Salon, Sommer stated that with the exception of few ("twenty or so") painters and even fewer sculptors, "the art of the line constitutes indeed the best bastion of our contemporary aesthetic." Sommer, "Asomo al dibujo y a la gráfica de 1978," *El Mercurio*, October 15, 1978. Among the artists from the newer generations represented were Elías Adasme, Patricia Figueroa, and Víctor Hugo Codocedo.

<sup>894</sup> Two prints from the series "In Memoria" by Roser Bru were reproduced in the exhibition catalogue *1er Salón Nacional de Gráfica* (Santiago: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1978), in pages 6 and 7.

connected through a well defined cross.<sup>895</sup> Dittborn in turn won in the printing category with the work “Nada, nada” (fig. 4.32), a pun on the Spanish word for both “swim” and “nothing.”<sup>896</sup> The serigraphy presented two sets of superimposed mass-media reproductions that were vertically stacked and separated at the center by the photograph of a horse race from the press, with a horse crossing the finishing line.<sup>897</sup> At the top of the print, a close-up of a swimmer’s face gasping for air and half hidden by water was superimposed onto an empty swimming pool, a situation reversed on the lowest part where the image of the empty recreational facility predominated over that of the swimmer. Emphasizing the repeated, mechanical gesture was a text which unfolded from top to bottom in three horizontal registers, each text repeating the previous line and adding a new one to it. Only in the third repetition at the bottom of the print was the macabre nature of the text fully disclosed: “this sign has a particular value because/ it allows establishing precisely the amount of time/ of the cadaver’s permanence in the water.” Smythe won in turn the drawing category with the work “La ciega” presented the previous year in his San Diego series, a work that resonated in its blackness and the old woman’s blindfolded face with the deadly ambience suggested in the other winners’ works.<sup>898</sup> The first prizes emphasized not only mechanical means of reproduction but the anonymity of their subjects as joined to quotidian violence.

A special recognition was given by the Salon to the newly formed Equipo Práctica (Practice Team)<sup>899</sup> made up by Altamirano and Leppe. The work they presented collectively was titled “Concepto: Serigrafía” (Concept: Serigraphy) and consisted of a minimalist table with four sets of Plexiglas boxes of different heights containing stacks of paper, a photographic contact sheet at the center, and two neon lights in the corner’s boxes (fig. 4.33).<sup>900</sup> Each box presented a step in the production of a serigraphy, laying out the process of mechanical reproduction in an “abc” manner from its inception to the reproduced images’ later public circulation. The actual serigraphy used as an example

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<sup>895</sup> Other works presented by Bru were connected to her series on Frank Capra’s photograph of a dying Spanish revolutionary soldier, mixed with iconic portraits which were also ruled out. Bru was exhibiting since September at CEDLA a group of related works focusing on Capra’s photograph, intensifying the artist’s commitment to political activism.

<sup>896</sup> Dittborn’s work “Nada, nada” is reproduced in the exhibition catalogue *1er Salon Nacional de Gráfica*, in page 8.

<sup>897</sup> More will be said in Chapter Six on Eugenio Dittborn’s use of the race horse imagery (the photographic ruling) in the context of his 1982 artist book “Fallo Fotográfico” and the discussions surrounding mechanical reproduction that began extending to video practices.

<sup>898</sup> Smythe’s “La ciega” is reproduced in the exhibition catalogue *1er Salón Nacional de Gráfica* in page 9.

<sup>899</sup> The word “práctica” can be variously translated as “practice,” “practical,” and “praxis,” the latter term being closer to the relationship between making and art that the group was working on. The recognition received by the group was amply celebrated in the catalogue as “unanimously” given by the jury. See the catalogue *1er Salón Nacional de Gráfica*, 14.

<sup>900</sup> “Concepto: Serigrafía” is reproduced in the exhibition catalogue *1er Salón Nacional de Gráfica* in page 14.

was one of a man hiding his face with one arm, his body contorted in pain as if shocked by the blinding white light of the camera's flash or literally "shot" by it.

The work focused on the process of making a photographically based print, explaining in a succinct rational manner the different stages involved in its production. By laying out the series of steps conforming the final work of art and "decomposing"<sup>901</sup> its parts through photographs, objects and text, Leppe and Altamirano were exposing the material basis of the work's preparation and the mechanical, "non-inspired" techniques underlying its creation. The resulting instructions demystified the art work's finished aspect as an object of aesthetic contemplation, a point underlined by the last step in which the image was deemed ready to be inserted in the public realm, whether of art or any other. By accentuating the produced nature of the work and its circulation in different circuits of consumption (from the press to art collections), Equipo Práctica was exposing the systemic aspect of art and art works, particularly the work of art's inclusion in larger networks of value and distribution.

In his critique of the exhibition, Sommer characterized Equipo Práctica's work as signaling the way for the development of graphic arts in the Chilean scene. Unlike the interpretation given to the work during the 1979 Seminary on current art organized by Richard, which focused on the use of 'art' as a 'support' to "make an enunciation about photography,"<sup>902</sup> Sommer noticed how the photograph in its bi-dimensional character was joined in "Concepto: Serigrafía" to the three-dimensional, so that "the flat image and its complementation with volume, conform[s] objects of unexpected range."<sup>903</sup> While Sommer calmed his readers by asserting that this was an 'extreme' example of the predominant conceptualism exhibited in the Salon's works, and that the Chilean scene still had plenty of Surrealist examples to offer, he was the only critic to observe the physical qualities of the work's presentation, its sculptural appearance, and its engagement as an object with the viewer even while still being a graphically derived work.

Sommer's attitude towards the object was nevertheless ambiguous, as could be told by the criticisms he made of Virginia Errázuriz (1941) and even Bru's works in the same show. While acclaiming Bru on the basis of her "maturity," which was nevertheless always 'renovated,' Sommer criticized her inclusion of an object (a scapular) instead of its reproduced image in one work because of its literalness. On the other hand, Sommer applauded Errázuriz' series of plastic bags containing mounds of damp earth, bits of wire and numbered tags suggesting a forensic form of corporeal identification, describing

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<sup>901</sup> Luisa Ulibarri, "Año cultural. Abundante, pero disparateo," *Revista Ercilla*, December 27, 1978- January 2, 1979, 53-55. It is interesting that the media defined the process exhibited by the work as 'decomposing' rather than 'deconstructing,' since it points to how the incorporation of continental theories were slow in its reception in Chile and took place mostly within academic circles, such as the DEH (Departamento de Estudios Humanísticos) of Universidad de Chile where Kay had been working as mentioned in the previous chapter.

<sup>902</sup> "Seminario Arte Actual Información Cuestionamiento," *La Bicicleta*, no. 4 (August-September 1979): 43-46. The Seminary and its importance for the delineation of the art scene from 1979 onwards will be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>903</sup> Sommer, "Asomo al dibujo y a la gráfica de 1978."

them as examples of a suggestive “conceptual expression,”<sup>904</sup> without questioning their “objectual” nature. Conversely, for Sommer it was Dittborn’s “Nada, nada” which exemplified the harmonic union of the ‘new figuration’ with the conceptual, merging the human figure with text and photographically based techniques in an expressive manner without departing from the medium’s flatness. Thus, Dittborn’s works summarized according to Sommer the exhibition’s main characteristics as establishing the predominance of photography and conceptual trends.

Several works at the Salon manifested a similar kind of expansion of graphic procedures and basic elements, such as repetition and the matrix, into the surrounding world of objects and viewers. The show also made patent the importance given by artists to the body as a site of inscription and to the political through its direct representation (the fallen soldier of Capra quoted by Bru) or metaphoric allusions and apparent translations (in Dittborn’s swimmer and its relation to disappeared bodies, or in Garreaud’s series on St. Sebastian’s torture). The critical tone of the works contrasted greatly with that of the current exhibitions at other cultural institutions, where painting as a medium and the landscape as a genre of national identification were brandished.<sup>905</sup> Parallel to the Salon, Instituto Cultural de Providencia presented “Nuestra Cordillera en la Pintura” (Our Mountain in Painting), an exhibition preceded at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MAC) by “Rugendas en Chile,” which celebrated the works of a German painter who had produced picturesque recording of Chilean sites and local customs. While the Museum seemed to be catching up with contemporary trends, other cultural institutions were still celebrating an Arcadian version of nature and of its inhabitant as objective identity markers.

A sharp contrast to the idyllic vision of Chile and the institutionally safe art presented at museums was provided by the exhibition “Recreando a Goya” (Recreating Goya) which opened at the Goethe Institute in Santiago during mid-October.<sup>906</sup> The show included the works of more than fifty Chilean artists and commemorated the hundred and fifty years passed since Goya’s death. While the exhibition looked like a memorial celebration, it also had political connotations as manifested in the presence of exiled artists who had sent works.<sup>907</sup> As noted by Sonia Quintana, the commemorated artist had not only produced renown portraits of the courts and aristocratic circles for which he worked as well as popular stories, but had been a witness of the violence of his time and

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<sup>904</sup> Of the Taller de Artes Visuales (TAV) working at the time and led by Brugnoli, Errázuriz was the most experimental component, even though her work has been eclipsed by the discourse and institutional presence of her husband.

<sup>905</sup> Other exhibitions focused on the Spanish past, such as “Maravillas del arte virreinal peruano y chileno” (Wonders of Vice Royal Peruvian and Chilean Art), which followed the Salon at the Museum of Fine Arts at the end of October.

<sup>906</sup> The show opened on October 11, and was organized by Grupo Cámara Chile which made an international artists’ call to present works for the show.

<sup>907</sup> Among the exiled artists sending works were most notably José Balmes and his wife, Gracia Barrios. Artists from different generations were also included, from Delia del Carril marking the oldest generation (associated with Pablo Neruda) to Luz Donoso and Brugnoli’s generation, passing to Leppe and the youngest artists represented by Adasme.

left a painted and printed record of it, “expressing his horror before persecution and violence.”<sup>908</sup> Though the resonance of Goya’s works within the Chilean scene has already been noted in relation to Dittborn’s early 1974 works in Chapter Two, the idea of witnessing violence and translating it into a visual language in both a documentary and expressive manner, connecting the savagery of the everyday to the aggressiveness of graphic art as had been done by Goya, was felt more deeply in a series of works in the show.<sup>909</sup>

The combination of political commentary with references to the actual, physical world could be seen in the work of Muñoz titled “Automarginación” (Self-marginalization) of 1978 (fig. 4.34).<sup>910</sup> The work consisted of an inverted canvas placed on the wall, its wooden stretchers turned towards the viewer, with a large paper strip stretched horizontally at the top reading “automarginación.” In front of the canvas and in a reduced scale stood another wooden structure, this time resembling the window of a Spanish house with metal bars on whose surface hung several photographs of a worker holding a book on Goya. Acting as a title and caption, the text was a sign of presence and absence, joined symbolically with both the worker as a member of a present yet forgotten social class and with Goya’s own exile in France.<sup>911</sup> The ‘unseen’ canvas surface or ‘front’ side of the “work” was marginalized from view, just like the laborer with the Goya book became a stand-in for the uprooted artist (Muñoz and also Goya) unable or unwilling to speak his mind in a repressive context.

Even though the exhibition consisted mostly of prints there were other examples of three-dimensional and even event-involved works that directly required the participation of viewers.<sup>912</sup> This was the case of Altamirano who, along with the poet Raúl Zurita, distributed typed sheets of paper with questions or assertions for the

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<sup>908</sup> Sonia Quintana, “Artistas chilenos recuerdan a Goya,” *El Mercurio*, October 15, 1978.

<sup>909</sup> Without alluding directly to the Chilean situation, Sonia Quintana nevertheless made certain parallels between Goya’s world and the present as when she stated that “it is worthy of note that in their majority they [the artists] felt attracted to the most dramatic parts of Goya’s work, which perhaps presents the closest resemblance to the reality faced by the world these days.” Ibid. Sommer noticed how there were two approaches to “recreate” Goya’s works: one was to repeat the actions and most iconic images of Goya, and the other to interpret the ‘essence’ of his spirit. According to Sommer, “between those who cultivate the most avant-garde graphic art we find, in this exhibition, the nucleus that best incarnates the anima hungry for authenticity of the son of don José, a gilder, and Gracia Lucientes.” Waldemar Sommer, “Recreando a Goya,” *El Mercurio*, October 22, 1978.

<sup>910</sup> The work “Automarginación” is reproduced in the article, “La vanguardia y sus formas,” Dossier Especial Rumbo ’81, no. 35, *La Tercera*, November 24, 1981.

<sup>911</sup> In the article “La vanguardia y sus formas,” Goya’s self-imposed exile from Spain is mentioned in relation to Muñoz’ work, yet it is connected to the French invasion and what is described as Goya’s “leaving art because his country was occupied.” The claim does not take into account Goya’s production of the “Disasters of War” or his work for the French court. The text does not refer to the restoration of Ferdinand VII to the throne when Goya left Spain for Bordeaux in another form of self-exile. See the article, “La vanguardia y sus formas,” Dossier Especial Rumbo ’81, no. 35, *La Tercera*, November 24, 1981.

<sup>912</sup> Carlos Leppe, for example, presented an installation of anonymous printed faces hiding behind a real blanket.

audience to decipher. In the first page of Altamirano's three-page document two portraits of the author were presented following the conventions of a common identity card (fig. 4.35).<sup>913</sup> Stacked vertically in a column, each photograph had a caption below it, the top one stating the name of the artist, date of birth and an empty space for date of death, as well as his profession: "Carlos Altamirano Valenzuela (1954- ) artista." The second portrait of Altamirano followed the same schema, yet the information in the caption was replaced by Goya's.<sup>914</sup> Giving the document an official, bureaucratic appearance was a typed page number at the top and the date (11.10.78) at bottom, as well as a diagonally stamped phrase in red stating: "This document must be understood as an art product." Echoing Goya's self-presentation as a painter in the *Caprichos* prints and adopting his identity, as well as Duchamp's claims for the ready-made as art (this is a work of art because I say so), the identical photographs of Altamirano pointed to the weakness of identity systems and the fallacy of the truth claims implied in language.<sup>915</sup> The parallel between Altamirano and Goya was not only based on the two mirror images and their captions, simultaneously making of language a constructor and an evidence of truth, but it was supported on the premise of art being a product. Altamirano was presenting himself and Goya as artistic producers, intervening and transforming the art system through the fabrication of documents.

The second page developed the production theme and related it to a concrete social question and a particular space of representation. The page presented the photocopy of a roughly cemented wall and empty tiled sidewalk overlaid with a typed text that stated "every artistic product fulfills its social function through the previous questioning of the Art System." The phrase resonated with the systemic view of art advanced in the work "Concepto:serigrafía" presented with Leppe a few weeks earlier, linking it this time with the street, its language, and its connection to the "public" realm.<sup>916</sup> The artist was here claiming that art had a function to fulfill, one that was eminently social in character, as represented by the street, and that this role was accomplished "first" through a critique of art and its modes of reproduction. A social critique could only be arrived at if the artist probed and questioned art itself, its media

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<sup>913</sup> A copy of this work is in the library of Universidad Católica de Chile.

<sup>914</sup> Altamirano used the same photographic portraits for his object based work "Autorretrato" (Self-portrait) of 1978, which is documented in the catalogue *Carlos Altamirano. Obra Completa*, in pages 156 and 157. It is interesting that there is no documentation of the original document/art work presented in this retrospective catalogue (nor was it shown in the exhibition), perhaps because of its ambiguous nature as "art."

<sup>915</sup> The police file aspect invoked in the work's first page, and the changing identity of the artist similar to the alias, also brings to mind Marcel Duchamp's "Wanted/\$2000 Reward" of 1923, another example of slippery identity and multiple international patriarchs of Chilean art.

<sup>916</sup> Only the phrase in the document's second page is mentioned in Richard's 'historical' account of art in Chile from 1975 onwards published as an abridged version of the Seminary in *Revista La Bicicleta*. However, no reference is made to the Goya quote in the first part. This is an interesting lapse that points to the textual emphasis of Richard's interpretation regarding Altamirano's work and the importance given to questioning conceptually the art system. In the version published in *La Bicicleta* Zurita's pamphlet is also mentioned, which asked "Which are the supports? What are the projects? What is the Work? /Mein Kampf," quoting from Hitler's famous book written during his imprisonment. In the 1979 Seminary, the works were considered 'highlights' of the year by Richard. See "Seminario Arte Actual," 44-45.

and techniques, which were tacitly understood as a manifestation of bourgeois culture. Art's political relevance thus emerged from its self-criticism as a way of overcoming its elitist origins and producing a different kind of culture.

The third page reinforced the theme of artistic self-reflexivity and the quoting gesture, yet in the form of a direct appropriation of a previously existing image. In the last page of the document, a photograph of a seminude male body carried by the arms by two other figures was presented fragmented into three parts through layers of text. The latter stated the photograph had been "recuperated" from *Flash Art* magazine and then "processed by the artist" through "photographic cuts." Taking into consideration the claims made in the previous two pages by the artist, text, image, and document were to be considered artistic products, independent of their aesthetic qualities, mode of presentation, or lack of originality. Art was ideally conceived by Altamirano as the result of a process, a labor, and a technique rather than inspiration and craft. As in Muñoz' work, the artist was surreptitiously aligning himself with the working class as a producer, yet ironically one whose products were still being asked to be considered as 'art.'

Even though Altamirano did not delve more on the questions proposed as to the nature of art and its social function, his work pointed towards a new attitude in the Chilean scene regarding the relation between art and politics. Leaving open the problem of how and why all artistic products should find their 'social function' in the questioning of the art system (or why art should have a social function at all), the artist was transferring a form of political opposition in the social realm to a form of intervention in the space of cultural production. The alignment of art with politics was to be done, as conceptually presented by Altamirano, through actions in the sphere of art and its institutions (such as the exhibition space) and by means of works that rethought and reinscribed in a new context different forms of representation (as in the case of the id photograph or the appropriation of the *Flash Art* image). The artist as producer was envisioned by Altamirano as a technician and a theoretician, acting in his realm of specialization by questioning the apparatus of art, its strategies, and forms, amalgamating artistic transformation with social change.

Yet no matter how conceptual in appearance and even 'detached' in its solidarity with the working class, in Altamirano's conception of the art work as product there was also an active, guerrilla element involved. Insofar as the 'document as art as product' was presented in the form of a pamphlet handed out during the exhibition, the work of art was given an outsider status, disrupting traditional forms of viewing and consuming art. Similar to a form of political propaganda, the artistic document functioned as an intellectual agitator, breaking into normal forms of artistic distribution and circulation. In this way, even though the work was eminently conceptual and text-based, there was still an aspect of physical intervention involved, a certain activism related to propaganda.

There were different versions of the relationship between art and politics presented in "Recreando a Goya," passing from metaphoric translations of disasters past and present, physical allusions to political injustice and repression in some of the installations, and conceptual associations of political dissent with artistic production in an institutional setting. Spatial relations were brought to the fore in this battle of power and representation, particularly through the relation between an 'other' existing outside regulated borders or expelled from them (the political dissident, the exile, the dead bodies) and a powerful center determining the limits of order, identity, and even life. If in

the works of Smythe, Dittborn, Leppe, and Altamirano, the ‘other’ figure existing somewhere outside the limits of society had been identified with the delinquent, the worker/proletariat, the prostitute, and the transvestite, this ‘other’ subject was now associated with the position of the artist in society in a dual and ambiguous manner. The artist was envisioned as being outside bourgeois culture insofar as he or she was able to critique it. Yet the artist could also act as a mediating figure between the space of art and high culture and that space associated with other kinds of producers or social members.<sup>917</sup>

The exhibition further manifested an increased tendency to associate graphic arts with the political, as exemplified by Goya’s own engravings and lithographies on the subject of war, human violence, and social injustice. The violence of the black traces on the paper’s whiteness could be read as an aggressive act of marking, introducing signs into an object where there had been none. The body, whether individual or social, was in turn increasingly conflated with a (graphic) matrix to be inscribed, presenting a surface for a dispute of identities interpreted as traces. From the page to the world there were only a few steps, and the passage from the flat, reproducible ‘documents’ of the real to reality itself was regarded more and more as possible through their graphic, incisive and thus critical components.

The relationship between graphic arts and violence seemed to find its culmination in the brief exhibition “Exposición Internacional de la Plástica en el Año de los Derechos Humanos” (International Plastic Exhibition in the Year of Human Rights) at Convento San Francisco in November 1978. Organized by Francisco Brugnoli and TAV (Taller de Artes Visuales), the one-week exhibition reunited around 300 works of national and international artists that were hung in temporary walls inside the convent and set along the cloister’s corridors.<sup>918</sup> In its global scope, the show recalled the spirit of Museo de la Solidaridad and its origins during Allende’s government, specially the manifestation of the strength of international solidarity with the Chilean nation. Yet the purpose of the current exhibition marked it as different from earlier examples. While mostly uncovered and unpublicized in the press, the show was meant to oppose the trampling of human rights in the world and Chile in particular.<sup>919</sup> According to Brugnoli, the exhibition “was like a call to the conscience of artists,”<sup>920</sup> an internationalist gesture which sought to convoke a public and worldwide reprobation of the current Chilean situation.

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<sup>917</sup> The problem of whether those ‘outside’ high culture would identify with the work of the artist or not, or how they were represented by the artists for a bourgeois public is a subject dealt with in Chapter Five.

<sup>918</sup> In an article on the exhibition, Brugnoli was quoted stating that the call for works had been done in September 1978. The works were later donated to the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, recalling the strategies employed by the Museo de la Solidaridad of Allende’s government. Among the international artists were Julio Le Parc, Antonio Saura, Rafael Canogar, José Caballero, José Hernández, Equipo Crónica, Lilo Salberg, and Joe Tilson. See Luisa Ulibarri, “Reencuentro en el templo,” *Revista Ercilla*, December 6-12, 1978, 43-45. A folder with thirty serigraphic works by Chilean artists illustrating each human right was also printed, the only permanent and more “collectible” aspect of the exhibition.

<sup>919</sup> Sommer wrote a critique in December which he titled “International Exhibition of Plastic Art,” following the more general and safe aspect of the show. Ulibarri briefly mentioned the exhibition in the end of the year review of the arts.

<sup>920</sup> Ulibarri, “Año cultural. Abundante, pero desaparejo.”



The centerpiece of the exhibition was titled “Archivo de Reflexión Público” (Public Archive for Reflection) set up by TAV for the show (fig. 4.36).<sup>921</sup> The work contained documents related to missing persons and human rights violations that had been placed in a series of filing cabinets. These could be opened, the files read, and more documents added to them, an aspect the work that has led critics to treat it as an early example of a process-based, open-ended type in Chile.<sup>922</sup> In its interactive aspect and presentation, the work recalled earlier Conceptual examples of information based art such as Art and Language’s series of Indexes done between 1972 and 1974. But if in the English example it was language, the group’s own publications on art, and society’s modes of organizing reality which were under investigation, questioning the reception and use of art in the process, in the Chilean example the index was subjected to the contingency of the nation, the form to the content. The emphasis placed on content was manifested in the series of printed images surrounding the index cases, containing photocopied portraits of the disappeared and their families, as well as testimonies and information on them. The self-referential quality found in other Conceptual art movements, from Kosuth to Art and Language, and even the self-criticism advocated by Altamirano, was given a clear human and social orientation at the exhibition, making the association between art and document, art and protest, blurry.<sup>923</sup>

Even though the exhibition provided grounds for formal experimentation, many works offered more direct allusions to the general theme of repression and coercion.<sup>924</sup> The human figure in particular became a widespread vessel for the condemnation of such acts, featuring prominently in the show in examples of emaciated bodies, lonely figures, scenes of execution, and a general manifestation of empathy with human suffering.<sup>925</sup> Simultaneously to featuring works with evident symbolism, such as a painting with a white dove bathed in blood, installations and conceptual works were also shown. Thus, a

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<sup>921</sup> An image of “Archivo de reflexión público” appears in *Chile Arte Actual*, in page 165, and in Ernesto Saul, *Artes Visuales 20 Años 1970 a 1990* (Santiago: Ministerio de Educación, 1991), 54.

<sup>922</sup> This is the position taken by Ernesto Saul in *Artes Visuales 20 Años 1970 a 1990*. In his description of the work, Saul mentions three different drawers containing information on the Letelier murder case, material on torture, on detained and disappeared prisoners, among others. According to Saul, the work “was given in the form of a process: it was not finished or concluded until all the cases were solved.” Ernesto Saul, 54.

<sup>923</sup> While it could be argued that the members of TAV were still under the influence of an earlier conception of the avant-garde where political commitment was expressed in a clear manner, as seen in the Archivo, many TAV members were interacting with other groups and renewed versions of what being avant-garde meant.

<sup>924</sup> The conceptual also had important representatives, as noted by Ulibarri in *Revista Ercilla* when she mentioned how there were many “artists who need to express their points of view, obsessions, and pain through a language that often was transformed into a code (...) [L]anguage that in its insistence continues to be a reflection of a well settled tendency in our medium, consolidated under different -yet same- names of conceptual art, rupture, idea, and document.” Ulibarri, “Año cultural. Abundante pero disparejo.”

<sup>925</sup> Photographs of some of the exhibited works in the convent’s cloisters were published in 1981 in *Revista La Bicicleta* in an article on human rights. Among the works included were sculptures of emaciated and lonely human figures in the case of Ricardo Mesa, and Mario Irarrázabal’s sculptural scenario similar to Goya’s *10<sup>th</sup> of May*, with a wall of elongated bodies in front of a man with outstretched arms held to a wall.

young artist like Víctor Hugo Codocedo was presenting a wooden construction with a gun training target pasted over a vertical plank and looming over a smaller wooden box with a sketchily painted Chilean flag and a stenciled drawing of a hand aiming a revolver at the viewer. Sommer noted the disparity of the works exhibited, and wondered if aesthetic considerations had been made regarding the works' selection, pointing to the overall privileging of manifest content over form of the organizers.<sup>926</sup>

One of the most important aspects of the show was its coincidence with the International Symposium on Human Rights celebrated in Santiago between November 22 and 25.<sup>927</sup> Convoled by the archbishop of the city, and composed of seven talks taking place in the Santiago's Cathedral, the symposium was attended by the General Secretary of Amnesty International and other foreign ambassadors and dignitaries.<sup>928</sup> The most symbolic result of the symposium was the "Carta de Santiago" (Letter of Santiago), a document signed on November 25 by the attendants and members of the Chilean clergy, denouncing the systematic violation of human rights in the nation.<sup>929</sup>

The symposium was in part a response to the aggravated situation of human rights in Chile which was acquiring by late 1978 new forms of visibility. The worsening context of human rights abuse was met with evident forms of protest from the families of the disappeared, from hunger strikes taking place in May to public acts performed by relatives of missing persons, most notably those who tied themselves to the gates of CEPAL's headquarters in Chile in early November.<sup>930</sup> In September, the Vicaría de la Solidaridad had presented to the cardinal of Santiago a report which established 613 proven cases of disappearances, findings supported by the results of a second 'ad hoc' group from the U.N. regarding human rights in Chile which were published on November 20 that same year. In the report, the Chilean regime was accused of continued abuse and violation of human rights, with confirmed reports of torture which were not being attended by the Chilean judiciary system. The government's response to the Symposium was reflected in Pinochet's mocking commentary of November 24 published in *El Mercurio*, referring to the gathering as, "very interesting, it should have occurred in 1972."<sup>931</sup>

While the November art show did not receive any advertisement in the main media outlets despite a few end of the year reviews, its importance within Chilean art laid

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<sup>926</sup> Waldemar Sommer, "Exposición internacional de la plástica," *El Mercurio*, 3 December 1978. A reproduction of Codocedo's work appears in the article.

<sup>927</sup> The full title of the symposium was "Los derechos humanos a la luz del nuevo ordenamiento internacional."

<sup>928</sup> For a description of the cardinal's position regarding human rights as manifested in the Symposium, see Steve J. Stern, *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet's Chile, 1973-1988*, Book Two (Duke University Press, 2006), 156-157.

<sup>929</sup> The letter was preceded by the Episcopate's own declaration that those missing had died outside the bounds of the law.

<sup>930</sup> "Se ataron con cadenas a rejas de la CEPAL," *El Mercurio*, November 7, 1978.

<sup>931</sup> "Pinochet sobre el simposio," *El Mercurio*, November 24, 1978.

in underlining the problematic of the body in a context of constant disappearance. Though the approaches to the body's representation varied and went from conventional symbols to conceptual suggestions in a wide range of mediums, the interpretation of human rights passed through an understanding of the body as their vessel, with the body as a site of human existence. To represent the corporeal in a social context that chose to repress or efface it, acquired a political connotation insofar as it turned into a presence that which was continuously been suppressed.

The connection between bodies and a discourse of presence became more poignant at the end of 1978 when several cadavers of persons missing since the coup were found buried in abandoned limestone quarries and ovens at Lonquén in November 30 and Cuesta Barriga in December 10.<sup>932</sup> The findings were the first physical evidence of the strategies of disappearance and torture executed by the military, countering the narratives of loss, illegal existence, and mistaken identities advocated by the government.<sup>933</sup> The discourse on absence had been turned into deadly presence, the bodies acting as silent witnesses of the regime's violence. If the missing bodies had previously been ghosts, specters of missing people, without substance according to the military, they were now restored their physicality and reality, but only as ciphers of death.

The last show of the year gave three-dimensional form to the question of the absent body. Patricio Rojas (1951) presented at Galería Espacio Siglo Veinte plaster sculptures with cast life-size body pieces.<sup>934</sup> Titled "Motivo de yeso" (Plaster Motif), the show consisted of eleven pieces of mostly human faces and facial parts set into pedestals or rectangular slabs that were arranged in facing rows (fig. 4.37).<sup>935</sup> According to Sommer, the works evoked a "geometric mausoleum and (...) mute extinguished gods,"<sup>936</sup> reflecting the general ambience of death that the nation was confronting in the media. Fragmented, the human body was presented by Rojas in an incomplete state, ambiguously coming out from the plaster enclosures or being reabsorbed by them.

The human face was given a prominent place, yet it appeared unfinished, abstracted, and simplified. Its features were frozen in expressive gestures, from an open mouth and flaring nostrils, caught as if in a scream, to a protruding chin, and a torn mouth suggesting physical acts of violence. As an opening locked in an incomplete gesture, the mouth emerged as a point of communication and transformation, a space of contact

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<sup>932</sup> It was discovered later on that the fifteen bodies found had been missing since October 7, 1973, when they were captured by the police in Isla de Maipo.

<sup>933</sup> When the bodies at Cuesta Barriga were found, the Legal Medical Institute stated that the bodies had been illegally removed from a cemetery. A witness of the shooting came forward and provided evidence of the missing bodies, their identities, and how the men had been captured and executed by the police.

<sup>934</sup> The sculptures were made with the collaboration of two assistants, Alejandro Verdi and the young Eduardo Echeverría, who would achieve prominence for his corporeal works in 1979.

<sup>935</sup> Several works from Rojas' exhibition "Motivo de yeso" are reproduced in the exhibition catalogue, *Motivo de Yeso* (Santiago: Espacio Siglo Veinte, 1978), in pages 2, 4, and 18, with photographs by Teo Baeza.

<sup>936</sup> Waldemar Sommer, "Naturalezas muertas y motivo de yeso," *El Mercurio*, November 19, 1978.

between self and other that was nevertheless frozen. As mentioned by Kay and Dittborn in the collaboratively written catalogue text, there was a mortuary mask-like appearance to the sculptures, with the body ‘embalmed’ and turned into a fossil.<sup>937</sup> According to the text, the “positive” casts acted as “screens” interrupting language and difference, creating a block and blockade impeding speech and by extension any corporeal manifestation, such as defecation or even birth.<sup>938</sup> The texts emphasized the body as a site of lack, based on a psychoanalytic reading of the body as a place of castration and incompleteness, the plaster in turn interpreted as a material of physical and psychological repression.<sup>939</sup> Thus, the text repeated as a mantra and a lamentation how these half-faces were without a niche or grave, “visibly blind” and “visibly deaf.” But the body was also read as a site of physical forces, teeming and about to flow through its orifices, stopped short by the restrictive sterility of the white plaster.<sup>940</sup>

Through the literal volumetric manifestation of the human body in the plaster casts, the absent corporeality was rendered visible and palpable, given shape and presence as a concrete ghost. Present and absent, the fragmented bodies presented by Rojas spoke of missing originals (whether referring to the ‘missing’ bodies in the nation or to the artist’s body as a model or matrix) and osseous incomplete copies. Frozen in their casts, presented as ruins and reminders, the corporeal fragments had an ominous ring to them. Like steles, they made visible the invisible and transformed the body into a serial, anonymous landscape with death inscribed in its visible surfaces.<sup>941</sup> If the Chilean territory and its land- and city-scapes were being edited, cut down, and reworked, this space was also beginning to be contested by the markings of other bodies.

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<sup>937</sup> The show was supported by the group V.I.S.U.A.L., as manifested in the catalogue’s texts by Dittborn and Kay and the design by Parra. It is interesting to note that by 1978, while the members of V.I.S.U.A.L. were still working together, they had no gallery to support them and that Parra was occupying a marginal position within the group. Instead, the texts by Kay and Dittborn presented a mingled, interconnected, and almost co-authored appearance that emphasized their theoretical roles and the importance given by them to the body. See Eugenio Dittborn and Ronald Kay, “definitivamente transitorio,” in *Motivo de Yeso*, 6.

<sup>938</sup> Dittborn and Kay, “definitivamente transitorio,” 8-9. The body invoked by Kay and Dittborn was ambivalently sexless, as the paragraph associating lack of brains with the phrase “without semen” and “without sex,” in page 14 suggested. The idea was echoed in the words “without phallus” juxtaposed to “acephalus,” and “without woman” in page 15.

<sup>939</sup> A direct reference to the Oedipus complex was made in the phrase “Oedipus Rex has/perhaps one extra eye.” Dittborn and Kay, 14.

<sup>940</sup> Dittborn and Kay’s interpretation of the cast and body relationship anticipated Richard’s reading of it in Leppe’s 1980 works as stated in *Cuerpo Correccional*. Richard has not acknowledged any theoretical debt to both authors.

<sup>941</sup> The act of casting as one of repetition emerging from a mold or prototype could also be interpreted as manifesting both a lack of originality in the series produced and echoing a basic printing concept, that of the edition, in a three-dimensional level. It is easy to see why Dittborn and Kay were interested in Rojas’ work since it offered a point of convergence with their own interests in reproduction.

## Chapter Five: The Expansion of Limits

1979 was a year that saw the expansion of graphic arts and conceptual practices in the Chilean art scene. It was also a year of border definitions, of marking territories both on a national and artistic scale. In the terrain of the arts, avant-garde practices were being defined and redefined, their borders often touching and mingling. This was a time of cross-fertilization among disciplines, which saw the appearance of emerging artists and pitted conceptual models against each other, demarcating different approaches to art and the groups that upheld them.

A defining event during the year was the seminar on contemporary art (Seminario Arte Actual) that integrated and gave direction to the recent artistic tendencies. The seminar was organized and directed by Richard who determined in an important manner the course that avant-garde art in Chile would take. The seminar was soon followed by the publication of *Revista CAL*, a magazine where the conceptual underpinnings of the new movements were set forth. A series of publications and seminars soon followed, confirming the importance of art and conceptual practices in the cultural domain.

In this context, the landscape and the territory took on an even more prominent role in the arts produced from 1979 onwards. More works reflected on natural and socially constructed territories, on physical and symbolic boundaries, exploring and critiquing their impact in the construction of national identity. Social limits, regional boundaries, territorial barriers, and political demarcations were also prominently defined by the military regime, inscribing strict differences in the social landscape. The graphic mark acquired a renewed importance in the arts as a sign of presence and erasure, as a strategy of inscription and a theoretical model for social action insofar as it was envisioned as a site of contradictory definitions with which to contest the limits defined by the regime.

In a time of border creation and border indefinability, the notion of the margin acquired a special meaning in cultural practice and discourse. The margin was appropriated by artists and identified with a variety of social causes, subject positions, and locations, coming to symbolize a site of opposition to centers of power. Margins were conceived as political sites of resistance and social construction and their slippery borders given a new valence, even though their effectiveness, origins and the relation to those considered 'marginal' were not always questioned by the artist employing them.

In this social and artistic landscape, the body re-emerged with renewed force as both a site of inscription and action. The body was envisioned as acting on the land, city, and social-scapes, transforming their shapes as much as being altered by them. A diversity of bodyscapes were proposed, from a macro to a micro scale, ranging from the national to the personal, offering different models of identification between viewers, artists, works of art, and corporeal representations. The body was more than a support or subject for art; it became a privileged site for the experience of space, place, and identity and the contest for representation.

## 5.1. The Seminar and the Conceptual Limits of the Chilean Avant-Garde

While in terms of exhibitions the year 1979 seemed to have started slowly, the artistic scene was only gathering momentum. In April, a seminar directed by Richard at Instituto Chileno-Norteamericano de Cultura (Chilean-North American Institute of Culture) opened its doors to artists, curators, students, and cultural agents in general, extending for a period of two months. Meeting every Monday, the “Seminario Arte Actual. Información. Cuestionamiento” (Seminary of Current Art. Information. Questioning) consisted in a series of talks and presentations regarding the contemporary state of the arts, centering on the case of Chile yet punctuated with a discussion of the developments in the international scene.<sup>942</sup> Even though most of the talks were conducted by Richard, the seminar was proposed as “an instance of collective study”<sup>943</sup> where artists would be exposed to a series of theoretical questions and hypothesis regarding contemporary art production along with visual material. The idea was to accelerate the knowledge of contemporary practices around the world in order to focus on the Chilean experience and derive an exemplary model of production, not only updating the state of the arts in the nation and revising their current condition, but introducing specific alternatives of creation that were supported by the examples from abroad.<sup>944</sup>

In her introduction to the Seminar, Richard made her own position evident as a cultural agent implicated in this new distribution of knowledge and interpretation. Centering on the notion of “production” coming from Marxist literary criticism,<sup>945</sup> Richard stated that interpreting or “reading” a cultural text, be it a work of art or otherwise, involved the production of new meanings insofar as a reading not only

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<sup>942</sup> In its August issue, the cultural magazine *La Bicicleta* published a shortened version of the Seminar’s main discussion points, including the antecedents of current art in Chile and commentaries from some of its participants. All quotes from the Seminar are from *La Bicicleta*’s review, unless otherwise noted. *Revista La Bicicleta* was first published in September 1978 and it consisted of a bi-monthly publication focusing on a diversity of cultural productions. With a clear leftist orientation that gave particular importance to popular art forms, from theater to song, and community based arts with a strong social intention, the magazine was one of the first attempts to give a broad panorama of contemporary cultural events. It is no coincidence that the popular bent of the magazine was attuned to the art works produced by the C.A.D.A. group and was one of its main initial platforms of communication, as will be discussed below.

<sup>943</sup> “Seminario Arte Actual Información Cuestionamiento,” *Revista La Bicicleta*, “Seminario,” 44. The summary of the discussion was produced by Leppe, which demonstrates the close relation between Richard’s theories and the artists she advocated. Whether this was a collaborative work or not, is a point which I hope to illuminate in the following chapters.

<sup>944</sup> The seminar’s main objective was defined as “a reflection and critical revision of contemporary art practice – in its international production- and of the incidence this production has on certain practices that in their totality structure a great part of the national artistic endeavor.” Richard, quoted by Leppe in *La Bicicleta*, 44.

<sup>945</sup> While directly emerging from the central importance given by Marx to production as the generator of social relations, the concept was also used by Walter Benjamin and Julia Kristeva from a materialist and semiotic perspective correspondingly. Even though the two authors served as models for Richard’s theories on art, her own conception of production in the arts was strongly influenced by Kristeva’s notion that all literary texts can be considered as productivity.

“records the signified initially posited by the signifier, but also produces it, inverting the here and now position of its agent.”<sup>946</sup> Quoting Althusser and the impossibility of producing an ‘innocent’ reading, Richard asked artists and historians alike to determine their own levels or “margins” of guilt and complicity, their interpretative positions, and turn those stances into new cultural events, available for further interpretation and (re)production. Starting from a materialist approach to culture, Richard was proposing interpretation as an act producing meanings and texts parallel to that of art, a statement that clarified Richard’s own position as a producer of meaning and concepts that could mold the Chilean scene. Artists were not only “producers” in a Benjaminian manner, but art criticism was also perceived as able to define art’s scope and social incidence.

In Richard’s demarcation of the seminar’s boundaries and objectives, a particular space of action and production of meaning was defined. According to Richard there was a “need to situate the reflection [on art’s condition/production] in one’s own ambit,”<sup>947</sup> to circumscribe this artistic inquiry within the Chilean setting rather than the international art world. This necessity had a historical nature, since Chilean artists found themselves at a specific historic juncture (marked by the dictatorship though unmentioned in the text) that demanded of them a new consciousness and productive response.<sup>948</sup> The seminar thus embarked in a demystifying mission, bringing a new faith and awareness to artists by “confronting them with the perspective of a specific social situation (ours),”<sup>949</sup> of which they had to gain consciousness. In this context, the exterior models used in the seminar as examples of the international avant-garde (from Vostell to Beuys) acted as markers that could better help locate the Chilean practices and “reaffirm”<sup>950</sup> their novel gestures, yet without completely inscribing them in a globally expanded artistic terrain. Rather, the Chilean scene was closing itself from the international models it referenced, ambiguously asserting its independence from the art world while invoking its ‘newly’ given historical mission.<sup>951</sup>

The mission of these newly appointed apostles was complex and required a series of steps. Invoking a Marxist language related to fetishism, Richard spoke of first becoming aware of the “mystifying” social function performed by “official” artistic structures, which only reproduced the existing status quo. This was done through the creation of complacent art, an object for “contemplation” in which “illusionism” as technique was used to reaffirm existing values. Acquiring consciousness of this reproductive system (of social and class relations, one could argue) would lead the recently illuminated artists towards the production of a critical, conceptually infused art

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<sup>946</sup> Ibid.

<sup>947</sup> Ibid.

<sup>948</sup> In 1979 Altamirano would refer to this specific historic situation as one of “emergency that forces the art to define itself.” Carlos Altamirano, “Altamirano: respuestas a un cuestionario,” *Revista CAL*, no. 3, (August 1979): 14.

<sup>949</sup> Richard, 44.

<sup>950</sup> Ibid.

<sup>951</sup> This self-enclosure was also extended to the amount of participants that, according to *Revista La Bicicleta*, did not surpass a hundred people, most of them artists or art students.

that did not merely copy and reproduce current social models, but questioned them in the present. What mattered according to Richard was the “here and now,” the historical impact that Chilean artists could have in their own context as they responded to their historical call of criticism and embraced this responsibility.

The new avant-garde would then be opposed to a reactionary, illusion-generating art. This movement was defined by Richard as the result of a “conceptual reevaluation” of the artistic terrain, an inquiry that would lead to the creation of “a socially conscious art (...) responsible for the society in which it is situated, therefore, conscious of itself and its communicating function.”<sup>952</sup> By supplanting illusionism for a conceptual probing into the ideologies supporting the use of certain techniques and motifs in art, the new socially committed artist would go beyond the repetition of conventionally assigned meanings. Instead of reproducing reality, the latter would be documented; instead of merely hanging in a white box, the space of art would be placed in a tense relationship to the ‘outside’ world, which was defined by Richard as an eminently “urban landscape.”<sup>953</sup> Through a revision of history and material means of production, as well as the development of new formal languages and the adoption of contemporary forms of representation (photography, photocopies), artists could begin questioning the context of artistic production. Art was contoured by Richard as part of a larger system of relations including society, the work, the artist, and the art sphere itself, and artists could fulfill their social role by making these relations manifest.

Even though Richard’s model followed a semiotic approach to the question of art and communication, the application of a Structuralist and Marxist oriented point of view to this model allowed her to inadvertently stress the spatiality of artistic production. By thinking about art as a system of relations between producers, receivers, and context, instead of an isolated object, Richard was emphasizing the situated character of art, its formation in the crux of a myriad of social forces and discourses, whether they were defined by institutions, artists, or others. Through this topographical approach to art, the process of its making was also highlighted, pointing towards even more spatial and interactive forms of artistic engagement.

As Richard reproduced and reworked her arguments regarding the critical edge of conceptual art based on mechanical reproduction, and continued using the binary reproduction/original, objective/subjective,<sup>954</sup> she had to explain the difference between the artists of the past who had also been critical or socially oriented and those of the present. Even though Richard acknowledged in passing the existence of earlier “non-traditional” art practices that had performed interrogations echoing those of the new vanguard, the former had merely pointed toward the critical evaluation of art production yet had not fully arrived at it. Furthermore, these works had operated individually, producing an “atomized artistic landscape,” rather than acting as a coherent movement. Because of their fragmented impact, works like Valentina Cruz’ 1973 “La tina de Marat Sade” (The Tub of Marat Sade), a paper tub placed in front of the Museum of Fine Arts

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<sup>952</sup> Ibid.

<sup>953</sup> This term was used by Richard in relation to the 1978 collaborative works of Rosenfeld and Juan Castillo. I will address these instances in Chapter Six, though the individual works of Rosenfeld are discussed in the following sections.

<sup>954</sup> Richard, 44.



and set to fire, or the installations of Juan Pablo Langlois discussed in Chapter One, were dismissed as avant-garde antecedents in spite of their direct critique of the museum and their political charge.

Two arguments were used by Richard against the anticipatory nature of these earlier works. First, according to the critic these examples were disconnected from a “cultural necessity,”<sup>955</sup> as opposed to the cultural rootedness of the current art, and second, they lacked a direct influence on other artists. The first part of Richard’s argument made clear the distinction created by the critic between works that referred to external referents, staking universalist claims and leaving the specificity of the physical environment in the background as a static force, and those that were locally committed and responded to the spatial and historic conditions of their own time. By referring to potent yet foreign and older symbols of political revolution, the contemporary political situation was eschewed rather than directly illuminated or critiqued, as was the case of Cruz’ Marat reference. Martyrs and the idea of the revolution as performing a radical break had become disconnected with the current reality, too tied with older artistic groups and a model of politics that spoke to a different generation.

Though Richard’s argument did not account for the introduction of notions such as the dematerialization of art or the emphasis on process in the earlier works, thus failing to explain the appearance of these ‘current’ conceptual forms, the critic supplemented her first reason for the works’ dismissal with the notion of their lack of progeny. This argument points to the founding desire of Richard and the artists working close to her who were to become artistic fathers disseminating the seed of a new consciousness. Such a genealogical argument allowed Richard to simply disregard at the time the works of artists like Balmes, the muralist brigades, and even those making installations in the early 1970s like Vicuña, by denying their parental influence (they were octogenarian ‘bachelors’ with perhaps bastard offspring, such as Brugnoli). But more importantly, the break was one of passing from understanding “social” commitment as the “illustration” of political ideas, as opposed to questioning those ideas and the systems in which they moved. By reducing earlier art expressions to visual examples of a political revolutionary discourse, as if they were a transparent transposition from one arena or medium to another, Richard was clearing the ground for the younger generations as examples of a critical resistance and manipulation of the codes used within these discourses.<sup>956</sup>

The foundational impulse behind such polarizations found its expression in the list of artists, works, and exhibitions that Richard quoted as a genealogy of avant-garde

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<sup>955</sup> Richard, 45.

<sup>956</sup> The argument was also explained by Richard in “Dos enfoques de la plástica” (Two points of view of plastic art) published in the June issue of *Revista CAL*, where Sommer was also asked about his view on the recent art made in Chile. Richard not only noted the related incorporation of “photographic resources” and “textual material” in the most recent artworks produced in Chile, but she distinguished between these works and those of artists working abroad (exiled or not) who manifested “a complete lack of connection” with the Chilean situation, a fact that she saw worsened in their inclusion in international exhibitions where they showed their “total de/contextuality and a/historicity as marginal works, created out of time.” Nelly Richard, “Dos enfoques de la plástica,” *Revista CAL*, no. 1, (June 1979): 11. More will be said in Chapter Six on this problem of exhibiting Chilean art ‘outside’ the nation in relation to the Paris Biennial of 1982, whose Chilean entry Richard curated.

practices in Chile.<sup>957</sup> Starting with Leppe's 1974 "El Perchero" and his photographic portrait with cords, yet without mentioning the artist's "Happening de las Gallinas" of the same year, Richard outlined a chronological lineage of ruptures that corresponded to the new scene's acquisition of social consciousness. Thus, from an early break with tradition (associated with Leppe and his use of the body as "art material"), Chilean artists came to critique history (as in Dittborn's 1976 "delachilenapintura,historia"), followed by questioning a historical and cultural situation while gathering critical attention (as manifested in the 1977 exhibitions at *Época* and *Cromo*), and receiving validation of his/hers processes through the work of a renowned international artist (Vostell, whose works, as stated by Richard, "exemplified the current situation of contemporary artistic phenomena"<sup>958</sup>). At the same time, texts such as Richard's would have gained in importance as producers of meaning (also seen in 1977); collective works began to appear (as in the 1978 Graphic Salon, San Francisco exhibition and the Goya show) which focused on new materials (photography and photocopies), and novel formal elements (specifically, the use of language). The culminating point of this process was reached in the work of Altamirano presented at the "Recreando a Goya" 1978 exhibition, where he offered "a new form of artistic production through the handing of documents"<sup>959</sup> that directly questioned the art system and the constitution of art. Chilean art had reached its maturity or standstill point of awakening<sup>960</sup> by following a path of formal ruptures that led to the recognition and examination of art as an experience available to criticism, turning its history, making and context of appearance into a subject to be analyzed and critiqued through conceptual modes of production.

Richard's seminar marked the conceptual territory of Chilean art and its most 'advanced' members, defining its boundaries and scope of action. That Richard would not include the seminar in her 1981 and 1986 books on the Chilean art scene, points to her ambiguously assumed role as "producer" of artistic and conceptual effects at a time when the "escena de avanzada" was clearly losing steam and she became its 'historian.'<sup>961</sup> But the seminar and Richard's conceptualization of avant-garde art had an immediate impact on the art scene. This could be felt in the interviews made to some of

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<sup>957</sup> A similar list of artists and defining genealogy was published independently by Dittborn at the end of the year, yet the emphasis varied slightly as discussed below.

<sup>958</sup> Ibid.

<sup>959</sup> "Seminario," 45.

<sup>960</sup> It is curious to note that within a materialistic infused discourse, Richard would appeal, like Marx and Benjamin, to a religiously inflected, messianic language when defining the revolutionary role of the new art. For if as seen in Chapter One in relation to the socially oriented art of the 1970s, revolution in the streets was associated to artistic avant-garde, Richard was only reinterpreting this earlier politically committed model for a dictatorial context.

<sup>961</sup> Or perhaps she could also be considered by then its gravedigger. In 1986 for example, Richard emphasized through a series of quotes from other writers how 1977 was the turning point in the definition of avant-garde practices. See pages 54-55 and footnote 5 in *Márgenes e Instituciones*. In their book *Chile Arte Actual*, Galaz and Ivelic also disregard the Seminar, and generally comment in a footnote that from 1977 onwards seminars, forums, and round tables allowed, along with magazines, artist's travels, and some international exhibitions, for the "confrontation of ideas" coming from within and other international art centers. Galaz and Ivelic, *Chile, Arte Actual*, 198.

the attending artists that was published in *La Bicicleta* and the following works of Altamirano that seemed to literally take up and even ‘illustrate’ the points expounded in the seminar.

The interviews consisted of the proposed statement, “give an account of your seminar-experience,” which six artists had to answer. Unlike the varied praiseful responses of Carlos Gallardo, Altamirano, Rosenfeld, Codocedo, and Juan Castillo (1952), only Benito Rojo (1950), a painter, manifested a critique of the seminar.<sup>962</sup> While the other five artists described the seminar as an eye-opening experience (Gallardo), saw in it a theoretical support of their own anti-institutionalism (Codocedo), or identified in it resonances with their own work (Altamirano), Rojo was the least enthusiastic about its range and implications. Even though Rojo spoke of the “stimulating” aspects of the discussions, he felt the information provided on art and its situation was “partial and dogmatic” in spite of its logical and serious framework.<sup>963</sup> Rojo’s answer pointed to the clear division in Chilean art being generated between those who were still making “objects of contemplation” such as paintings and those aligned with the conceptual mode, as well as the animosity and doctrinaire bent of the position assumed by these new self-titled avant-garde artists.

Altamirano’s and Castillo’s responses offer instead two symptomatic modes of interpreting the seminar’s influence from the perspective of artists who were against traditional modes and mediums of art making. Altamirano regarded the seminar as a confirmation of the conceptual work in which he had embarked, even though his oeuvre was still filled with “contradictions.” According to the artist, these occurred because he had been formed in an artistic ambience where subjectivity (“my own tastes and feelings”) dictated the content and forms of expression of his ideas. The seminar had instead highlighted for him how “art is a mental construct, structured on the base of a language that is constructed in the same act of making art and the necessity to actively appear before history.”<sup>964</sup> By providing him “information” and a “method with which to analyze this information,”<sup>965</sup> the seminar had outlined a theoretical path to follow. Castillo, on the other hand, focused on the contextual emphasis placed by the seminar in

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<sup>962</sup> Parallel to Parra and Altamirano’s exhibitions in 1977, Rojo was also exhibiting in October at the newly opened Galería CAL. His paintings depicted abstracted images of human beings in different states of corporeal torment blindfolded or with eyes scratched out. Sommer criticized the works for their painterly and decorative “hedonism,” yet curiously enough the critic also saw in them an example of the documentary trend in Chilean art at the time. See Waldemar Sommer, “Rojo, Larraín, Pflingsthorn y Roa,” *El Mercurio*, October 16, 1977.

<sup>963</sup> Benito Rojo, in “Seminario Arte Actual Información Cuestionamiento,” *La Bicicleta*, 46.

<sup>964</sup> Altamirano, “Seminario,” 45. A similar response was expressed by Gallardo, who stated that not only was this the first time when he was exposed to the relevance of theory in art, but the need to “confront responsibly an activity of this kind,” a knowledge which the art schools dismissed in favor of the learning of techniques. Gallardo opposed the academy’s “buen hacer” (good craftsmanship) to “buen pensar” (good thinking). Carlos Gallardo, “Seminario,” 46. Codocedo in turn also critiqued the academy, speaking of “the regressive state through which the university art schools parade,” schools that supplanted reflection on the contemporary by “classic and exhausted nineteenth century structures.” Víctor Hugo Codocedo, “Seminario,” 46.

<sup>965</sup> Altamirano, 46.

its delineation of a historical undertaking. For him, the seminar had underlined the importance of questioning the production of art and its system of inscription, a self-reflection that was leading to the “configuration of an identity that belongs to us.”<sup>966</sup> The emphasis placed by Castillo on assuming from that moment onwards both “the social reality in which we live and the very problematization of this practice (art practice),”<sup>967</sup> signals the spreading idea of creating through a conceptual approach an art that was clearly Chilean in its forms and content, referring to the specificities of location and its social emergence. In this view, for art to truly assume its historical mission, it had to reflect on its spatiality.

Even though the seminar’s influence was widespread and even affected cultural institutions and individuals who began sponsoring in the three years to come a series of seminars and publications, it was in the realm of art making that its direct effects could be immediately perceived.<sup>968</sup> Altamirano mentioned in the *CAL* magazine interview his engagement in a new work that would “reflect” the combined aims of being self-questioning and socially communicative. The work took form between August and October 1979 in two stages. The first phase consisted of five hundred questionnaires sent to artists and other cultural agents under the title “El arte necesita que usted responda” (Art needs you to respond). Like his previous 1978 Goya work, the questionnaire was stamped with Altamirano’s name and the phrase “this document should be understood as a product of art,” giving it an official, almost ‘legal’ looking artistic appearance. The stamp implied that not only the document itself was part of the final artistic ‘object,’ but that the process of sending, receiving, and resending the documents also formed part of it.<sup>969</sup>

The questionnaires revolved around the theme “the interpretation of the history of Chilean art,”<sup>970</sup> as was asserted in one of the examples published in *Revista CAL*. Along with a statement of objectives on its front side and instructions on the back, the questionnaire posited a single statement upon which the recipients would have to reflect, annotating their answers on an assigned space, and finally sending their responses by mail to the gallery to be used as part of Altamirano’s September-October exhibition. One

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<sup>966</sup> Juan Castillo, “Seminario,” 46.

<sup>967</sup> Ibid.

<sup>968</sup> Some examples were a seminar on contemporary art titled “La Plástica en Chile, Hoy” organized by Grupo Cámara in January 1980, followed by seminars on photography and graphic art at the premises of T.A.V. and the Goethe Institute. See “Seminarios. Los plásticos en el foro,” *Revista Hoy*, January 2-8, 1980, 41-42. The new decade also saw the emergence of a series of short-lived publications such as the magazines *La Separata* (started by Richard in April, 1982) and *Revista Margen* (co-founded by Richard and Justo Pastor Mellado), among manifestos by C.A.D.A. and other kinds of artistic involvement in publications. For a full account of the state of cultural publications in Chile, see Richard’s chapter “The Scene of Writing,” in *Margins and Institutions*, 45-51.

<sup>969</sup> The subject and method was nevertheless not unknown for Chilean artists. In 1970, Juan Downey had sent a questionnaire to artists, critics, of the New York art world, bringing their answers together in a work titled “A Research on the Art World.”

<sup>970</sup> Statement in *CAL*’s questionnaire, *Revista CAL*, no. 3, n.p. Four other questionnaires with similar questions were mailed to specific individuals.

of the statements was taken from a phrase used by Richard in a previous issue of the same magazine that stated: “The history of Chilean painting is the history of a successive appropriation of the foreign, a history that never thought itself “in” its’ own as a tension with the foreign.”<sup>971</sup> Richard’s phrase echoes the ongoing themes of self-reflection on the problematic of an art indebted to exterior models (the dependency complex) and its lack of questioning, posing the problem of defining a Chilean identity in art and forging an artistic context of self-reference that was nevertheless itself appropriating a foreign artistic language to propound it.

The exhibition “Altamirano: revisión crítica de la historia del arte chileno” (Altamirano: critical revision of the history of Chilean art) showcased some of the answers (fig. 5.1).<sup>972</sup> These were blown-up and photocopied into large rectangular panels hung on the gallery’s walls.<sup>973</sup> The work of art literally became pure text, dematerialized into the visual expression of thoughts through written, typed language, denying the viewer the possibility of a pleasurable aesthetic experience while reinforcing its intellectual origin. But in a spin on both Joseph Kosuth’s conceptualization of art as pure idea and Duchamp’s understanding of art as a mental product,<sup>974</sup> Altamirano was emphasizing the situated nature of those ideas, giving a particular placement to self-reflexivity through the questions’ content (Chilean art and not merely “art as idea”) and the varied responses to it. For while stating that “art is a language” that must “respond to the exigencies of its time”<sup>975</sup> through the creation of works that were not merely products to be sold or contemplated upon in a passive manner, Altamirano was not only echoing the anti-commercial nature of much Conceptual art in the United States of America in particular and explaining his works’ similarities in terms of materials (photocopies) to other international productions. Rather, Altamirano was also emplacing his critique of art and its modes of representation in a specific artistic location. Artistic representations

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<sup>971</sup> The phrase in the Spanish original is complicated because of the use of the word “en” (in, within) followed by “lo propio” (its own/one’s own) and I have translated it as close to the original as possible to maintain the emphasis placed on the “in” used by Richard in quotation marks. Nevertheless, a more grammatically correct form of translation would be “a history that never thought of itself (or “of its own”) as a tension confronted to the foreign.” The original stated: “La historia de la pintura chilena es la historia de una sucesiva apropiación de lo ajeno, historia que nunca se pensó “en” lo propio como tensión frente a lo ajeno.”

<sup>972</sup> The exhibition took place between September 25 and October 25, 1979. It was supplemented by a series of talks by contemporary artists, among them most prominently Brugnoli, who from his work at TAV criticized the artistic trends associated with Richard. There is an image in *Revista CAL* (no. 3) of Brugnoli seated in a table surrounded by Altamirano’s panels. A photograph by Heliodoro Torrente of Altamirano mounting the panels was published in the article by Luisa Ulibarri, “Altamirano. A fojas cero,” *Revista Ercilla*, October 10, 1979.

<sup>973</sup> The panels were of the same size, one meter by one and half, and were industrially produced.

<sup>974</sup> Kosuth’s influence has never been acknowledged by Altamirano, yet Duchamp was quoted by Luisa Ulibarri when reviewing the show. See Luisa Ulibarri, “Altamirano. A fojas cero,” *Revista Ercilla*, October 10, 1979. Altamirano also mentioned Duchamp as an influence in the interview of *Revista CAL*, “Altamirano: respuestas a un cuestionario,” *Revista CAL*, no. 3, (August 1979): 13.

<sup>975</sup> Altamirano, quoted in “Altamirano. A fojas cero.”

were posited as dependant on their context of emergence, and in the Chilean case this was a context that, as defined in the questions and answers exhibited in the show, was regarded as historically based on imitation.

The mental aspect of conceptual art was thus converted in Altamirano's case into a tool with which to build a specific Chilean new art. In an interview published in *Revista CAL*, Altamirano spoke of how the present national situation demanded that "young artists find a common identity, which clarifies what we are, what we have and don't have, and what we can do with it, to sum up, to configure a true Chilean art."<sup>976</sup> That the concept of "truth" was invoked by Altamirano reaffirms the messianic feeling and mission that several artists surrounding Richard were adopting, as well as the idea that prior art was somehow a forgery, an imitation that was not faithful to its context and had distorted its representation. Art had to cleanse itself from these earlier falsifications in order to speak of its time in an authentic manner.

But the dematerialization of the art work into a text in Altamirano's panels presented problems that reflect on the contradictions involved in the adoption of a conceptual approach within the Chilean context. It could be argued, for example, that unlike Mel Bochner's 1966 presentation in "Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art" of photocopied, written material in the form of books, the work created a horizontality in its disposition and thus became accessible and usable by the viewers/readers, while Altamirano was still using a vertical and panel-like format hung on the walls associated with painting and graphic art.<sup>977</sup> Replicating, though in a textual manner, the distanced observation/reading of the art work (the conservative position so disparaged by Richard), Altamirano's panels were still operating as art works, a fact accentuated by his own stamps and claims that the documents presented were indeed artistic "products" and not, as suggested by Bochner, ambiguous objects that performed their artistry by being located within an art context.<sup>978</sup> Furthermore, Altamirano did not question the act of representation itself through the use of text, but focused only on the development of artistic representations in the Chilean context.<sup>979</sup> Language was somehow rendered transparent, an innocuous vehicle of communication without particular ideological underpinnings.<sup>980</sup> Unlike photography,

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<sup>976</sup> Altamirano, "Altamirano: respuestas a un cuestionario," 14.

<sup>977</sup> It has been argued that Bochner was nevertheless presenting the books on pedestals and in this way turning them into sculptures of sorts. See the account of Bochner's work in Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer, *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975* (Los Angeles, California: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995), 82-83.

<sup>978</sup> Altamirano did acknowledge the context of appearance of the "art work" and its production of meaning insofar he claimed in an interview that the gallery was chosen as a site for his work precisely because it was a socially recognized space for the display of culture. See Altamirano, "Altamirano: respuestas a un cuestionario," 13.

<sup>979</sup> In the same interview, Altamirano argued that "the value of a contemporary work of art is not found in its physical or visual attributes, nor in its particularities of form and color, because these are only elements of the language employed and do not have anything to do with the meaning of the work as art." "Altamirano: respuestas a un cuestionario," 14.

<sup>980</sup> Regarding language and its communicative function, Altamirano stated that "if we understand art as a language and as such invented by man to satisfy some necessities of communication, we also understand

considered 'objective' by Richard in its documentary aspect and as 'ideological' in its use within newspapers and the media, the written text was not thought of as constructing reality in particular ways. Language was just there, like the Chilean Andes, yet unlike the mountains, it somehow escaped questioning by the avant-gardes in formation.<sup>981</sup>

## 5.2. The Limits of the Body Politic: Carlos Leppe's Star and Elías Adasme's Maps

Altamirano's exhibition was followed by a performance and installation by Leppe in the same gallery that also dealt with the problem of the foreign and the local, addressing the Duchampian model and conceptual modes of production in a different way. "Acción de la estrella" (Action of the Star) was a performance presented in the context of Leppe's exhibition titled "Leppe/Trabajo 1977-1979" (Leppe/Work 1977-1979), a show which had been promoted in CAL magazine for several months. Leppe's advertisements had consisted of either the black contours of the Chilean flag along with a date and information regarding the gallery, or a small photograph of a seated Duchamp seen from the back while smoking a pipe, revealing a star-shape shaved on his scalp.<sup>982</sup> The photograph was accompanied by a brief reference to Duchamp's "Tonsure" of 1919, a work in which the artist had the hair at the back of his head cut in the shape of a five-point star by George de Zayas, being later photographed by Man Ray.

Leppe's interpretation of Duchamp's tonsure consisted of a performance within an installation at CAL (fig. 5.2).<sup>983</sup> A small stage had been set against the gallery's back wall in its lower story, consisting of a piece of wood with medical utensils and a radio on top of a large piece of plastic.<sup>984</sup> In front of the stage was a chair separating the audience from this platform along with a transparent acrylic plate suspended from the ceiling with the contours of the Chilean flag traced in black on top. The spare rectangular forms of the

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that this language, to keep serving its function, has to change its forms as they cease to respond to the exigencies of their time, be that these have changed or new ones have appeared." Altamirano, 13.

<sup>981</sup> I mention the Andes as a "static" and objective geographical element, because it continually appeared in the works that will be dealt with in the following sections and next chapter. Yet, as discussed below, the Andes' immemorial, passive, and framing status, as well as its importance in defining Chilean identity, was questioned by several artists in the following years.

<sup>982</sup> The photograph had been taken by Marcel Duchamp's collaborator, Man Ray. According to Duchamp, the star was meant to recreate the "headlight child tonsure," which "could, graphically, be a comet, which would have its tail in front..." Marcel Duchamp, *Writings: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (1973; New York, da Capo Press, 1989), 26. In the article "In the Manner of Duchamp, 1942-1947: The Years of the Mirrorial Return," Thomas Singer mentions the photograph and connects it with Duchamp's physical transformations as Rose Sélavy, particularly the photograph of him lathered up which was included in a bill for a Montecarlo casino. Thomas Singer, "In the Manner of Duchamp, 1942-1947: The Years of the Mirrorial Return," *Art Bulletin* 86, (2004): 346-369.

<sup>983</sup> The performance was taped by Carlos Altamirano and I base my description of it on the video. Images from the performance have been published in different articles and books, starting with Richard's *Cuerpo Correccional*, pages 50 to 61, Galaz and Ivelic's *Chile Arte Actual*, page 201, and in Leppe's exhibition catalogue *Cegado por el oro*, pages 40 and 41, among others.

<sup>984</sup> The setting resembled Joseph Beuys stages used in the 1960s in the context of Fluxus exhibitions and happenings (for example, 24 Stunden at Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal, Germany in June 1965), where Beuys would set up a stage and perform actions on it.

flag, a larger horizontal rectangle on the lowest half and a square on the top left (which encases a star) followed by a medium sized rectangle on the right, echoed the rectilinear aspect of the room and its whiteness since the flag's red, blue and white colors had been omitted. On the opposing white walls framing the stage, Leppe had stenciled two phrases between neon tubes. On the left side, the phrase was divided into two bands connected at the top by a black line, and stated:

la bandera ----- de Chile:  
superficie blanca

(the flag-----of Chile:  
white surface)

And on the right wall,

la bandera de Chile:  
superficie transparente

(the flag of Chile:  
transparent surface)

In the back wall, behind the stage and flag, Leppe had stenciled in large black-contoured letters filling the white surface a long paragraph written by Richard. The text read:

“In 1919 in Paris, Marcel Duchamp signals the first antecedent of body art, tonsuring a star on his head. The repetition of Duchamp's act by Leppe in 1979, in Santiago de Chile, formulates a national proposition through the reinsertion of the earlier act in a new artistic enunciation. The quote as an extractive reiteration of an act previously formulated in a unique unit of discourse other and previous in Duchamp, is applied in Leppe not as a literal procedure, but as a corporal one, an inter-textual citation procedure of a part that has not been written but is acting. The quoted is not cited from texts, is not read literally transcribed from a textual support to another, like a passive support, but is instead quoted from the bodies, materially transposed from a corporeal support to another as an active support. The quoting of Duchamp in Leppe exposes the star to its physical attachment of two bodies, bodies of art successive in history; the quotation of Duchamp in Leppe through the duplicative act of the star in the head of the artist, operates the somatic re-edition of a living sign in history.”<sup>985</sup>

The performance started when Leppe entered the gallery dressed in a worker's white shirt and pants and took a seat in front of the hanging mock flag with his back to the viewers who were seated on the gallery's floor. A haircutter proceeded to cut a star shape onto Leppe's scalp, imitating the Duchampian gesture. After the hair was cut,

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<sup>985</sup> My translation. All quotes in the following paragraph come from the videotape.



Leppe sat on the chair for a minute with his back to the audience so that the tonsured star occupied visually the space of the missing star in the mock Chilean flag, and proceeded to turn on the radio and take his seat again. A tape with the recording of Richard's voice was heard, which narrated (or quoted) her own text on the wall, revealing that the latter was only a fragment of a larger text. The rest of it focused on the "reincarnation" of Duchamp's star in the living body of Leppe, a sign that had been "displaced" in its repetition, "transiting" from one history to another. According to Richard, the star used by Duchamp acquired a new meaning in Leppe insofar as it reflected the national "lonely" star of the Chilean flag, which Leppe's body superimposed onto its "discolored" version in the gallery. This juxtaposition allowed Leppe to "synchronize" in his body the "national and cultural dimensions of the present" and to turn his corporeality into a surface that also acted as a "territorial" one. Richard concluded by stating that through the "emblematic inscription" of Duchamp's star into his body, Leppe was positing the traced surface of his corporeality as a surface to be "annexed" by the "joining of two bodies, one singular and the other plural." The last phrase alluded to the body politic as a larger symbolic frame composed of a diversity of actual corporealities that Leppe, like the flag itself, was incarnating.

After Richard's voice disappeared, Leppe turned off the radio and sat still for a moment. He then took from the wooden platform beneath his chair a plastic bag filled with white paint, placing it quickly behind his head as he straightened up in the chair. After a few minutes Leppe squashed the bag so that a violent spurt of white paint hit the transparent flag behind him, dripping on its surface and falling to the ground while oozing down Leppe's head and partially covering his tonsured star. After discarding the bag and staying seated motionless, Leppe took from the wooden board a roll of gauze, which he then cut into strips and began taping to the back of his head forming a cross shape. With his head completely covered with gauze, Leppe took a white roll of canvas, unrolled it on the floor placing adhesive tape on its borders. The artist then moved to the left wall, taped the canvas below the stenciled words, turned the neon on and painted the phrase: "and your colors." Leppe then left the gallery, which resounded with the buzzing sound of the neon dimly illuminating white words completing the stenciled phrase.

Leppe's "Acción de la estrella" not only combined the theoretical and textual nature of art by performing a series of quotes within quotes, but also explored the act of repeating as one of identity formation. The act of citation as a form of differed repetition was not only embodied in the evident quote of Duchamp's star tonsure. It was also present in Richard's discursive duplication in two textual forms, visual and aural, in the anticipation of the action and the duplication of it, as well as in the iterated symbols of star and flag inscribed in words, bodies, and objects, or even in the stencil itself as duplicate of an original matrix. If the performance duplicated Duchamp's tonsure with a sixty year difference and, as mentioned by Richard, translated the gesture from one temporal and spatial context to another, it re-signified the tonsure act as one of 'marking' the body with a highly charged symbol which had more than just emblematic national connotations. For the cut and mark invoked not only tattooing practices (in Chile, particularly associated with the Ona and Yagan ethnic groups), but also images of branding associated with the Holocaust, an "Auschwitz effect" to quote Lihn again,

which gave ‘body’ to ethnicity, religion, and other forms of identity.<sup>986</sup> More than an avant-garde gesture, the Duchampian referent used by Leppe reenacted other forms of violently marking the body.

The physical and visual inscription of the star into Leppe’s densely dark hair acted as a stark mark connected to graphic practices. As the artist’s body provided a surface for the cut or incision to be made, it reflected the tracing gesture of engraving and its eventual duplicates. Using a graphic language yet without alluding to a translation of mediums, Richard stated in 1980 that the Duchampian star was a “cultural matrix” which Leppe was “editing” in his action as a ‘chalcographed’ emblem.<sup>987</sup> By becoming a physical support for art, supplanting the canvas, page, or metal plate with his own body, as was noted not only by Richard but by Galaz and Ivelic as well, Leppe was translating in a fluid way different signs, mediums, and forms of corporeality. But if the copy and the inscription implied in graphic practices were thus indirectly quoted, the compulsion to repeat guiding the performance further invoked the need to assert and confirm a nationalistic identity. That the star of Duchamp was re-inscribed by Leppe physically and symbolically as the star of the Chilean flag, suggested a particular national narrative in which the body politic was understood as a larger social surface connected to the nation state. Like the artist’s body or a graphic matrix, the flag itself was a “white surface” as stated in the walls, an “empty” space for social and nationalistic inscriptions.

The symbolism of the flag and star was specially charged at the time in Chile. Even though independently from its context, a flag stands in symbolically for a nation and thus speaks of a political project of carving out an identity and inscribing a recognizable form within a standardized format that through shapes and colors symbolically speaks of a people and territory, in the Chilean dictatorial context the flag and its “lonely” star had more notorious connotations and uses. Since 1976, the dictatorship had issued a series of advertisements in *El Mercurio* that used symbolic forms and national landmarks to gain popular support.<sup>988</sup> In September 1976, during the celebrations of the national festivities and in relation to the arbitrage of the Beagle islands, advertisements stating “you and your flag united in front of the world” spoke not only of a holiday related to the nation’s independence day, but of the cohesive power stemming from the flag’s symbol in the battle of legitimacy the nation was undergoing.

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<sup>986</sup> This connection is not arbitrary. In the November 1978 symposium of Human Rights celebrated in Chile, the Norwegian ambassador compared the Chilean situation to that of Nazi Germany. See “Con la Europa ocupada por los nazis comparó a Chile orador extranjero,” *El Mercurio*, November 24, 1978.

<sup>987</sup> Nelly Richard, “La edición de un signo cutáneo,” *Cuerpo Correccional* (Santiago: Francisco Zegers Editores, 1980), 51. Nevertheless, Richard did not make an explicit graphic association, tying instead the act of editing to the act of writing, a curious contradiction with her earlier anti-writing stance. Speaking of an ‘extra-textual procedure’ involved in the act of quoting, and reading the star as an “asterix” in a corporeal grammar, she then supplemented the textual approach by acknowledging that this was not a text, but the inscription of a “figure” in a “support not written, not spoken, but acted, gesticulated.” Richard, 53. In her reading of Leppe’s actions in 1980 and 1981, Richard was particularly influenced by Kristeva’s ideas on semiotic excess and the role of the body which, curiously, led her to underestimate Freud. She stated, for example, that the physical sign of the star, by the fact of not being a written or spoken sign, “elevated” the corporeal as a “model of communication” above the “linguistic sign.” Richard, 57.

<sup>988</sup> The mountain was a particularly privileged symbol among these.

The subtitle “Chile is you” also spoke of the body politic, defining the nation as a comprehensive reunion of individuals, yet as stated by Althusser this “summon” was ambiguous in its specificity.

When in late 1977, and as a reaction to a resolution made by the United Nations against Chile, Pinochet convoked a national plebiscite to “defend our national dignity and our sovereignty, which demands from us to confront this aggression,”<sup>989</sup> more nationalistic symbols were summoned. The rapidly organized plebiscite was meant to ascertain whether the national population backed Pinochet “in the defense of Chile and reaffirms the legitimacy of the Republic’s government to head with sovereignty our constitutional process, or if it supports the United Nations’ resolution and its pretence to impose on us from the outside our future destiny.”<sup>990</sup> Besides the evident Manichaeism of the statement, the physical ballot that had to be casted also used a territorial and patriotic symbolism to assert its message. The ballot contained the words “yes” and “no” next to two horizontal lines that had to be crossed perpendicularly and a small rectangular shape above them. Above the “yes” supporting Pinochet’s legitimacy claims were the traced black contours of a Chilean flag. Instead, above the negative response was a completely black rectangular field.<sup>991</sup> In a similar manner, in 1980, for the vote on the new Constitution to be rewritten by the regime, the approval slot was juxtaposed to a star, whereas the negative position had an empty circle next to it. In both cases, patriotism was associated with the flag or star, the latter a bright symbol of the future and guidance, whereas the lacking spot, the visual emptiness or black area was left for those who did not support the dictatorial project.

Leppe’s acts of repetition acquired new resonances under the ‘quote’ of national symbols. To repeat the star tonsure, to enact it in the “present” as stated by Richard, was not just to make Duchamp’s gesture travel and be “incarnated” or revived once more in a different context, but it iterated an act of violence in the constitution of identity. If the flag transposes in a symbol the representation of a larger mass of individuals who identify as a group, forming an inclusive “imagined community,” it also stands for the delimitation of who does not belong to that group. The flag has its own borders, and while it attempts to contain the disparate and represent all citizens, it refers indirectly to those who had to be vanquished and separated in order to define the national body. The absence of color in Leppe’s plastic flag removed the symbolic ‘blood’ filling its lower half, presenting its schematic skeleton as a simultaneously empty (or “transparent”) and a charged signifier. Yet, by ‘incarnating’ a portion of the flag, Leppe was re-

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<sup>989</sup> Pinochet, quoted in “S.E. convocó a plebiscito nacional,” *El Mercurio*, December 22, 1977.

<sup>990</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>991</sup> The ballot was reproduced in the press after the plebiscite announcement and the day before the ballots had to be casted, *El Mercurio* published an advertisement where the word “yes” was framed by a rectangle followed by the phrase: “yes to Chile” next to a photograph of Pinochet with a small smiling girl. Below, two columns repeated the approval and patriotic theme: “yes is security, yes is tranquility, yes is family, yes is fatherland.” The advertisement had been supported by the nationalist movement aptly named “11 of September.” See *El Mercurio*, January 3, 1978.

individualizing it, marking the distance between the representation of the nation-state and the living bodies forming it.<sup>992</sup>

The repeated appearance of the flag in Chilean daily life during the dictatorship points to the regime's need to assert on a regular basis the idea of the nation-state as an identity mark, while reproducing a particular concept of the nation and belonging. If the flag is one form of the nation state's self-representation, it reflects the performance of its identity, the repetition of its limits and defining acts in an attempt to constitute a particular being. That these limits are in need of securing in the first place, suggests their transient and fluid nature and the inability of definitely fixing them. The nationalist drive behind the dictatorship's use of the flag and star reflected the problematic nature of the nation-state's borders not only as a physical territory (as seen in the multiple frontier disputes with Argentina, Bolivia, and Peru) and the questioning of the rights to sovereignty advocated by 'other' nations, but to the limits of the body politic as a community of individuals.

These repeated symbols were further associated with patriotism as defining the national subject, and were connected to virile resistance and manly defense (as in the "yes to the fatherland"). In this way, the dictatorship was also articulating a gendered representation of the nation, which connected the flag to patriotic duty and the defense of the territory. One example was an advertisement published in *El Mercurio* during December 1978, to counteract the economic boycott of Chile approved by several American nations. The advertisement featured a male worker in overalls, helmet, and gloves, with legs wide open and firmly planted over a pasture while bearing a serious countenance. The image accompanied the legend: "'And not subjected to foreign rule.'" More than a verse. An unquestioned tradition, the pride of a free people through 150 years of independent history. Chilean, reject the foreign intromission!"<sup>993</sup> The association between the common male laborer, represented in a herculean manner towering over the empty landscape, and the defense of the nation from foreign aggression, reproduced a masculine approach to identity, connecting male brute force and strength in work to patriotic feelings. The legend's first phrase, taken from Ercilla's epic poem, quoted and thus also reiterated the need of national defense, emphasizing the concept of resilience as a 'mark' of the Chilean people throughout the nation's republican life. Nevertheless, in Ercilla's sixteenth century text such resilience was attributed to the native Chileans of the time, in other words, to the foundation of what would become the 'people' and workers of Republican Chile: the Araucanos. The historic inaccuracy of the advertisement and its misplaced quotation, signals another form of corporeal oblivion in the nation, the

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<sup>992</sup> In this aspect I differ in my interpretation of the action from Richard's as stated in *Cuerpo Correccional*. Richard interpreted Leppe's star and his video image as "transforming your [Leppe's] bodily extension into a territorial extension –your body banded with the national territory." By 1980, Richard regarded the artist's body and the actions performed on it as a transposition of the national body, which led to the performance of expiatory acts upon it. This was part of Richard's overarching interpretation of the growing corporeal practices in Chile, which she also saw at work in C.A.D.A. as discussed below. Richard, 53. In the Spanish original, the last phrase is a play with the meaning of the words "abanderado" and "bandera" (flag), the former translating into English as forming part of a group (recognized by a specific flag).

<sup>993</sup> *El Mercurio*, December 2, 1978. In the Spanish original, the summon is made to a male receiver: "Chileno, rechaza la intromisión extranjera!" thus addressing itself to all male nationals.

marginalized Mapuches, who the propagandistic advertisement literally erased from Chilean history.

The violence of tracing and delimiting a national identity was further referenced by Leppe through a medical trope.<sup>994</sup> A surgical ambience was evoked through the use of gauze, the bandaging of the artist's head, the cut star as a wound, the pristine whiteness of Leppe's surgeon-like suit, and the precise, analytical gestures with which each action was performed. These helped invoke the space of the clinic or the "surgical" that, as interpreted by Richard, was echoed in the act of quotation itself insofar as the star as a "graft or transplant" taken from Duchamp left a "scar" on Leppe's body.<sup>995</sup> Yet it could be added to Richard's reading that a body part of the artist was removed, his corporeal unity broken by the appearance of the star as a binding element joining Leppe to Duchamp's gesture. In this sense, the graphing of Duchamp's star onto Leppe's scalp was also a double act of planting and circumcision, a trimming of the seed sown elsewhere, as Richard's "transplant" metaphor indirectly suggested.

As a cut and a physical scar inscribed on the scalp, the tonsure further referred to an act of castration. That the Duchampian gesture had emasculating connotations escaped Richard's interpretation at the time, insofar as she focused instead on the question of the copy, the quote, and the corporeal inscription of an earlier avant-garde gesture within a different historical and geographic context.<sup>996</sup> At the time, Richard privileged a view of Duchamp as an "original" source, a father to whose 'tribe' Leppe belonged, reading this transposition of gestures or signs as a commemorative but also legitimizing act of a fellow kinsman.<sup>997</sup> By quoting Duchamp through a formal gesture and establishing an 'affinity' between them, Leppe was somehow claiming his inheritance in the avant-garde landscape, asserting his belonging to the clan by symbolically performing an act of circumcision.

And yet the cut effectively spoke of a mutilation of the artist's self-image, whether it was that of Duchamp as seen in his portrait or in Leppe's body, bringing other gendered connotations into play. If the head, as stated by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, acts as a displaced signifier for the penis, its trimming would also involve a translated act of laceration that could, symbolically, be applied to the penis as a form of

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<sup>994</sup> A device he continued using throughout the 1980s, as in the video "Las Cantatrices" discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>995</sup> Richard, 55.

<sup>996</sup> This is more surprising in light of the amount of space she dedicated to the notion of the cut in the first two chapters of *Cuerpo Correccional* in relation to gender. Yet at the time of dealing with the Duchampian father, Richard's interpretation is reverential.

<sup>997</sup> For Richard, Leppe's quote was perpetuating "the inaugural mention of the star of Duchamp," thus becoming both a "commemorative" gesture of origins while establishing the "historical continuity of a stellar sign," a sign that had been "inherited and activated in a body of copy having an affinity to the original." Richard, 55. Richard even mentioned Leppe's "tribal" participation in the community of art, a "congregation or confraternity" through which he also asserted the "authority of a preexisting enunciation." Richard, 57.

castration.<sup>998</sup> Insofar as the tonsure enacts a form of carving, it creates a lack where there was fullness, reenacting in a differed manner what Freud described as castration anxiety in the male child: the fantasy of being emasculated by the same-sexed parent for the child's desire towards the parental opposite sex. If completeness is one characteristic of defining identity, by allowing this form of lack to penetrate into their own heads, both Duchamp and Leppe were engaging in what could be read as masochistic act of self-effacement and castration, becoming 'like women' since they would be mutilating their symbolic penises. Duchamp's tonsure, and by extension Leppe's, could be regarded as a "symbolic castration,"<sup>999</sup> challenging traditional modes of representing masculinity and patriarchal authority.

As stated by Richard, the 1979 Chilean tonsure was acting in a different artistic and social context. Leppe's tonsure and self-emasculaton was performed in the frame of the dictatorship whose masculine symbolism pervaded representations of the nation and being Chilean. To tonsure a star onto one's body referencing directly the Chilean flag could be read as form of (poetic) desecration, a lowering of a national symbol and a form of feminization through the concept of castration. Furthermore, the notion of defilement was related to the emphasis given by Leppe to hair as an excessive "growth" associated with the head.<sup>1000</sup> Though close to the cranium, hair does not seem to form a part of it symbolically and physically. Since hair grows in the body even after death, like nails, it is an uncontrolled (natural) extension of the corporeal, extending the 'limits' of the head. If hair can be considered a form of protection, it is also a grotesque form of corporeality and growth which exceeds consciousness and life itself.

The importance given to a bodily extension was also present in Duchamp's pipe, visible in the photograph used by Leppe in the exhibition's advertisements. But if the pipe in Duchamp could suggest another transposition of the phallus,<sup>1001</sup> both mocking and reinforcing patriarchal symbols while asserting the artist's position as an avant-garde 'father,' Leppe's tonsure denied the restitution of the phallic as a contained, unified form. To the hair as a physical element that needs control, Leppe added the explosion of the

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<sup>998</sup> As mentioned in Chapter Two, Freud described the castration anxiety experienced by the male child as a fantasy stemming from his realization, during the phallic stage, of gender difference by discovering that women do not have penises. The fear of the child, forming part of Freud's Oedipus complex, is that the father will remove his penis as a result of his developing desire to possess his mother (the opposite sex). Castration thus becomes an imagined act of castigation for a still unfulfilled act, leading to the repression of the desire for the mother.

<sup>999</sup> Giovanna Zapperi, "Duchamp's Tonsure: Towards an alternate masculinity," *Oxford Art Journal*, no. 30 (2007): 298-303. Zapperi also refers to how Duchamp's tonsure was performed only a few years after Freud was developing his ideas on castration anxiety.

<sup>1000</sup> In the chapter titled "Tzanck Check and Other Related Works by Marcel Duchamp," Peter Read traces Duchamp's "fascination with hair," a fascination that Leppe shared insofar in a work of 1980 and as late as 2000, he would produce a large-scale mountain of cut hair resembling the hill in Santiago where a sculpture of the Virgin Mary is located. See Peter Read, in *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century*, Rudolf E. Kuenzli and Francis M. Nauman, eds. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989), 95-105.

<sup>1001</sup> Read cites Freud's assertion in *The Interpretation of Dreams* that "[t]o represent castration symbolically, the dreamwork makes use of baldness, hair-cutting, falling out of teeth and decapitation." Freud, quoted in Read, 95.

bag filled with paint, which alluded to an eruption of corporeal excess. As the white paint exploded in an orgasmic stutter on top of the hanging flag, it defiled symbolically the “transparent” national emblem. If the amorphous blob of paint could be related to ejaculation, this was of a masturbatory, self-induced type. Such narcissism, a term often used in relation to Leppe’s self-referencing works, equally suggested the physical fulfillment of a desire and ambivalence towards the masculine images associated with the national self. The ejaculatory gesture proposed a disruption of boundaries ranging from those of the body to those of the self and ‘proper’ behavior,<sup>1002</sup> erupting as an unformed (or ‘informe’) mass that stained what was an otherwise strictly geometrical formation. The juxtaposition of the sudden explosive liquid contained in a limp bag to the crisp contours of the Chilean flag also invoked the maternal breast producing another corporeal fluid that overflows bodily boundaries. The combination of the flag with the corporeal was not merely an opposition between a social representation and the individual, or order set against disorder, but pointed to the production from within (the body, the body politic) of both the undefined and the fluid, as well as the rational and contained. The fatherland was at the same time a motherland, phallus and breast, its gender undecided.

If Duchamp stood as a symbolic father for the Chilean conceptual artists, as acknowledged even by Richard, in the transposition and alteration of the original meaning of the tonsure Leppe was also disrupting the former’s Dadaist gesture. For not only was Leppe disordering the nation’s symbols, but altering the meaning and implications of Duchamp’s cozy smoking of the pipe after his self-imposed castrating gesture.<sup>1003</sup> Like a naughty child who imitates yet caricatures the parents, Leppe was also convoking and mocking Duchamp’s clean cut by subjecting it to third-world imitation and transformation, literally ‘staining’ the gesture. Fathers, artistic and politically imposed, were abjected in Leppe’s work, if not symbolically summoned and killed.

The correlation established by Leppe between national symbols and body politic, and the inversion of hierarchy performed with them, was also seen in the performative works of Elías Adasme that same year. In December 1979, Adasme, who had been working in graphic art and participating since 1978 in several graphic exhibitions,<sup>1004</sup> took the nation’s official map (with all the newly acquired and disputed territories, including the Antarctic) and subjected it to a series of corporeal relations and physical emplacements. On December 16, Adasme went to the new subway station of El Salvador in Providencia and hung a long map of Chile on one of the station’s pole signs with leather straps.<sup>1005</sup> Wearing only his pants, Adasme then hung himself, head down, from

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<sup>1002</sup> While Vito Acconci’s “Seedbed” of 1972 might be counted as a predecessor to Leppe’s work, Acconci’s ejaculatory and masturbatory gestures are implied and not visually confirmed by the viewers (or historians reading his work), becoming in this sense symbolic as well.

<sup>1003</sup> Perhaps the pipe can be read as another form of narcissism in Duchamp’s case.

<sup>1004</sup> Adasme had studied art at the University of Chile. After his graduation, he participated in a two-person show at CAL in June-July 1978 and continued participating in several contests throughout the early 1980s.

<sup>1005</sup> Line 2 of the subway, crossing the first line, began functioning in March 1977. Work for an extension of Line 1 to reach into the ‘upper’ zones of the capital, began in October 1978, connecting downtown Santiago with the Military School.

the other pole, where he was photographed (fig. 5.3).<sup>1006</sup> The same action was repeated in other locations, such as the artist's studio and his bedroom, where he hung head down from the door's threshold next to a Chilean map, or appeared standing against a black wall, nude, with his back to the viewer and a map of Chile projected onto his body. A fourth photograph was taken of Adasme facing the viewer with the word "Chile" inscribed on his chest while the map next to him presented the same word crossed out. Reproductions of the photographs were arranged in a four part grid, printed in black and white, and pasted as posters on the streets of Santiago and other public buildings (such as libraries and universities) between late December and the beginning of 1980. The time of permanence of the posters on the streets was counted and recorded, sometimes lasting only a few minutes.

The work, titled "A Chile" (To Chile), gave both body to the territory and "territorialized" the body of the artist.<sup>1007</sup> As he hung from thresholds and poles, or stood with the map graphically inscribed on his skin, Adasme's body seemed to duplicate in size and length that of the map, his swaying and curving corporeality recalling the undulating curves of the Chilean territory's borders. In the photograph of the completely nude artist, standing rigidly with his arms close to the sides of his body, the map's rectangular frame matched at parts his own contours, the Chilean territory becoming almost a curvilinear duplicate of the artist's spine starting at his nape and ending below his buttocks, with the southern division of the territory into continental parts and long column of islands resembling the verticality of his legs. The inscription in capitalized letters of the words "MAP OF CHILE" in both the maps and one of Adasme's standing photographs, reasserted visually the parallel between two masses or forms of corporeality and their identification through verbal language.

The geopolitical map presented by Adasme was of the type used at schools or hung in public offices as a didactic backdrop and a nationalist reminder.<sup>1008</sup> In such contemporary geopolitical maps a particular location associated with a nation-state is presented and symbolized, requiring both words and images (particularly lines) to represent it as a whole. Through its contours and signaled locations (such as: this is a "map of Chile" and not of China), the map can be seen as an attempt to create a unified

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<sup>1006</sup> Panels 2 and 3 of the work "A Chile" are published in Gerardo Mosquera, ed., *Copiar el Edén. Arte Reciente en Chile/Copying Eden. Recent Art in Chile* (Santiago: Ediciones y Publicaciones Puro Chile, 2006), in pages 174 and 175. Panel 1 is published in *Chile Arte Actual*, in page 193. There is also documentation in *Copiar el Edén* of Adasme's following "diffusion" or intervention in the streets, with photographs of the artist pasting the images, in page 172.

<sup>1007</sup> Josefina de la Maza, in the section on Elías Adasme in *Copiar el Edén*, 172. *Copiar el Edén* attempts to bridge the gap between the history of the Chilean avant-gardes and contemporary art in Chile, yet does so by providing a brief glimpse into over a hundred different artists, presenting their most well-known works without much contextualization, except for the introductory text by Mosquera. Each artist is presented with a brief commentary on the work illustrated, as in the case of Adasme.

<sup>1008</sup> High school's educational programs were revised in 1977 by the Ministry of Education, particularly the course on History and Geography of Chile. From April onwards it was established that this course would focus on a periodical recounting of the fatherland's history since the sixteenth century, effectively eliminating from national histories those of the natives unless seen under the lens of colonialism. See, "Revisión a programas de educación media," *El Mercurio*, April 24, 1977.



and integral vision of a territory, translating into a flat area what is an otherwise curved, three dimensional, and disparate surface. This vision is presented from a god-like height and the contours of the nation objectified through measurements that are scaled down to fit a human environment. The official map of Chile used by Adasme established a clear North-South orientation following the Mercator arrangement, including the thirteen recently renamed regions composing Chile, starting with number one in the north and ending in the Antarctic continent with number thirteen. The capital instead, occupied its own distinct space as an independent region: “metropolitan,”<sup>1009</sup> asserting its independent and central role in the nation.

This type of nation-state map tacitly makes a connection between the people living within the boundaries of the territory and the place itself as a binding form of identity. Maps assert visually the existence of a ‘homeland,’ which all those living within its borders share. Such a tracing of identity homogenizes the differences both within (ethnicities, races, genders) and without (different nationalities), creating an apparently cohesive whole. The Chilean dictatorship made such a nationalistic claim of belonging to a place when it asserted that in Chile there were no Indians but only Chileans,<sup>1010</sup> swiping out ethnic differences from the nation’s surface. To be Chilean and to belong to the territory demarcated as the homeland was to be the same.

If Adasme created in his work a parallel between the living body of the artist and the contours of the nation, establishing both as frames of identity, he was also disrupting this analogy. By inverting the position of his body, distorting its ‘normal’ upright position as he hanged upside down next to the maps, Adasme was inverting its order and orientation, ‘lowering’ the hierarchical place assigned to the head. This inversion signaled a discrepancy between the ‘upright’ map and the individual body within its suggested borders, invoking a medieval image of the fool and a world turned upside down. The real, fleshy body of the artist ‘contained’ within the schematic contours of the territory as traced in the map, not only created a contradiction between the geopolitical frame as an objective, scientific mode of defining identity and the bodies making up the concept of the ‘nation,’ but at the same time it suggested that the space within was one of carnivalesque disorder and difference.

While pointing to the convention of assigning to the “north” the uppermost position in the map, Adasme was signaling the socially constructed nature of such forms of national representation as well as their ‘imagined’ character.<sup>1011</sup> In this sense, the map

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<sup>1009</sup> The regions’ names were published in *El Mercurio* on October 11, 1978. The new designations were part of an effort from the dictatorship to establish clear regional boundaries.

<sup>1010</sup> The statement was issued by the Minister of Agriculture, Alfonso Marquéz de la Plata: “In Chile there are no indigenous people; everybody is Chilean.” The statement was part of a dispute started in 1977, exploding in 1978 and extending for several years, regarding the expropriation of Mapuche lands and their reorganization by the government. The Mapuches were given “titles of dominion” which effectively reduced the actual lands they owned, and had lived and worked in, for centuries. The Minister explained the actions by stating that the dominion titles were meant to “integrate them in a definite manner to Chileanness with the same rights and responsibilities as the rest of the population.” See “Mapuches, ¿la hora de extinguirse?” *Revista Hoy*, September 13-19, 1978, 29.

<sup>1011</sup> Doreen B. Massey has explicitly made the assertion that maps are not only social products, but that they reflect the power of their makers. For a good collection of essays on geography and power relations, see Doreen B. Massey, John Allen, Philip Sarre, eds., *Human Geography Today* (UK and Malden, MA:

was envisioned by Adasme as a ‘space of representation’ or ‘conceived space,’ a term used by Henri Lefebvre to distinguish between images and constructs of a space from its physical or material characteristics (“perceived space”), and how it is actually lived, experienced, and transformed by human beings (“lived space”).<sup>1012</sup> While my own characterization of Lefebvre’s trialectic of space is simplified, it aims to point to the gap formed between maps presented as objective rationalizations of space and the actual practices and lived experience of them. Adasme’s body was not merely ‘territorialized’ in the sense of given a specific Chilean character through the use of a particular map, but the act of defining identity through the connection created between place and abstract graphic circumscription of space was questioned. Adasme’s varied positioning of his own body within and without the map, as well as the map’s inscription and physical relation to his body with all its symbolic and imagined connotations, invited to a more complex reading of nationality, identity, and placement that pointed to the discrepancies and disjunctions among them.

Adasme’s choice of the subway entrance and sign in one of the renovated ‘uptown’ sectors of the capital for the only outdoors photograph of the series is significant for several reasons. Not only did the capital act as the ground in which the action was effectively situated, the ‘center’ of Chile acting as a frame for the work and specifying its actual physical location (using Lefebvre’s terminology, acting as ‘perceived’ space), just like the map invoked the overarching representation of the nation (or ‘conceived’ space). It also pointed to a specific change in the Chilean landscape associated with the growing and modernizing capital enacted by the dictatorship (the ‘lived’ space of Lefebvre). The economic bonanza experienced by the nation as a partial result of the liberal policies installed by the government, were symbolized by the expanding subway and its updated form of transportation and, as seen in the photograph, the varied forms of public advertisement in the forms of large scale billboards mounted on apartments’ roofs. The “HONDA automobiles” sign next to Adasme’s feet was literally a sign of the Chilean economic expansion to foreign markets, one of the few forms of exterior contact allowed by the dictatorship. The irony found in the juxtaposition of the subway sign to the automobile company’s resided not only in the contradictory forms of transportation each promoted (public versus private), but in the discursive nature shared by the signs, their similarity as forms of propaganda and advertisement. These even included the map, which appeared in the photograph almost up for sale like the rest of the urban landscape.<sup>1013</sup>

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Blackwell, 1999). See also the introduction by Denis Cosgrove, in Denis Cosgrove, ed., *Mappings* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 1-23.

<sup>1012</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991).

<sup>1013</sup> The subway’s expansion had not only changed the surface and underground aspect of the city, through its construction process and the replacement of buses for another form of transportation, altering habits of mobilization through the city’s center, but it had also engaged in a cultural campaign aimed at beautifying and improving the cultural knowledge of the nation. In an attempt to bring art to the public, the subway had started in March 1977 a series of exhibitions of European “masterpieces” in the form of poster reproductions. See the article “El metro difunde la pintura,” *El Mercurio*, March 22, 1977.

The specific location chosen by Adasme was also important in terms of the symbolism found in the name of the station. “Salvador” (Savior) referred not merely to the hospital located in the station’s neighborhood but also to Christ,<sup>1014</sup> finding its echo in the tortured-looking body of the hanging Adasme, a modern bearded Saint Peter of sorts.<sup>1015</sup> To the signs of growing capitalism and to the graphic symbol of the nation, Adasme opposed the body in pain, a body unable to move, disoriented in spite of the map.<sup>1016</sup> Against a changing cityscape, Adasme posited the body as a site of memory, enacting the location and its given historic meanings through a painful performance of the site’s name, ‘savior.’ The allusion to other bodies contained within the territory of Chile, from those ill to those executed, tortured, and displaced, signaled the multiple corporealities making up the notion of the nation-state, and how the idea of its homogeneity was given physical reality through the political and physical imposition of boundaries.

The apostolic reference involved in Adasme’s inverted and martyred body was further connected to the new proselytizing mission of the Chilean vanguards and the expansion of artistic actions to the lived environment. Both in the performance of the action and in its last portion consisting of pasting the action’s reproductions onto walls, Adasme was inserting his work into the visual economy of the cityscape, mixing his own posters with the signs of commercial products. Incorporating the city as a site for his work and as a body to be intervened, Adasme was materializing the seminar’s emphasis on the artist working ‘with’ and ‘on’ the social reality he or she was living in. Adasme was adamant in a questionnaire on art criticism published in *Revista CAL* on the active role of the artist of the present, who had to “assume his practice, in terms of historic accusation and in terms of the art system,” since they were living in an “emergency situation.”<sup>1017</sup> But for Adasme, the socio-historical situation of the nation had not merely to be assumed: the limits of artistic action had to be “extended” as well.<sup>1018</sup> That this extension took the form of operating in the city by mixing the private and the public realms by means of the actions and photographs, through placement, and the artist’s own nudity, suggested a new possible path to be taken by artist where the conceived, perceived, and lived spaces were conjoined in an intimate relationship.

This extension towards an active artistic stance reached its peak in October 1980, when Adasme walked around the crowded Paseo Ahumada handing out printed copies of

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<sup>1014</sup> The hospital was created in 1872 under the name “del Salvador” (of the Savior), with lands bought from the Catholic Church.

<sup>1015</sup> In 1991, Adasme made a performance titled “Estudio histórico para una cruz y ficción” (Historical study for a cross and fiction) in the Liga de Arte de San Juan, Puerto Rico, involving his mock crucifixion. I will analyze the cross imagery further in the next chapter in the context of Rosenfeld and Mezza’s videos.

<sup>1016</sup> The work generated controversy when it was exhibited in 1980 at the Gráfica Centenario (Centennial Graphics) in the Museum of Fine Arts. For a description see “Gráfica polémica,” *La Bicicleta*, no. 8 (November-December 1980): 6.

<sup>1017</sup> Elías Adasme, in “La crítica de arte en Chile,” *Revista CAL*, no. 3 (August 1979): 7-8.

<sup>1018</sup> In the interview, Adasme also spoke of “breaking, in this way, the tradition of centuries, in which the art situation got resolved within art.” Adasme, “La crítica de arte en Chile,” 8.

one of the performance's photographs (the artist's back with the map projected on his skin), while wearing a t-shirt stating the slogan; "el arte debe ser ineludible" (Art must be unavoidable). Stopped by policemen, the artist was quickly arrested and released. The pamphlet also contained a text that stated: "from the dismembered and hierarchical geography of South America, we say art should be unavoidable," adding that in a time of negation where the inhabited space was turned into one of "non-belonging," art should be "a dynamic and effective action capable of affecting reality."<sup>1019</sup> Regarded by the artist as "an act of reevaluating the landscape,"<sup>1020</sup> the artistic action was perceived as a way to "intervene common spaces, the inverted scene, and the confrontation of collective signs: the assault of reality through art."<sup>1021</sup> The phrase "inversión de escena" (inverted scene) was a reference to a 1979 work of the C.A.D.A. group discussed below, which signals the change in artistic practices that occurred between the last months of 1979 and the beginning of the 1980s as a group of artists were reclaiming their rights to the city using guerrilla-like techniques.

Such an inscriptive gesture of actions performed in the social fabric found its explanation in Adasme's formulation of graphic art in 1980. Adasme stated then that "graphing" should not merely be understood under traditional modes of printmaking, but as a "making visible ideas through a "tracing" that operates as the instrumentalization of these means [of current mass communication], which determine its status as art before the epoch in which it is inscribed."<sup>1022</sup> Graphic practices were being redefined as larger forms of social inscriptions with a conceptual base, tracings making visible ideas through mediums such as photography or written texts. The graphic mark was a trace attuned to its own time and modes of representation, a trace that made visible the present, spoke its language, and yet 'assaulted' its structures through a physical intervention. Marking the landscape in an extended sense, from the lived surroundings to their visual representation as modes of constructing identity, became from 1979 onwards a guiding principle in the works of the Chilean conceptual artists.

The Christian symbolism present in Adasme's work, its relation to the landscape, and dependency on a graphic support (physical and theoretical) was even more marked in the last exhibition of the year at Galería CAL. The show joined Altamirano, Leppe, and Dittborn around the work of the poet Raúl Zurita, who had recently published his first book titled *Purgatorio* (Purgatory). As the title suggests, the poetic work was a tribute to

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<sup>1019</sup> The full text can be read in Adasme's webpage. See Elías Adasme, "El arte debe ser ineludible," Elías Adasme, October 1980, <http://www.adasme.net/Ineludible.html> (last accessed April 3, 2010). A part of the text was reproduced by the critic Víctor Carvacho when he reviewed the Segundo Encuentro de Artistas Jóvenes at the Instituto Cultural de Las Condes in November 1980, where Adasme presented the text along with photographs. See Víctor Carvacho, "Segundo encuentro de jóvenes artistas," *La Nación*, November 19, 1980.

<sup>1020</sup> Adasme, "El arte debe ser ineludible."

<sup>1021</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1022</sup> Elías Adasme, interviewed in "¿Qué pasa con el grabado en Chile?," *La Tercera*, May 25, 1980. The article's title (What is happening with printing in Chile) is telling of the perception coming from Chilean art critics that something was changing in the approach to printing practices.

Dante, yet it was deeply enmeshed in describing the Chilean current landscape as one of an in-between place, half way of heaven and earth, a limit within itself.

### 5.3. The Limits of the Chilean Landscape: Illuminating Raúl Zurita's Purgatory

Written between 1970 and 1977, Zurita's *Purgatorio* was a poem of epic proportions which included more than literary text.<sup>1023</sup> Framing the book on the cover was a photograph of an extreme close-up of Zurita's face exposing his burnt cheek, exhibiting the scar left after the poet had thrown acid to his face as gesture of extreme corporeal agony associated with the suffering of the nation.<sup>1024</sup> The back of the book in turn was framed by an encephalogram of the poet taken at the Psychiatric Institute that Zurita was regularly visiting at the time, a graphic representation of the brain's activity mentioned halfway through the poem in a reproduced letter from the doctor treating him. Inside the book, and following the title of the work, a dedication, and the title of the first chapter, was an identity card photograph of Zurita with the stenciled Latin legend "EGO SUM" (I am) followed in the next page with a handwritten paragraph written by a prostitute, stating her name, "Raquel," and how she had "lost the way." Below was a stenciled legend stating "QUI SUM" (what I am).<sup>1025</sup> From beginning to end, the poem was proposed as a large collage composed of fragments, inter-texts, and liminal states. Zurita's choice of the female prostitute to identify himself, the inclusion of a tracing of his brain's activities, and the scar on his cheek, all referenced extreme states of marginality and physical limits: prostitution (and with it, poverty and the feminine within a patriarchal society), psychosis or other mental illnesses, and (self-inflicted) torture.<sup>1026</sup> The image of purgatory being constructed was one of borderline states and places, whether social, mental, or physical.

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<sup>1023</sup> In the exhibition "Recreando a Goya," Zurita had handed out a text asking the question "which are the supports?" followed by the statement: "Not anymore a sheet of paper not a photograph not a tape of cinema or video not even an act. Everything that remains of life, that is the support... The support is our own objectified life... because through it the landscape gets narrated." Quoted in Robert Neustadt, *CADA DIA: la creación de un arte social* (Santiago: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2001), 29.

<sup>1024</sup> In October, 1979, in the context of an exhibition of paintings by Juan Domingo Dávila, Zurita had cut with face with a razor and then proceeded to masturbate in front of the works. *El Mercurio* described the action as "an aberrant spectacle of onanist character." See the article "Polémicas origina arte que incluye carne descompuesta," *El Mercurio*, November 24, 1979. An interesting photograph by Raúl Montoya in the article by Ascanio Cavallo, "Un "arte extremo"," *Revista Hoy*, December 5-11, 1979, 38-39, shows the hand of the interviewer holding a photograph of Zurita's original cut with the poet smoking behind it.

<sup>1025</sup> All the following references to the text are taken from Raúl Zurita, *Purgatorio* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1979). There are also images of schematic fish in profile and axial diagrams interspersed with the text. The Christian symbolism is pervasive.

<sup>1026</sup> The photographs, images, and texts framing the poem are telling not only in terms of their relationship with the book's content and its title, but also with the mode of action taken by the collective artists group Zurita formed part of since 1979: Colectivo Acciones de Arte, C.A.D.A. (Art Actions Collective) discussed in the next section. These three strands formed part of the basis of C.A.D.A.'s identification with the marginal in society, the social outcasts, and the forgotten.

Though Zurita's poem was inspired by Dante's *Divine Comedy*,<sup>1027</sup> such a frame was deconstructed into a fragmented appearance. With changes in voice (from male to female and back), a broken off and often free-flowing style marked by cuts and punctures in its structure, and a charged yet cryptic language filled with religious symbolism, the work was praised at the time by conservative and liberal critics alike as a modern (and later, post-modern) 'masterpiece.' In its subject matter, the work shifted from the personal to the surrounding psycho-social environment, placing the Christian concept of "purgatory" as a physical (and in Dante, geographical) location where souls await their entrance into heaven as they purge themselves through torture (using fire among other forms of bodily purification) in the midst of the Chilean landscape. References to Chilean landmarks abound in Zurita's text: most notably, the Atacama Desert in the north, the green pastures of the central valley, and the "pampas" or plains of the Patagonia in the south, which mark three distinct chapters. But these landscapes were converted in Zurita's poem into desolate lands of penance and pain, physical and psychological torment, inhabited by cows,<sup>1028</sup> prostitutes, and poets, translating the Christian symbol into a known everyday environment.

Three artists were invited by Galería CAL at the end of 1979 to illustrate the poem in an exhibition. Altamirano, Dittborn, and Leppe each presented installations which, like a contemporary reinterpretation of a medieval manuscript, 'illuminated' or, as stated in the title of the exhibition, "visualized" the text.<sup>1029</sup> These were spread out on walls and floor, while a dim light with a buzzing sound coming from neon tubes illuminated the room. The poems were heard in the background, reproduced in a monotonous manner through a recorder.<sup>1030</sup> Though each artist presented a different amount of works in a variety of personal styles (Altamirano only presented one, yet in the form of a triptych) and some appeared as literal transcriptions of Zurita's symbolism, there were others that signaled an approach to the concept of marginality that came to permeate the Chilean conceptual works of the early 1980s.

Altamirano's entry, "Me he aborrecido tanto estos años" (I have abhorred myself so much these years) of 1979 (fig. 5.4), was composed of four parts.<sup>1031</sup> The first three

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<sup>1027</sup> Zurita's poem became the first part of a trilogy: Purgatorio, Anteparaíso (before-paradise), and Vida Nueva (New Life).

<sup>1028</sup> "Vaca Sagrada" (Sacred Cow) is a title from one of the novels by Diamela Eltit, the wife of Zurita at the time and also a member of C.A.D.A.

<sup>1029</sup> Dittborn's influence is evidenced in this reference to a "visualization," which quotes V.I.S.U.A.L.'s strategies. The three artists appear smiling together next to Altamirano's installation in a photograph by Hugo Donoso published in the article by Luisa Ulibarri, "Purgatorio. Más allá del infierno," *Revista Ercilla*, January 1980, 39-40.

<sup>1030</sup> The exhibition took place in the middle of Santiago's summer and, lacking any air conditioning and being located in a cramped half-subterranean room, the interior was extremely hot. A critic describing the location spoke of the viewers as "penitents" who had to endure not only the heat but also the images, as well as the catalogue with a text by Richard. See Ulibarri, "Purgatorio. Más cerca del infierno," 39.

<sup>1031</sup> Reproductions of the work can be seen in several articles of the time, for example in "Purgatorio con luces de neon," *Revista Hoy*, January 23-29, 1980, in page 42, where Altamirano is shown placing some paper in the bucket. The work was reinstalled and photographed for the retrospective exhibition of

consisted of large white vertical panels with an enlarged photocopy of Zurita's portrait found inside the book. The portrait was slightly altered in each case, the image turning out of focus from left to right and broken in half at the far right. On top of each image and crossing Zurita's forehead was the complete Latin phrase "ego sum qui sum," repeated three times. Each portrait was also covered over with a transparent plastic, one in a crossed-out gesture and the others in horizontal and diagonal lines. Below each portrait was another typed legend, this time reproducing in three parts the prostitute's self-confession in a typed text printed onto plastic sheets. In front of the triptych was a rectangular tin bucket filled with water where three reproductions on paper of Zurita's face and text were floating, and slowly decomposing. On the borders of the bucket and hand painted in white letters was the beginning phrase of Zurita's poem: "I have abhorred myself so much."

The work established a connection between the vertical effigy of the poet and his reproduced image swimming in the water, through repetition and by way of their incomplete and transforming state. By appearing decomposing, fragmented, sliding, and its precision diminished through the act of reproduction, the portrait of the author as a sign of identity was exposed as a fallacy. For the iteration of the self's image, accompanied by the cadence of the Latin phrase's own repetitive mode, "I am what I am," suggested a disjunction between the discursive assertion of the self's existence and individuality, the need to repeat and confirm through this act the subject's identity, and the serialization and lack of authenticity of any representation. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the artist's face with the woman's discursive self-presentation, "My name is Raquel, I have been in the job for many years/I find myself in the middle of my life/ I lost my way," created a gap and an affinity between the two. Gender difference was asserted and eschewed, the poet's affirmation of identity through words and image disrupted by the appearance of the female voice assuming or disputing this identification.

Dittborn's works also assumed the marginal as a form of identification.<sup>1032</sup> Continuing with the themes of delinquency, anonymity, and social marginality seen in his earlier works, Dittborn presented rough and stained canvases with photocopied delinquent portraits. "Me llamo Raquel" took as its main subject the portrait of a female delinquent which had been translated mechanically onto the naked canvas in a series of black tones and was juxtaposed to smaller pieces of photographic paper. The cheek of the woman was stained in red acrylic, the rest of the face in white. Black painted words in a "rudimentary calligraphy"<sup>1033</sup> imitating a child's script spelled out the title and accompanied the portrait, creating an identification between the two female subjects, Zurita's prostitute (and by metonymical relation, the poet) and the 'real' prostitute captured and photographed by the police. A similar disposition was found in "Mis amigos

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Altamirano's works in 2007 and can be seen in the catalogue *Altamirano. Obra Completa*, in pages 176-179.

<sup>1032</sup> Dittborn presented four works: "Pampas," "Mis amigos creen que estoy mala," "Me llamo Raquel," and "Yo soy la mancha."

<sup>1033</sup> Waldemar Sommer, "Por caminos de purgatorio," *El Mercurio*, January 27, 1980. The relation between the child's script and the primitive has already been pointed out in Chapter Three as a device that from 1978 onwards became associated by Dittborn with female prostitution as a fall from grace.

creen que estoy muy mala” (My friends think that I am very bad) of 1979 (fig. 5.5), a work on cardboard where the made up portrait of a woman with plucked out eyebrows was framed by a large rectangle, one cheek marked with a white patch of paint, her face surrounded by irregular red painted marks.<sup>1034</sup> Below her, the title referenced Zurita’s change of voice from male to female in the poem and the burnt cheek, as it stated: “my friends think I am bad because I burnt my cheek.” The white patch covering the woman’s left cheek operated as both a bandage healing and hiding a wound and as an artificial make-up, similar to the woman’s dramatically painted eyebrows.

In “Yo soy la mancha” (I am the stain) of 1979 (fig. 5.6), the reference to the landscape as a socially constructed one was made evident.<sup>1035</sup> A large squared canvas made out of roughly sewn sacks had a prominent stain on its surface and a long row of nine photocopied mug shots juxtaposed on the right side. The row extended beyond the borders of the frame and expanded towards the floor, overflowing the confines of the canvas. While the specific reference to the text was Zurita’s passage entitled “Áreas verdes,” where cows populate the green plains along with the cowmen who guide them, the mention to the stain in both artists’ works suggested other identifications. According to Sommer, who reviewed the show, the stain “seemed to symbolize both the animal and the men who, for whatever reasons, marginalize themselves from society,”<sup>1036</sup> an ambiguous statement insofar as it did not consider the socially imposed forms of marginalization associated with delinquency and prostitution. Nevertheless, Sommer’s phrase pointed to the stain as providing a basic form of identification with the marginal: “I am the stain.” The “I” of Dittborn’s title not only referenced the poet’s voice, but each individual in the portraits, as well as the author of the work, suggesting the fluidity of their borders. This was enhanced by the physical stain on the canvas that permeated and became part of its support, enacting a material identification between them.<sup>1037</sup>

Insofar as the stain is an indistinct and irregular shape, referring to a corporeal mark and fluid, it can be considered a physical form of the abject. As the sign of an element belonging to a body and yet expelled from its limits, the stain is the trace and evidence of what has been rejected, removed from the center. As the image of corporeal waste that can defile yet also become sacred (as in Christ’s own sweat and blood), the stain is an ambivalent sign of the corporally marginal. Dittborn’s own resuscitation of the socially deviant turned the men and women’s effigies into saintly figures elevated from their peripheral and anonymous positions only to be reviled again through the staining process. The series of identifications at play in Dittborn’s (and Zurita’s) work suggested a connection between the socially marginal and the body’s excretions as forms of excess,

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<sup>1034</sup> “Mis amigos creen que estoy muy mala” is documented in Richard’s *Margins and Institutions*, in page 92.

<sup>1035</sup> “Yo soy la mancha” is documented in the article by Sommer, “Por caminos de purgatorio.”

<sup>1036</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1037</sup> In “Pampas,” a work on cardboard and wood, the stains were divided in a Trinitarian manner, with three groups of three stains arranged in a row. The only work by Dittborn to reference the landscape directly, it established a relationship between the painted stain and the support that evoked through color and texture the vast and flat emptiness of the southern plains. In Chapter Six more will be said about this relation in connection to Dittborn’s videos of the early 1980s.



repudiated and yet also forming part of the social body, necessary for the definition of order and its opposite.

Leppe instead presented eight works which referred in a more direct manner to the landscape through their titles, such as “Áreas verdes” (Green areas) or “Desierto de Atacama” (Atacama Desert), all taken directly from Zurita’s poem and its subtitles. Most of the works were re-adaptations of older strategies and imagery: transparent acrylic cubes withholding organic and inorganic objects, as in “Áreas verdes” imprisoned lamb skin recalling the “agnus dei” or sacrificial lamb of the Christian god (and Parra’s 1977 work in the “Imbunches” show). Among the works that recreated the landscape was “Desierto de Atacama,” a series of transparent plastic bags filled with lime arranged on the floor as lumps or bodies evoking both the aridness of the desert and death.

Instead, the work “Mi mejilla es el cielo estrellado” (Mi cheek is the starry sky) of 1979 (fig. 5.7), created a translation of the landscape that turned the public personal and the shared Christian symbol into a sign of marginality.<sup>1038</sup> The work consisted of a wooden ladder where each step was covered and roughly taped with gauze, two bluish neon lights framing the staircase on the sides. At the top of the ladder, a small plaque had been installed with the commemorative words taken from the poem: “My cheek is the starry sky and the brothels of Chile.”<sup>1039</sup> While most reviewers criticized the directness of the ladder’s symbolism,<sup>1040</sup> insofar as it created a literal stairway to heaven (or its reference in the text), the connection between starry sky and brothels suggested a different type of landscape and purgatory mountain. This was one where the natural met the socially constructed, where nighttime became an avenue towards carnal desire and the wolves’ dark den. Even though the ladder was illuminated and suggested heavenly associations, and was thus connected to Dante’s description of purgatory as a leveled mountain, the lights were neutral and industrial, and the path so illuminated led nowhere. Ascension as a form of spiritual transcendence was denied, while the materiality of life was emphasized. Each step along the way was bandaged, wrapped as a distorted white mound as if each rung would potentially inflict pain or was a phase in a “via crucis.” If, as suggested by Sommer, the bandages related to wounds, they referred back to the cheek of the poet, self-mutilated in an act of contrition, but also of morbid pleasure.

In Zurita’s text, the phrase is found in between the registers formed by the zigzagging lines of the poet’s electro-encephalogram, framed by the words “purgatory” above and “Santa Juana” below. Leppe’s ladder and the reference to the poet’s lacerated cheek connected the evoked mountain landscape with the marginality of the mentally ill, the psychotic, and the schizophrenic rupture. The encephalogram could further be read as the register of the mind’s landscape, a “seismography” and graphic rendering of its hidden electrical activities. As an aid to detect mental and neurological disorders, the encephalogram points to behavioral deviancy and its future disciplining or ordering. If the scar in the poet’s cheek was a break, a bodily rupture producing a stain, the

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<sup>1038</sup> “Mi mejilla es el cielo estrellado” is documented in Richard’s *Margins and Institutions*, in page 92.

<sup>1039</sup> The original word in the text used for brothel is “lupanares,” a term whose etymological origins are found in a Roman brothel found at Pompeii and the Latin word “wolf” (lupus).

<sup>1040</sup> Sommer and Ulibarri among them. Sommer even stated that the staircase as a symbol of ascent seemed “too manifest, even puerile.”

encephalogram was also a mark of rupture, a borderline case, a state of unreality and in-betweenness similar to purgatory.

While Leppe's staircase was read by some critics as a Christian symbol of ascension, the phrase at the top was read by others as "the spiritual and carnal identification with a suffering humanity."<sup>1041</sup> Such an interpretation suggests a deep connection between the social body or body politic and that of the artist, a reading supported by Eduardo Balcells, another member of C.A.D.A., who stated that Zurita's wound pointed to "a painful collective identification (...) a form of graphing the nation in the body."<sup>1042</sup> But while Zurita's work, and in particular his meta-textual actions, can be interpreted as identifications with the wounded social body of the nation and the enactment of a purge, with physical torture as an act of expiation, the works of Altamirano, Dittborn, and Leppe presented in the exhibition conceptually privileged the marginal as a site of social disruption, creating a distance between the body of the artist and the peripheral one.

The distinction is important, for if even Leppe in the first years of the 1980s increasingly incorporated metaphors of corporeal constraint and pain, these were exaggerated performances that on one hand made their artificiality always evident, and on the other did not place the artist solely in the role of victim, but, as stated earlier, also as an aggressor.<sup>1043</sup> But more importantly, the conceptual reworking of marginal imagery marks a divergence in the paths of these artists between the physical reenactment of torture and its metaphorical interpretation as would be seen in the works that C.A.D.A. group was producing at the time.

The landscape proposed by Altamirano, Dittborn, and Leppe in "Visualizaciones" was an eminently corporeal one. The Chilean landscape evoked in Zurita's work was envisioned by the artists as a human geography where placement informed and molded bodies and locations alike. The bodies convoked were inhabitants of the city's margins and society's outskirts, those belonging to society yet marked in distinct spaces (the brothel, the psychiatric institute downtown, the jail),<sup>1044</sup> contained and expelled from its center.<sup>1045</sup> Bodies were in turn treated by the artists as geographical settings, as spatial entities with their own topographies and graphic markers, bodies that were also political

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<sup>1041</sup> Foxley, "Purgatorio con luces de neón," 42.

<sup>1042</sup> Fernando Balcells, "PURGATORIO, obra de Raúl Zurita," *Revista Bravo*, no.2, February 1980.

<sup>1043</sup> As noted in the first chapters, Leppe had since 1974 used corporeal metaphors and referenced body pain, as in "Happening de las gallinas," "El perchero," and "Retrato con hilos," or even in his series of boxes.

<sup>1044</sup> The prison, the psychiatric ward, and the brothel were locations that Michel Foucault termed "other spaces" or "heterotopias." Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 12-27. Heterotopias are "counter-sites," places existing in culture where all other real sites "are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality." Foucault, 24.

<sup>1045</sup> The 'heterotopic' status of spaces for torture should be included in this list. In a reversal of fortunes that may have even impressed Foucault, the center for torture "Tres Alamos," described by the dictatorship as an "ex-camp of detention," was destined by the government to become a center for the rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents. See "Nuevo rostro de los 3 Alamos," *El Mercurio*, July 19, 1977.

spaces and as such not only vulnerable to social markings but capable of agency, like the painted eyebrows of the prostitute.

Margins were summoned and embraced by the artists at CAL as political alternatives in the construction of identity. These were not only reminders of otherness rejected, but signs of the convoluted and fluid edges of identity. If Chile was envisioned as purgatory, an in-between space of torment and pain, the concept of the margin implied in it was also envisioned as a limit that is a point of encounter between the outside and inside. The margin portrayed was never fully outside what the border attempted to demarcate, but present in the map and landscape, not unrepresented but conspicuously incorporated to delimit the map's frontiers. As the margin's line parts and joins, it signals a site that is indefinable in its openness and closeness, marking a site of transit and passage. It is in this sense disorienting and de-familiarizing, and can in its disordering be turned into a productive space.

Yet the assumption that marginality is by itself a model of subversion and resistance is fallacious as well. If the radical elements of inhabiting the in-between become mere effigies of devotion and pass unquestioned, their openness to otherness and their undefined state can also be closed down. My main criticism of Zurita's actions and C.A.D.A.'s work, as well as Altamirano's later treatment of borders, lie on their tendency to reduce otherness to a cipher of subversion without questioning its construction, while assuming that identification with marginality immediately entails a disruptive social act. If the works on view at CAL reflected the distance between social reality and its artistic representation, the question of social action and of the effectiveness of invoking the marginal through art became more poignant as more artists took to the streets and extended the concept of marking to the physical environment. In the section that follows a few works of C.A.D.A. as a group will be analyzed and compared to the individual work produced by Lotty Rosenfeld, one of its members, as pointing to another form of acting in the cityscape, employing the graphic mark, and relating to marginal bodies and spaces. If the artists at CAL had envisioned Chile as a liminal space, for C.A.D.A. the nation was not just purgatory but the margin incarnated.

#### 5.4. Expanding the Limits of Art and the City: C.A.D.A.'s Margins and Lotty Rosenfeld's Via Crucis

C.A.D.A. was a collective group formed in 1979 by the visual artists Lotty Rosenfeld and Juan Castillo, the writers Diamela Eltit and Raúl Zurita, and the sociologist Fernando Balcells (1950).<sup>1046</sup> The group disbanded in 1985, even though Eltit and Rosenfeld continued working together, and Rosenfeld developed a distinct body of work. The group formed to collectively make works that challenged received notions about art and its relation to society, placing an emphasis on the city as a site for political and social transformation while using the available media as a support for art, texts, and documentation. C.A.D.A. was one of the most directly politically engaged groups in the

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<sup>1046</sup> For a good documentation of C.A.D.A.'s actions and interviews with the artists, see Robert Neustadt, *CADA DIA: la creación de un arte social*.

country, and has been recently elevated to the position of “the first historical example of a vanguard Chilean art.”<sup>1047</sup>

The group’s actions were characterized by their accent on marginality and their first work defined the tone for those that followed. Entitled “Para no morir de hambre en el arte” (Not to die of hunger in art), the work took place on October 3, 1979 (fig. 5.8),<sup>1048</sup> and began with the artists filming the handing out of one hundred plastic bags of milk, with the words “1/2 liter of milk” printed on them, to the inhabitants of a shantytown within the capital’s borders, asking them to return the empty bags.<sup>1049</sup> These were collected and sent to artists to work with, while those unused became part of an installation at the gallery Centro Imagen later in October, after all the stages of the work were completed.<sup>1050</sup>

A second portion of the work consisted in the publication of a completely white page in *Revista Hoy*. This part was not fully materialized as conceived by the artists, who had to acquiesce to a recommendation of the magazine for the inclusion of a text written by the collective: “to imagine this page completely white/to imagine this white page as the daily milk to be consumed/to imagine each corner of Chile denied the daily consumption of milk as white pages to be filled.” The third part involved running a tape with a text written by the group recorded in five different languages in front of the headquarters of CEPAL in Santiago.<sup>1051</sup> Titled “No es una aldea” (It is not a Village), the text established the basic parameters and conceptual underpinnings of the group’s actions. Beginning with the statement “it is not a village the place from which we speak, but a place where the landscape as well as the mind and life are spaces to be corrected,”<sup>1052</sup> the text went on to describe Chile as more than a marginal or “forgotten”

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<sup>1047</sup> Nelly Richard, quoted in Neustadt, 15.

<sup>1048</sup> The delivery of the milk at the shantytown is documented in the article “Arte o espectáculo?” *Revista Hoy*, December 26 1979, January 1 1980, page 47, and in Neustadt in pages 126-127, while a photograph of the gallery installation and of the artists at CEPAL can be seen in *Copiar el Edén* in page 233.

<sup>1049</sup> The work was done with the help of a cultural center of the area, Centro Cultural Malaquías Concha, as stated by the group in a collective text. In C.A.D.A., “para no morir de hambre en arte. Colectivo acciones de arte – chile,” *La Bicicleta*, no. 5, (November-December 1979): 22-24. To this day, this collaboration has been overlooked in all texts written on the subject, even though it is one of the few instances that demonstrate the group’s actual involvement with the marginal sectors they were adamantly invoking.

<sup>1050</sup> The installation consisted of an acrylic box placed at the center of the gallery filled on its base with forty unused plastic milk bags, a copy of *Revista Hoy*, and the recording with the text “It is not a village.” As described by Richard, the bags were left there until the milk decomposed, while a printed text on the box stated: “To remain here until our people receive the proper amount of food. To remain here as a symbol in reverse of our deprived social.” Quoted in Richard, *Margins and Institutions*, 55. It is interesting to note that the revised 2007 version of Richard’s text adds a more pluralistic note to the same phrase. Following the sealing of the box, the artists had a discussion with the gallery goers, which included among them from the art world Adasme, Brugnoli, Donoso, Richard, Leppe, Altamirano, Vilches, Alberto Pérez, and from literature Marcela Serrano, Rodrigo Cánovas and Eugenia Brito.

<sup>1051</sup> As stated by Neustadt, these were the five official languages of the Commission: Spanish, English, Chinese, French, and Russian. Neustadt, 26.

<sup>1052</sup> All quotes from C.A.D.A.’s texts come from Neustadt’s reproductions of the originals in the appendix of his book unless otherwise noted. Neustadt, 128.

location, but a “despoiled plain” where each life was also a “word within discourse.” Since life in this desolate place was defined by “hunger or terror,” its pain was not merely characteristic of a local condition, but of “all the discourses in the world.” Speaking from a nation defined by its desert and sky while “offering itself as spectacle of its own precariousness, of its own marginality,” the artists would set forth in a quest to “create the real life conditions” of the nation. This was a work that was not just political but artistic insofar as it was defined as “a work of social creation of a new meaning and a new collective form of life.” Producing life was for C.A.D.A. the only meaning behind the word ‘art,’ a new kind of life shared around the world, and not just in the Chilean village’s hungry and terrifying landscape.

The text resembled Joseph Beuys’ ideas on art as a social activity, with each man interpreted as an artist in terms of his or hers everyday creative potential. Yet Beuys has never been acknowledged by C.A.D.A. as a source and instead, it has become commonplace to trace the collective’s interest in the merger of art and life in the works of Vostell.<sup>1053</sup> While the relation to Vostell was factual, and in 1981 Rosenfeld and Eltit visited in Germany the aging artist,<sup>1054</sup> the looming presence of Beuys hangs around each

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<sup>1053</sup> The most recent case is that of Neustadt, who naively states that C.A.D.A.’s “obsessive attempt to signal the connection between art and life could be influenced (or at least could mark a coincidence) by the ideas of the German artist Wolf Vostell.” Neustadt, 27. Richard had already proposed such a point of view when she stated that “[I]t was from Wolf Vostell, whose works were exhibited in 1977 at the gallery *Época*, and his concept of “found lives” or the aesthetic reprocessing of the coordinates of social existence, that the Chilean artists [C.A.D.A.] inherited their desire to confront the dead time of the museum picture with the *living time of an art that works with vital experiences*.” Richard, “Margins and Institutions: Performances of the Chilean *Avanzada*,” *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art in the Americas*, ed. Coco Fusco (New York; Routledge, 2000), 204. (Emphasis in the original). In a 2006 interview with Federico Galende, Richard has slightly modified the same assertion, stating that C.A.D.A. “translated Vostell’s concept of “found life” into an “art-situation” whose works, of mobile temporality, uncompleted, were hoped to be finished by the participating citizenship.” In Galende, *Filtraciones I*, 202-203.

<sup>1054</sup> Luis Camnitzer quotes in a footnote this information from Neustadt in his commentary on C.A.D.A.’s action in his book *Conceptualism in Latin America: didactics of liberation* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2007), 279. The visit had nevertheless been documented by *Revista Hoy*, which published an article of the artists’ European voyage with a photograph of them talking to Vostell at his home. The importance that C.A.D.A. has acquired in recent years as a symbol of the Chilean “avant-garde” particularly in its political aspect, is reflected in Camnitzer’s selection of the group as the sole Chilean example of Conceptual practices with the exception of Cecilia Vicuña’s works (who now lives and works in New York, like Camnitzer) and a brief mention to Leppe’s “Acción de la estrella.” The chapter of the book in which the reference to the Chilean examples is found is titled “The Aftermath of Tucumán Arde,” clearly making a connection between the earlier Argentinean politically engaged works which combined performance, direct action in the streets, and appropriation of the media, with other Latin American examples that followed. Yet the connection is more conceptual than based on facts, particularly in the case of Chile, since as Vicuña and others have stated, Chilean artists had at the time little to no knowledge of what was happening in Argentina, or had happened there during the 1960s, a situation that worsened after 1973. The relationships between the two countries were sporadic, and as noted in Chapter One, what had been a primordial form of contact were the events gathered around the Encounter of Latin American Artists. In 1976, the Argentinean critic and director of Instituto di Tella Jorge Romero Brest visited Chile, giving a lecture in which he claimed that “there is no interchange between Argentina and Chile, no relationship.” See the article “En torno al arte y al artista latinoamericano,” *El Mercurio*, August 22, 1976. Three years would pass until Chile was visited by the Argentinean artist and director of C.A.Y.C., Jorge Glusberg, who not only asked Kay to deliver a lecture on Dittborn at the center (which was cancelled) in 1979, but was interviewed by *Revista CAL*. There he spoke of a form of “systems” art patronized by

of the group's texts. Besides the references to Beuys within the Chilean scene, as in Muñoz' 1977 exhibition dedicated to the German artist, the magazine *CAL* had published in its first number of 1979 an article on Beuys and his concept of expanding the limits of art.<sup>1055</sup> Such forgetting of artistic influences is striking insofar as C.A.D.A. would define its works as "social sculpture," directly quoting Beuys' own phrase.<sup>1056</sup> Nevertheless, and in a manner that seems at first similar yet is different from Beuys' conception of social sculpture ("how we mold and shape the world we live in: sculpture as an evolutionary process, everybody is an artist"<sup>1057</sup>), the group defined the term as "an artistic action that attempts to organize, through intervention, the time and space in which we live, as a way, first of making it more visible, and then, more livable."<sup>1058</sup> By emphasizing its artistic origins, rather than its vernacular or everyday ones, C.A.D.A. was altering a fundamental aspect of Beuys' conception, the idea that social sculpture is more than art understood as an aesthetic practice generated within the art world and its institutions, but a social creation that takes place every day without regards to the original 'profession' of the individual. For C.A.D.A., it would be art that intervenes on the everyday, and not the other way around, with the artists heralding social transformation through their socially committed actions. Art and its tradition was still invoked by C.A.D.A., as is found in the second part of their description, where the group argued that their own work was a "sculpture," insofar as it "organizes in a volumetric manner a material like art," and that it was "social" because "this material is our collective reality."<sup>1059</sup>

In this position, the works of C.A.D.A. also distance themselves from those of their supposed model, Vostell. If for the German artist a crashing plane or an interrupted television signal could be considered 'art,' C.A.D.A.'s definition was less encompassing,

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C.A.Y.C., which had nevertheless had its heyday in the 1960s. The only reference to an example of Argentine Systems art can be found in Smythe in 1978, when he spoke of "the potatoes that decompose," which may be an allusion to Víctor Grippo's famous installation. Smythe, *Arte y Conciencia*, 25. That the title of Camnitzer's book includes the word "didactic" is noteworthy, for it points to an exemplary component in Conceptual Latin American art and Camnitzer's own role as the (English-published) teacher of its contents.

<sup>1055</sup> The São Paulo Biennial, which counted with Chilean participation, had featured a special room dedicated to Beuys, and an article was published in *El Mercurio* on December 2, 1979. That there was knowledge of Beuys' works within the Chilean art scene can be seen in references made to them by different artists, such as Smythe's comments of the 1977 Documenta 6 at Kassel and the ideas of an ecological art espoused (by Beuys) there, Altamirano's reference to Beuys in his interviews from the 1980s onwards, and Zurita's mention in 2008 within the catalogue *Tentativa Artaud*.

<sup>1056</sup> The art historical lapse manifested by the artists is outstanding. In one of the interviews conducted by Neustadt with the artists in 2000, Fernando Balcells claims that the term 'social sculpture' was "a very fortunate analogy. Merit of Raúl Zurita." The term, in other words, was a Chilean invention. Neustadt, 70.

<sup>1057</sup> Beuys articulated this formulation in 1979, even though he had been using the terms 'social sculpture' for several years. See, the remarks made de Beuys in the Introduction of Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 6.

<sup>1058</sup> In C.A.D.A., "para no morir de hambre en el arte," 24. This is the only part of the definition quoted, without a source, by Neustadt. The rest of the phrase, quoted below, is not mentioned by the author.

<sup>1059</sup> Ibid.

while the participatory nature of Vostell's happenings was only dimly echoed in the Chilean group's first endeavors. The claims to artistic heritage made in favor of Vostell were only precariously supported by the group's attempts to create "participatory situations of recognition of the hidden dimensions and open perspectives of our history,"<sup>1060</sup> and can hardly be invoked in a work that takes the often surprised, sometimes recoiling, members of the La Granja community as passive recipients of the milk.<sup>1061</sup>

C.A.D.A.'s use of the milk as a symbol of "lack" and as way to "denounce poverty"<sup>1062</sup> in the nation, not only became a staple of the group, but points to the collective's use of simple symbolism with which a large part of the population could relate. As mentioned by Neustadt, the distribution of milk quoted Allende's social programs, establishing a direct relationship between the communist government and its emphasis on social justice and equality, and the present actions.<sup>1063</sup> By directly operating on the social margins through the distribution of milk, the artists were attempting to bridge the gap between art (as symbolized by the museum and other institutional spaces) and the 'real' life of those in the edges. As the members of C.A.D.A. enacted an action within society, they were effectively transforming (at least for a day) the material conditions of it, even though to what level they were changing the consciousness of its recipients is a point that in 2000 even Zurita was questioning. Blurring the edges of what art could be, and pointing to the social as a 'material' to be acted on, C.A.D.A. was concretely putting into practice the postulates of the 1979 seminar.

Regarding their socially aware content, the actions of C.A.D.A. addressed in an indexical manner the specific social problems associated with the larger concept of 'marginality.' In a work like "Para no morir de hambre en el arte," there is no mention to how the poorest sectors of society had been forced by the dictatorship to settle on the margins of the city in a concerted action of expropriation and relocation that extended from 1977 onwards. The "operations" were intended to eliminate the "marginal" and "unhealthy" apartments in the capital, replacing them with "new and modern" ones.<sup>1064</sup> The titles of domain were given to women, specifically to the owner of the house (in Spanish "dueña de casa"), who was described as "the one who makes the most effort and sacrifice to sustain the home."<sup>1065</sup> The government announced that it would be devoting four hundred million Chilean pesos of the time to eradicate marginal shantytowns, and a "critical population map" was created by the Minister of the Interior to detect and

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<sup>1060</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1061</sup> The video documenting the work is telling in this aspect, how the people from La Granja are treated as receivers of the milk donations and not active agents of the work.

<sup>1062</sup> Richard, *Margins and Institutiones*, 54.

<sup>1063</sup> Neustadt, 25.

<sup>1064</sup> In "Nueva operación para erradicar campamentos," *El Mercurio*, March 23, 1977. Some of the operations names were: "Operación Confraternidad Segunda" (Operation Second Co-fraternity).

<sup>1065</sup> Ibid.

eliminate the most affected zones.<sup>1066</sup> Expropriation statutes were redacted to justify such acts of social cleansing, often arguing for the need to develop the lands in a more productive manner, as the dictatorship effectively ‘molded’ the city’s shape.<sup>1067</sup>

The act of choosing such marginal communities by C.A.D.A. was therefore a charged one. Yet it was through an indexical act of pointing (with the milk containers acting as the index of the action, also recorded in video and photographed),<sup>1068</sup> and by means of the symbolism of the marginal, that awareness was attempted to be brought about in the viewers of the work. At the time, these were gallery goers or readers of certain left-oriented journals and magazines, where the group made an important effort to publish their statements and documentation.<sup>1069</sup> The political was envisioned by C.A.D.A. as the bringing into consciousness at the gallery space the symbolic and real lack of milk and other basic necessities that La Granja’s inhabitants, and by extension all the shantytowns, were suffering. While extending art’s area of action outside the institutional frame through its action on the social landscape, C.A.D.A. was also inadvertently pointing to its (and their own) limits within the realm of art.

The artists’ desire to transform the cityscape was embodied in their second important action, the intervention of the Museum of Fine Arts in the work titled

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<sup>1066</sup> “400 millones de pesos para erradicaciones,” *El Mercurio*, April 25, 1977. 301 “depressed” nucleuses were found in the map, their concentration being highest in the central zone.

<sup>1067</sup> See for example “Aumenta emigración de los pobladores a otros centros urbanos,” *El Mercurio*, April 28, 1978, where it was argued that 35% of the land had not been given a productive use. The relation between progress and eradication was made manifest in some of the newspaper’s articles on the subject such as “Quinta Normal: una comuna progresista,” *El Mercurio*, June 16, 1978, where progress is associated to the evacuation of the shantytown Nueva Matucana, whose inhabitants were relocated to the margins of the capital: Puente Alto, Maipo, La Florida, Pudahuel, Renca, and San Bernardo. “Erradicarán 750 familias de población Nueva Matucana,” *El Mercurio*, July 12, 1978. The concrete situation of the relocated inhabitants of Nueva Matucana was nevertheless denounced in *Revista Hoy*, which stated that the translated families were living in the same conditions as before. “Nuevo Amanecer: simplemente una ilusión,” *Revista Hoy*, March 26-April 10, 1980, 15. There were more articles on the shantytowns that emphasized their ‘unhealthy’ condition and poverty. See, for example, “¿Qué está pasando en las poblaciones? Reportaje en San Gregorio,” *El Mercurio*, June 25, 1978. It is interesting to note that at the same time, the dictatorship began its plan of giving titles of domain to the Mapuches. See “Títulos de propiedad a Mapuches,” *El Mercurio*, August 8, 1978, and the related article “Títulos de dominio a 250.000 Mapuches” on August 16. The promotion of the Mapuche program exacerbated the notion of ‘owning’ the land in a ‘legal’ manner, as in the article “Los Mapuches podrán al fin ser dueños de la tierra,” *El Mercurio*, September 17, 1978.

<sup>1068</sup> In an interview published in 1981, C.A.D.A. argued that they “indicated, or better, we refer to the problem so that it develops into a position of creativity, but it is the conjunction of society’s productive forces which should solve the problem.” C.A.D.A., “Colectivo Acciones de Arte: Cuando el arte cae del cielo,” *Revista Apsi*, August 11-24, 1981: 23. They continued: “what we do is to put into a scene, even for an instant, the process of transformation of reality.” *Ibid*.

<sup>1069</sup> It was not until 1981 that Sommer in his *El Mercurio* column would address the works of C.A.D.A. See Sommer, “Acciones de Arte, la Vanguardia de Hoy,” *El Mercurio*, October 1981. Sommer’s conservatism can be seen in how he devoted in 1980 a column to Land Art and the works of Christo, yet in the Chilean case described the works of Catalina Parra as being the closest to these contemporary manifestations. Waldemar Sommer, “Un artista en el paisaje,” *El Mercurio*, February 3, 1980.



“Inversión de escena” (Scene inversion) (fig. 5.9).<sup>1070</sup> On October 17, 1979, a caravan of ten Soprole trucks, which had been arranged by the artists, traveled in a single line from the milk factory to the Museum of Fine Arts in downtown Santiago, parking in front of it.<sup>1071</sup> The artists then proceeded to hang a large white sheet in front of the museum’s door, “shutting off” its entrance. The work has been variedly interpreted by critics, with Richard reading it as “censuring the artistic institution (...) as allegory of the sacralizing tradition of the art from the past (...) as symbol of the dictatorship’s official culture (...) while reclaiming the street as the “true Museum” of the people,” while Neustadt has read it as making evident the “transparency of quotidian repression” (through the white sheet) and the media.<sup>1072</sup> In 1979, in an article published in the magazine *La Bicicleta*, a similar position was asserted by the group regarding the concept of “breaking the imprisonment to which habitual forms of art are subjected (and its immediate consequence; elitism or marginality... in any case, popular uprooting).”<sup>1073</sup> The group claimed that the caravan traveling through the cityscape would “contaminate,” and thus alter, the latter’s normal working, arguing that “by mere accumulation they [the trucks] establish, in front of a quotidian situation, a reflexive instant.”<sup>1074</sup> That the passers-by and drivers who saw the caravan passing would effectively think of the milk “as an object, the milk as a problem, the city as problem, the personal individual register as forgetfulness of a problem,”<sup>1075</sup> is a question open for discussion, yet their parking outside the museum with a white sheet probably formed an unlikely picture that may have been interpreted as ‘art’ due to its placement.

It has not been noted by historians that the “appropriation” of milk trucks had recent political resonances. In April 26, 1979, *El Mercurio* published an article with photographs sent anonymously by the proscribed political group MIR (an acronym for “Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario,” Movement of the Revolutionary Left) which showed MIR members taking over a Soprole truck, then proceeding to distribute the

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<sup>1070</sup> Photographs of “Inversión de escena” have been published in Neustadt from page 131 to 134, *Copiar el Edén* in pages 224 and 225, and most notably in *Margins and Institutions* where the closing of the museum was used as the book’s cover.

<sup>1071</sup> Interestingly, the milk used in the previous action had been taken in Soprole containers. Soprole was one of the most important milk producers in the nation.

<sup>1072</sup> Richard, quoted in Neustadt, 31. Neustadt also mentions how the artists knew that the director of the museum, Nena Ossa, was not at work that day because she was undergoing surgery, which made the action possible in the first place.

<sup>1073</sup> C.A.D.A., “para no morir de hambre en arte. Colectivo acciones de arte – chile,” 22. Not every artist in Chile despised the museum. A polemic emerged in March 1980 when a pamphlet signed by well-known artists, from Matta to Balmes, began circulating which called for the boycott of the current celebrations of the Museum’s centenary. A few days later, several artists disclaimed having anything to do with such boycott. See the related articles “Panfleto llama a boicotear centenario del Museo de Bellas Artes,” *El Mercurio*, March 3, 1980, and “Artistas desmienten su participación en folleto contra museo,” *El Mercurio*, March 9, 1980.

<sup>1074</sup> C.A.D.A., “para no morir de hambre en arte,” 23.

<sup>1075</sup> *Ibid.*

contents of the truck to the inhabitants of the shantytown called Nuevo Amanecer (New Dawn).<sup>1076</sup> The dictatorship had in 1979 begun to condemn such acts as “extremism” and “terrorism” that should be “rigorously punished,”<sup>1077</sup> terrorism being a word that had not been used before by the government to refer to protesting actions *within* the national territory.<sup>1078</sup> To appropriate, consciously or not, such counter-institutional and, as stated by the newspaper, “armed propaganda” actions, was a form of aligning C.A.D.A.’s actions with guerrilla type gestures in their reclaiming of the city, rupturing order through the tergiversation of meaning. Political subversion was recuperated and reused as artistic subversion, reviving earlier avant-garde models of action.

The third important C.A.D.A. action, “Ay Sudamérica!,” took place in July 12, 1981 (fig. 5.10),<sup>1079</sup> when the group once again intervened the city, this time through the air.<sup>1080</sup> Having convinced a group of pilots to fly six private planes, the members of

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<sup>1076</sup> The article emphasized how the ‘extremists’ had hurt a boy with a bomb that they had detonated at the site. See “Propaganda armada del MIR,” *El Mercurio*, April 26, 1979.

<sup>1077</sup> “Legislación sobre terrorismo debe ser rigurosamente punitiva,” dijo Ministro de Justicia,” *El Mercurio*, April 26, 1979.

<sup>1078</sup> Terrorism was included in the dictatorship’s definition of the “delinquent figure,” this time one belonging to an illicit association. Ibid. In July, the expert on terrorism, Fred Rayne, was quoted in *El Mercurio* defining four kinds of terrorists: the mentally perturbed, the criminal, the political terrorist, the religious terrorist. See “La demencia del siglo XX: el terrorismo,” *El Mercurio*, July 15, 1979. In July 1979, Pinochet addressed the question of the new constitution being proposed and the incorporation of opposition parties into its design, by stating that there were “stark limits” that prevented the incorporation as “valid participants of civic life those who propagate doctrines or integrate movements of a totalitarian character.” Pinochet, quoted in “Presidente Pinochet anunció anoche en Chacarillas: límites del debate en etapa de transición,” *El Mercurio*, July 10, 1979.

<sup>1079</sup> “Ay Sudamérica!” is documented in Neustadt, pages 150-151 and in the article “Un “maná” artístico,” *Revista Hoy*, July 22-28, 1981, 45-46.

<sup>1080</sup> The work was documented with the help of other artists, among them most notably Alfredo Jaar, who videotaped the event. Jaar had begun exhibiting conceptual graphic works and objects in 1979, yet his approach to society can be safely said to have been influenced by the action within the city of C.A.D.A., particularly his 1980 work “Estudio sobre la felicidad” (Study on Happiness), first shown at the Segundo Salon de Gráfica in 1980, the ‘first’ work usually documented in English and Spanish versions of his oeuvre. For a reference to Jaar’s involvement with C.A.D.A. see “Un “maná” artístico,” *Revista Hoy*, July 22-28, 1981, 45-46. Nevertheless, Jaar’s approach to the social and political had more universal aims. In September 1981, Jaar presented in the Bienal Universitaria an installation titled “Ritos” (Rites) composed of trash cans’ lids along with a large panel filled with graphs and photographs connected to the actions of mothers in Belfast who banged on the cans as public signs of protest and mourning for the lives lost in Northern Ireland. For a reproduction of the work see “Los brotes de la plástica,” *Revista Hoy*, September 23-29, 1981, 41-42. Jaar won the first prize in the graphic section, yet the work is undocumented in catalogues of his oeuvre (as are all Chilean produced works, except for “Studies”). Perhaps this has to do with the controversy that followed in November, 1981, when in the V Bienal de Valparaíso Jaar won with a work titled “Opus 81,” which was later considered a plagiarism (on a very weak basis, nevertheless, since all the plagiarized works were deemed too similar to international conceptual art). Jaar had also presented to the Valparaiso Biennial a video work, “Obra abierta y de registro continuo” for which he received a scholarship that allowed him to study for a period of six months in New York, where he would stay. See the articles “Muchos llamados, pocos escogidos,” *Revista Hoy*, November 18-24, 1981, 47, and “Felicidad en la mira,” *Revista Hoy*, January 5-12, 1982, 41-42.

C.A.D.A. threw from them, after flying in an arrow formation through the skies of Santiago, bundles with 400.000 pamphlets that opened up with the effects of gravity, dispersing the texts in different marginal locations of the city.<sup>1081</sup> The airplane formation established visually a connection to military aerial surveys and the control of the citizens' movement, as well as with commercial planes displaying advertisements, forming both a menacing and a common image.<sup>1082</sup>

The text so distributed began with the phrase: "When you walk through these places and look at the sky and under it the snowed peaks you recognize in this site the space of our lives: the color dark skin, height and language, thought."<sup>1083</sup> The text established the identification of the speakers with the inhabitants of Santiago through different 'natural' and 'cultural' marks: the mountains, color of skin and height, and then language and knowledge. The text continued with a series of identifications that went from landscape to labor. The later was given prominence as it formed the basis of the next proposition; no matter what field one worked in, the artists were convoking all men to work towards "happiness." The artists then claimed under quotation marks: "We are artists, but every man who works towards the amplification, even mental, of his life spaces is an artist." C.A.D.A. then asserted that this was the "only valid" form of art, the "only exhibition," and the "only work of art that lives." Claiming that these desires were representative of all South American ones, they cried: "Ay Sudamérica!"

Beuys' influence is clear in the text, particularly in the claim that in spite of the daily performance of a particular profession, every human being is an artist. Yet Beuys' expression was relocated by C.A.D.A. within a specific local context, even though the last phrases attempted to reclaim its semi-universal, or at least shared South American status. This locational strategy through identification (we all live under the same mountain, we are all brown-skinned, we are all workers), while biased and inaccurate for it did not take into account the varied origins of the Chilean population nor definite in terms of who this "we" was addressing, provided a conceptual and lived basis for the egalitarian postulate of a shared artistic creativity, amplifying not only the limits of art making, but the definition of its makers.<sup>1084</sup> By combining Beuys' declaration with a social component embodied by the notion of "labor," and distributing the texts in specific marginal communes, C.A.D.A. was politicizing the artist's claim, bringing to it a Marxist component of social change and attention to class consciousness. For C.A.D.A. it was not just art that could be expanded and brought closer to everyday "life," but such an

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<sup>1081</sup> The planes flew and dispersed the texts over the communes of Pudahuel, La Granja, La Florida, and Conchalí. In "Cuando el arte cae desde el cielo," 24.

<sup>1082</sup> Interestingly, *Revista Hoy*, which covered the action, gave the work the epithet "an artistic mana."

<sup>1083</sup> The text was reproduced in its entirety along with documentary photographs of the action from the air in *Revista Apsi* on August, 1981. See "Apsi Creación" for the documentation and "Cuando el arte cae del cielo," both in *Revista Apsi*, August 11-24, 1981, 24. The later included an interview with the group in which they argued that their works were meant to 'intervene and trespass our quotidian life situations, transforming them,' and insisted that their works could not be "consummated" in a gallery. "Apsi Creación," 23.

<sup>1084</sup> In *Revista Apsi* they stated: "we think of the entire Chile as a gallery, this is the true spectacle to contemplate." In "Cuando el arte cae del cielo," 23.

expansion of limits had political connotations. Yet as stated by *Revista Hoy*, there was an irony in the action's "heavenly" distribution of the pamphlets as artistic "mana," art descending to the people from above.

The last important action of the group began in September 1983, when after making a call to different cultural agents and friends to help them, C.A.D.A. made an intervention in the cityscape with signs that read: "NO +" (fig. 5.11).<sup>1085</sup> Using visual and textual languages with an easy legibility similar to that of traffic signals,<sup>1086</sup> yet leaving an open space for the completion of the phrase "no more," the artists had created a condensed sign filled with meaning and also ambiguity that could be rapidly traced on any kind of surface by anyone. Appropriating the visual language of graffiti and the muralists,<sup>1087</sup> and using other quick forms of intervention (as in the famous four-part banner displaying NO+ and a graphic representation of a hand holding a revolver at the end, each part hung as a scroll from the railing of the Mapocho river in downtown Santiago next to the Central Market, and quickly dismantled by the police), C.A.D.A. was effectively changing the contours of the city, marking its spaces and allowing other citizens to fill in the signs with their own thoughts.<sup>1088</sup> The effectiveness of the action was noted by critics and reporters alike, particularly the "explosive" and sudden appearance throughout the city of the signs, which were later on appropriated by other anti-dictatorial groups.<sup>1089</sup> Usurping the cityscape and activating its surface through marks, while not merely convoking but allowing the participation of any willing citizen to inscribe their own, C.A.D.A. had produced an open-ended work available for others to continue expanding.<sup>1090</sup>

While much has been said of this work, the context during which it happened has not been fully explored.<sup>1091</sup> 1983 was a year characterized by the beginning of a series of

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<sup>1085</sup> "No +" is documented in Neustadt, showing one of the original C.A.D.A. actions with some of its appropriations by other social agents in pages 157-163. See also *Copiar el Edén*, page 229.

<sup>1086</sup> The sign also referenced the previous plebiscites' ballots, the "NO" and horizontal line intervened vertically as a legal manifestation of dissent.

<sup>1087</sup> The artists were adamant at the time of clearly distinguishing their practice from the "art made for the people" associated with the muralists in Chile, arguing that they did not "regress" into this illustrative translation of political ideas, but rather assumed an artistic position of "vanguard" from where they introduced themselves into open spaces that went beyond those of art institutions. See Mary Chapman, "Chile bajo el ojo del arte," *Revista Apsi*, November 29-December 12, 1983, 36.

<sup>1088</sup> A photograph of the scrolls was published in *Apsi* in Chapman's article along with a description of the work.

<sup>1089</sup> Chapman noted at the time that the sign had been taken by workers and shantytown dwellers and used in their own surroundings, and that the theater director Raúl Osorio had also incorporated the sign into his new play. Chapman, 36.

<sup>1090</sup> *Revista Hoy* published a photograph of a graffiti occupying the slogan and adding the sprayed words "dead" to C.A.D.A.'s phrase. See the article "El yo y la realidad," *Revista Hoy*, September 21-27, 1983, 45-46.

<sup>1091</sup> The only exception is Neustadt, who summarized the situation from 1980 to 1983 as one of "aperture of the political anti-dictatorial fight in Chile, with generalized protests culminating in 1983. In the years 1980-82, there is already a context of collective mobilization, street actions, flash mass meetings, and other

protests in Santiago which openly challenged the dictatorship, starting in May with a workers' Labor Day protest.<sup>1092</sup> The protests were amply repressed and tergiversated by the official press, yet they gathered more force as the year moved on. Artists had also joined the protests by taking the façade of the National Library, seating there along with writers and other cultural producers, and displaying banners asking for the return to democracy.<sup>1093</sup> Under this light, the directness of C.A.D.A.'s sign "NO +," formed part of a larger vocalization of protest against the dictatorship, rather than a unique form of manifesting dissent. What distinguished the work from other forms of protests was its spontaneity, its possibility of amplification, and its expansion of the makers' base.

It has been these characteristics that have become the basis for C.A.D.A.'s monumentalization in recent years and set its radius of influence within the Chilean scene in the early 1980s. The collective's expansion of artistic actions into the everyday realm, their hands-on approach to illuminating certain social problems, and their desire to activate the social environment by acting upon it, proved to be a model of action for several younger groups that were beginning to reclaim the space of the city in particular as a site of contestation to the regime. The old avant-garde connection of revolution, political and social change, and the fusion of art and life seemed to have come to a culminating point in the directness of the group's endeavors. But though C.A.D.A.'s appropriation of the marginal as a banner under which their actions gained coherence and an aim, their conflation of social marginality with the anti-authoritarian, and their use of the media and quotidian situations, gained them a space as a politically engaged, socially mindful, and resistance group, their challenges to authority tended to reduce the problems of representation to a question of access, and condensed the marginal to a privileged state of unofficial, non-institutional resistance. Their later conflation of marginality with a general Latin American state of affairs, combined with the presentation of it as 'victimized,' sealed the reading of 'otherness' the group laid claim to.<sup>1094</sup> The margin

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manifestations in which artists and writers, as well as other public figures, participated, trying to find forms of expression and protest that would not motivate the immediate repression of the dictatorship." The author then acknowledged that "[I]n this sense, though evidently more clearly theoretically articulated, C.A.D.A. is also one more group in a context of collective mobilization of art and culture to avoid censorship and to help open a democratic space." Neustadt, 34. In 1980, *Revista Apsi* also published an article on the increase in violence associated with the rise of groups, "militant and non-militant," that opposed the dictatorship. See "La violencia como problema nacional," *Revista Apsi*, 2-15 December, 1980, 2-3. Yet, manifest opposition rose even earlier than that, particularly in 1979 at the universities, where pamphlets and signs against the dictatorship were so prominently placed that even *El Mercurio* devoted an article to the subject. See the article "En la "U": los grupos políticos comienzan a dar la cara," *El Mercurio*, October 28, 1979.

<sup>1092</sup> For a detailed analysis and description of the 1983 protests, see the "radiography" published in *Revista Apsi*, in October, 1983, no page number.

<sup>1093</sup> The manifestation was part of the preparations for the "Congreso Nacional de los Artistas de Chile" (National Congress of Chilean Artists), which was planned for December. See the article by Eliana Jara Donoso, "Los artistas invocan la democracia," *Revista Apsi*, October 18-31 1983, 34-36.

<sup>1094</sup> I am referring here to "Residuos americanos" (American Residues), an installation by C.A.D.A. exhibited at Washington Project for the Arts between March and April, 1983. The installation was part of the exhibition "In/Out: Four Projects by Chilean Artists" and consisted of opened up bundles of used clothing, mostly made in the United States of America, yet sold in Chile at thrift shops. The work made literal the 'return' of the repressed, of the third world refuse to its source of origin as was manifested in the

provided ample space for a series of differences, which C.A.D.A. as a group tended to submerge under the same color.

C.A.D.A.'s collective endeavors to reclaim the city and activate its users were punctuated by the individual works of Zurita, Eltit, and Rosenfeld. While Zurita's bodily actions have been discussed, the works of Eltit and Rosenfeld offer a counterpoint to C.A.D.A.'s general mode of action that signals two different modes of understanding the marginal and the cityscape.<sup>1095</sup> Their approaches pointed to discrepant ways of acting on the margins and centers, particularly how to represent the social body and the spaces in which identity is performed.

Eltit's individual performances were strongly related to the book she was writing at the time, *Por la Patria* (For the Fatherland) and their connection has been critically analyzed by Eugenia Brito.<sup>1096</sup> Yet the work also functioned independently as an action 'illuminating' the marginal. In 1980, Eltit went to a brothel located in a poor marginal sector of the city, where she sat in front of a mostly art-related audience and proceeded to read fragments from her novel. The writer then walked outside the precinct and began washing the sidewalk with a sponge and bucket of water. On the run down walls of the brothel's street, several projections of Eltit's face were displayed, illuminated the dark surfaces with her frontal stare (fig. 5.12).<sup>1097</sup> Before the performance, Eltit had burnt and cut her arms with razors and was photographed, publishing the images of her wounds in the novel.<sup>1098</sup>

The work was titled "Zonas de Dolor" (Zones of Pain), endowing the performance with spatial and corporeal referents. The brothel and the artist's body were tied as being areas of suffering, corporealities undergoing different and similar forms of torment. Social marginalization as the physical exclusion from the city's center and the delimiting of spaces for the occurrence of the legally and morally condemned (as embodied in prostitution), were joined by Eltit to a demarcation of the body as a space of social incisions.<sup>1099</sup> The reference to the novel's title in the passages read during the

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catalogue text written by the group. For an account of the interpretations given to the work, see Neustadt, 35.

<sup>1095</sup> It is interesting that both artists were given opposing pages with documentation of their performances in 1980 in the magazine *La Bicicleta*, creating a sharp contrast between their approaches. See "Creación," *La Bicicleta*, no. 8 (November-December 1980): 9-10.

<sup>1096</sup> This view, first upheld in *La Bicicleta* (no. 8, page 10), and then reiterated by Galaz and Ivelic in 1988, is maintained in *Copiar el Edén*, which states "these symbolic actions constitute a performative extension of the novel." Catalina Valdés, *Copiar el Edén*, 298. See also María Eugenia Brito, *Campos Minados (Literatura post-golpe en Chile)* (Santiago: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 1990).

<sup>1097</sup> The first part of "Zonas de dolor" is documented in *Chile Arte Actual*, pages 217 and 218, and *Copiar el Edén*, in pages 298 and 299.

<sup>1098</sup> In their 1981 European tour, Eltit and Rosenfeld visited not only Vostell in Germany but Gina Pane in Paris, another undisclosed model for the ritualistic content of Eltit's and C.A.D.A.'s works, which will be discussed in relation to Marcela Serrano in the next chapter. See "Arte en acción," *Revista Hoy*, March 25-31, 1981, 46.

<sup>1099</sup> Nevertheless, as noted by Michel Foucault, prostitution could also be regulated, sanitized, and made a profitable enterprise for some. See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 277-278.

performance also localized the work, suggesting a shared space of pain under the sign of the nation and the fatherland.

In 1988, Galaz and Ivelic interpreted the work not only under the general category of “Body Art,” but also as an act of “expiation.” According to the authors, Eltit’s body was turned into “an expiatory and sacrificial body insofar as it assumed the nation’s collective guilt and pain.”<sup>1100</sup> The wounds inflicted by the artist on her body became for the authors “the indelible marks of her intense relation with collective pain,”<sup>1101</sup> establishing a direct act of identification between the artist’s corporeality and the body politic. In this view, Eltit had been self-chosen as the expiatory lamb of the nation, sacrificing her body and evoking those of society through her wounds and a ritualistic gesture.

Like the works of C.A.D.A., Eltit’s performance was “illuminating” marginality, pointing to it by incorporating the site into her work and making it public.<sup>1102</sup> The theme of illumination was nevertheless inverted: while physically brought to light with her presence and duplicated light image on the street’s walls, Eltit also called for another kind of illumination in the text she read during her action. According to Eltit, this would be an illumination coming from “madness,”<sup>1103</sup> which would shed light on the social body. Insanity was evoked by Eltit as a form of knowledge, an inverted one in terms of the hierarchical place given to reason in Western culture, yet also connecting to the theme of blindness (the opposite of light perceived) as a form of knowledge. If the space demarcated by the brothel was obscured from public sight, socially marginalized, and legally condemned, Eltit was spotlighting its ambiguous status both within and without society. The brothel exemplified in this sense the margin understood as “the negative, the reverse”<sup>1104</sup> of society that, intimately tied to its fabric, “permits that we are what we are.”<sup>1105</sup> For Eltit, the marginal was thus a fundamental part of society’s identity, not merely its underside, but a fold allowing for the ‘normal’ to surface.

Joining two forms of marginality, prostitution and insanity, allowed Eltit to call for the transformation and inversion of these spatial manifestations into “spiritual convents.” For Eltit the brothels were “purer” than other public and official social spaces, “more innocent [spaces] than public offices [or] government programs.”<sup>1106</sup> The prostitute could thus become a sign of purity, cloistered in a double form of marginalization, physically in the “lupanares” and socially marked as an outcast. This reading of the marginal as somehow “purer” than other sites points to an uncritical

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<sup>1100</sup> Galaz and Ivelic, *Chile Arte Actual*, 217.

<sup>1101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1102</sup> As stated by Eltit in 1983, “I am only interested in signaling.” Juan Andrés Piña, “Los rostros de la marginalidad,” *Revista Apsi*, November 29-December 12, 1983, 40.

<sup>1103</sup> Eltit, quoted in Galaz and Ivelic, 216.

<sup>1104</sup> Diamela Eltit quoted in Piña, 40.

<sup>1105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1106</sup> Galaz and Ivelic, 217.

understanding of centers and margins, insofar as it implies giving one of the terms a superior value. Such a position regarding the innocence of the site accentuates Galaz and Ivelic's idea of redemption and expiation of the marginal, even though the gender component of Eltit's self-chosen marginalization and purification was not touched by the authors. Eltit's identified with a particular form of marginality having a strong feminine connotation, prostitution. This connection was underlined by the relation between cleaning and female services as well, generating a relation with the laborer in general and with a form of female work in particular.<sup>1107</sup>

Such identification supports Galaz and Ivelic's initial statement, if the marginal is considered as what society 'sacrifices' so as to uphold its order. But if as stated by Galaz and Ivelic, Eltit was offering herself as sacrificial lamb for the sake of the nation, identifying her own body with the body politic and thus expiating its sins, she was also pointing to a state of pleasure derived from such sacrifice. While the corporeal identification between the artist and the marginal as embodied in the prostitute was evoked in Eltit's cleansing of the streets as a form of purification of the 'tainted,' Eltit was also remarking on the liberating aspects of carnality, making her connection with martyrdom more prominent.<sup>1108</sup> Not only did the physical marks on her body act as wounds and later literally and symbolically as scars embodying pain, but they visually operated as margins and thresholds, dividing and joining the flesh. Liminality was incarnated on the body's surface, given a spatialized and corporeal form. Furthermore, the voluptuousness of sexuality invoked by the association with prostitution, its hidden pleasures and 'sinful' corporeality as signs of excess, was transformed into an expansion, a form of communication. Pain can also be ecstatic, which makes of Eltit's performance less that of the sacrificial lamb than that of the saint or martyr, accepting torture and deriving mystical pleasure from it.

Eltit's identification with the marginal, turning her body into a site for expiatory rites, and particularly the association between prostitution and its physical location, differs greatly from the approach to the city and marking in Rosenfeld's works. The latter's actions in the city did not have such marked redemptive connotations, but instead activated the social landscape with works that effectively transformed it. Trained in graphic art, until 1977 the artist had worked in traditional printing mediums with feminine imagery,<sup>1109</sup> exploring afterwards unconventional materials and simple slogans in works on paper.<sup>1110</sup> She then passed through a period of re-conceptualizing her labor,

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<sup>1107</sup> This connection resembled Mierle Laderman Ukeles' performance "Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside July 22, 1973," where the artist for a period of eight hours performed some of the museum's cleaning staff tasks.

<sup>1108</sup> Eltit stated in 1983 that the "tearing of the body, when it is assumed freely, provokes instead an extreme happiness." Eltit, quoted in Piña, 41.

<sup>1109</sup> Rosenfeld studied graphic art at the Escuela Técnica de Artes Aplicadas (School of Applied Arts) of the University of Chile between 1963 and 1967, a strictly technical and commercially oriented school of applied arts. In the 1978 Lord Cochrane calendar featuring "Contemporary Chilean Graphic Art," Rosenfeld presented an aquatint with a reclining woman.

<sup>1110</sup> In 1976, at Espacio Siglo XX, Rosenfeld was already utilizing with the word "NO" in some of her graphic works, simplifying her visual language into more straightforward yet open-ended signs.



during which the artist sought to create more collective works.<sup>1111</sup> In 1979, after attending the Seminar and forming C.A.D.A., Rosenfeld began performing actions in the city, starting a mode of operation that centered on borders, transit, passage, and the implications of appropriating and transforming everyday signs and modes of behavior.

The first and most important of these works was “Una milla de cruces sobre el pavimento” (A mile of crosses on the pavement) of 1979 (fig. 5.13).<sup>1112</sup> In December 1979, with the help of other artists such as Eltit and Donoso, Rosenfeld began at dawn kneeling in front of white lines marking the separation of lanes in Avenida Manquehue and extending in a meticulous manner over them pieces of white tape that measured the exact same length and width as the already existing lines.<sup>1113</sup> Manquehue was at the time a new avenue that bordered empty lots and connected the growing upper class neighborhoods of Las Condes and Vitacura with two lanes on each side flanking a central grassy area.<sup>1114</sup> Rosenfeld placed the new lines formed by the tapes in a perpendicular manner so that together with the preexisting ones they would form a distinct cross shape. The action was repeated until a mile had been covered with crosses and the trajectory so formed was then recorded from the top of a moving car. The white tapes were left in place until they were removed naturally or through the actions of others, intercepting for a mile the normal aspect of the avenue. On June, 1980, on the same new avenue in uptown Santiago, Rosenfeld proceeded to project onto a large vertical fabric set on the grass between the lanes the recorded video of the action, which could also be seen in wide television monitors located on the canvas’ front and back with a separation of fifty meters. Beginning at dusk, and thus providing a counterpoint to her earlier action, the projected video’s images contrasted with the long lines of cars coming back and forth in the avenue, lifting from the ground the interception of the regulating lines for everyone to

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<sup>1111</sup> Rosenfeld had participated in the 1978 exhibition “Recreando a Goya” and, with the support of Galería Espacio Siglo XX, she traveled that same year to the north of Chile with a group formed by Alberto Pérez, Marcela Serrano, Juan Castillo, Pachi Torrealba, Antonio Gil, and Patricia Cerda. The group had journeyed to the desert in order to create a collective work of art and brought photographic cameras and recorders to register their experiences. The work was never executed, though the group’s commentaries on their trip were published under the title “Espacio Siglo XX,” in *Revista La Bicicleta*, no. 1 (September-October, 1978): 31-34.

<sup>1112</sup> The most complete work to date focusing on Rosenfeld is María Eugenia Muñoz, Diamela Eltit, Gonzalo Muñoz, Nelly Richard, Raúl Zurita, *Desacato* (Santiago: Francisco Zegers Editor, 1986) where several images of “Una milla de cruces sobre el pavimento” can be found. *Desacato* not only implies through its title the emphasis on social “misdemeanor” upheld by Rosenfeld’s work, but starts all of its narratives with “Una milla de cruces en el pavimento” without mentioning, except in the artist’s CV at the end, her previous work in graphic art and their connection.

<sup>1113</sup> The action was photographed and taped in 16mm, which was then transferred to video. The latter can be seen in Rosenfeld’s DVD compilation of C.A.D.A. works, *Antología Digital*. The placement of the lines lasted four hours.

<sup>1114</sup> The action was performed between Apoquindo and Avenida Kennedy, parts of which remained undeveloped zones for many years. Nevertheless, in September of that same year, a project for the development of the area was proposed, which consisted in high rise apartments, hotels, restaurants, services, and parks, which would be destined for people with “middle to high incomes.” See “Proyecto Manquehue: 400 millones de dólares para conjunto urbanístico,” *El Mercurio*, September 9, 1979.

see. A text was handed to the viewers who had gathered in the central lawn, ending with the phrase: “No, I was not happy.”

There are three main points around which interpretations of Rosenfeld’s crosses have been structured. Most mention the fact that Rosenfeld was transforming what could be read as a negative sign (of subtraction) into a positive one (of summation).<sup>1115</sup> These readings are related to the second main thread, the disruption of norms as embodied in (traffic) signs, a point summarized by Maria Eugenia Brito as, “the work blocks the network of blind signs that dominate the city. Blind signs insofar they carry an identical message, obedient to the repressive systems that alienate life, economizing the city’s diagram into a unique modeling of its dominating sense.”<sup>1116</sup> The third element, already contained in the second, concerns the relationship established between the normative in general as an element associated with signs (the semiotic of regulation) and the Chilean context of repression in which the works were made.

While all three threads are fundamental parts of Rosenfeld’s actions that cannot be done without when approaching her work, what I am mostly interested in all the ideas of producing space, the relation between representation, perception and experience of that space, and the formal operations performed to transform it. The semiotic interpretation addresses partially these relations, since it dwells on the social construction of meaning and its normalization through specific visual and physical forms (such as traffic signs). This approach is usually combined with a brief reference to urbanism, which nevertheless gets universalized as a homogenizing practice that merely forces upon city dwellers an overarching meaning through a specific language (architectural or otherwise).

Such an interpretation can be seen in Richard’s reading of Rosenfeld’s actions as creating ruptures in the social system. According to Richard, the appearance of the artist’s body in a “cemented”<sup>1117</sup> landscape without any other form of expression than that already given by the “system,” effected a “multiplying of horizons” through a gesture of rupture that “fractures the system by opening a hole in the break of its imposing linearity.”<sup>1118</sup> This rupture was given by Richard a particularly feminine connotation. The act of insubordination and rupture was not only avant-garde, as the negation of an imposed order, but marked as a specifically “matricidal” one (a neologism playing with the words “matrix,” “matriarchal,” and “matricide”). While the corporeal presence of the

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<sup>1115</sup> The first recorded mention comes from *La Bicicleta*, which states that one can read the work as either “an arithmetic or religious sign.” Antonio Gil developed this idea further in the article “Lotty Rosenfeld: Una milla de cruces sobre el pavimento. Una milla de cruces sobre el arte. Una milla de cruces sobre Chile,” *Revista Apsi*, July 29-August 11, 1980, 23-24. Nevertheless it should be noted that the negative sign can only be seen if the direction of the actual sign on the street is changed from the vertical to the horizontal.

<sup>1116</sup> María Eugenia Brito, “La economía dramática de la ciudad,” in *Desacato*, 45. Similar words are used by Eltit in her text for *Desacato*, “the transit code, in other words, of open space, is therefore the reverse of other signs that become identical: any fault of private or public character contains, at least in its germ, punishment.” Eltit, “Desacatos,” in *Desacato*, 12.

<sup>1117</sup> By 1986 Richard’s semiotic interpretation had shifted towards a feminist critique of art and this was brought to bear by the author in the gendered character of Rosenfeld’s work.

<sup>1118</sup> *Ibid.*

artist was related by Richard to the making evident of “art making,” going against the fetishization of art as an autonomous object, the (gendered) body was also given a primordial role within insubordination. For Richard, the body acted as a “surplus,” which along with the “gesture” of making marks stood for desire and acted as the “perverse supplement” of an otherwise linear code.<sup>1119</sup> Against the “logos” supported by imposed signs, the body of the artist set up an economy of desire and transgression.

While Richard’s argument is compelling, the performative gesture of Rosenfeld as she produced her own marks in the landscape needs further discussion.<sup>1120</sup> For Rosenfeld prominently appeared in all forms of the work’s documentation, assigning herself a performative role as an actor within the work, which points to the human aspect involved in intervening the cityscape. Richard read such an inclusion as a form of identifying with a “victimized space,”<sup>1121</sup> and a clear relation could be established with Eltit’s own bowing gestures and the sacrificial idea implied in the “via crucis.”<sup>1122</sup> The latter is an important notion not only because of its obvious association with the suffering of Christ at the cross during Calvary, with Christ as the sacrificial lamb of God, but of its relation to the body in a state of pain as manifested in Rosenfeld’s own gestures. But the city was treated by Rosenfeld not only as a surface ordained by imposed social signs or her own body as that of a victim. The city was also explored by Rosenfeld as a corporeal entity with a life of its own, a body that could receive and make its own marks, a corporeal geography. Instead of looking at the social landscape as merely the materialization of a patriarchal ‘logos’ forced onto the land, and thus regarding the city as a static element, I would like to turn instead to a different understanding of space as more than a container or stage that constraints human action.<sup>1123</sup>

I emphasize the corporeality of the landscape, because it was being actively molded and transformed by different agents at the time. The second architectural biennial that took place in 1979 in Santiago focused on the theme of “Making City,” in contrast to the previous Biennial’s theme of “Inhabiting Chile.”<sup>1124</sup> The shift in the titles and aims of the Biennials points to the current preoccupation with the city’s limits and its reorganization, a concern coming not only from the government but also from architects, urban planners, artists, and city-dwellers alike. This preoccupation was further joined to a

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<sup>1119</sup> Derrida’s “dangerous supplement” as discussed in *Of Grammatology* comes to mind as an influence in Richard’s discourse.

<sup>1120</sup> Richard’s reading of the body has been highly influential in more recent interpretations of Rosenfeld’s works. See for example, Sergio Rojas’ essay in what is the second most important catalogue of Rosenfeld’s work, *Moción de Orden*, where he speaks of the body as “the scandal of order.” Sergio Rojas, “El cuerpo de los signos,” *Moción de Orden* (Santiago; Galería Gabriela Mistral, 2000), 18.

<sup>1121</sup> Richard, 20.

<sup>1122</sup> Ana María Foxley, “Cruces de suma y dolor,” *Revista Hoy*, 18 June, 1980, 43-44.

<sup>1123</sup> Richard constantly refers to the social landscape as “scenery” in her text.

<sup>1124</sup> It is worth noting that the third Biennial of 1981 focused on “Homes,” a theme that had acquired renewed stringency in relation to the housing problem particularly associated to poverty. See the articles “La casa es lo primero,” *Revista Hoy*, August 12-18, 1981, 14, and Sergio Marras, “Déficit habitacional. Las casas en que no vivimos,” *Revista Apsi*, August 12-25, 1980.

sense of crisis, which would have been produced by the joint efforts of diverse social actors.<sup>1125</sup> The shift also emphasized the act of ‘making’ the city, with the urban understood as a product of varied social forces acting throughout history, rather than positing it as an unchanging static entity.<sup>1126</sup> Yet it can be argued that the city in turn produces subjects and modes of sociality, as seen in the works of Smythe, and that the city-dwellers further participate in the construction of these structures.<sup>1127</sup> As stated by Straub in relation to the Biennial, the man who inhabits the city “builds and conforms it through his social and human relations,”<sup>1128</sup> as much as the architecture and urban forms around the subject help define those relations. In this sense, Rosenfeld’s works brought to bear the intertwined relationship between space, history, and the social through the importance of the graphic mark, the line, the receiving matrix, and their intersection.<sup>1129</sup>

One example was Rosenfeld’s appropriation of both street signs and graffiti-like practices. Attacking the already existing traffic signs with her own impermanent markings, Rosenfeld was creating signs on the streets in a manner similar to the signatures of graffiti that intercept and transform any of the city’s surfaces (walls, monuments). Insofar as graffiti is a form of marking a territory, of delimiting a space in an “illegal” manner by appropriating private and public property and challenging its limits, it creates its own geography. As an alternative form of writing on the city, graffiti is an act of inscription that challenges norms regarding proper spaces for communication and what kind of messages should be transmitted. It transgresses limits and creates its own, in a manner similar to how Rosenfeld was appropriating a portion of the avenue, its most forsaken part, and infringing on its language and codes by altering their appearance.

On the other hand, such a transgressive visual mark was opposed yet at the same time connected with the landscape of commodity also actively reshaping the city.<sup>1130</sup> Antonio Gil mentioned in 1979 how Rosenfeld’s setup of canvas and televisions on the

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<sup>1125</sup> Sergio Larraín commented that the crisis was provoked by “the vertiginous growth of the population, land speculation, the automobile invasion, the loss of a social and community sense, pride and egotism,” while Cristina Fernández added that “urbanism in Chile is not done by urbanists. It is done by certain public services, especially Transportation.” Both architects are quoted in “Creación/obra y reflexión entre dos bienales,” *Revista La Bicicleta*, no. 4 (August-September, 1979): 33.

<sup>1126</sup> Emile Straub, who had won the previous Biennial first prize while still a student, argued that “making the city” involved not only architects, but people “from any discipline, and, overall, every citizen.” *Ibid.* The article also mentions how “the young propose an active participation [of non-architects and the public]” and Straub added that “a group of shantytown dwellers has probably something to say about “making the city” since they are living it in the flesh.” Straub, “Creación/obra y reflexión entre dos bienales,” 34.

<sup>1127</sup> See for example, Edward Soja’s discussion of Lefebvre’s trialectics of space in Soja’s *Thirdspace* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), 66-68.

<sup>1128</sup> Straub, 34.

<sup>1129</sup> Interestingly, the architect Cristina Undurraga spoke of the competition included in the Biennial as promoting creativity “in graphic form, and the language of the architect is that one [a graphic one].” Undurraga, quoted in “Creación/obra y reflexión entre dos bienales,” 34.

<sup>1130</sup> This position had been stated by the School of Architects, which stated that the city was being shaped by “the market” and “particular interests.” *Ibid.*

avenue resembled that of commercial advertisements seen on the streets and even came to “compete” with them, a remark that should be tempered by the fact that the portion of the avenue used did not have commercial signs at the time, except for those announcing the sale of the empty lots around it. Santiago was up for sale, becoming a site for real estate speculation, with not only lands previously occupied by shantytowns leveled for new ‘modern’ buildings and the dwellers re-located into ‘hidden’ marginal locations, but also through the parceled agricultural lands to be sold for urban development.<sup>1131</sup> Several decrees issued by the government had eliminated the limits curbing urban expansion, leading to the rapid speculation of the land.<sup>1132</sup>

Both of Rosenfeld’s signs (those on the pavement and their reproduction in a vertical manner on the screens) were mostly made to be seen by drivers rather than passers-by, pointing to the avenue’s highway appearance.<sup>1133</sup> This was different from the work produced in 1984 in front of La Moneda, the government house, the Museum of Fine Arts, and Universidad de Chile’s School of Law, where a single cross could be seen at street level (from a passers-by point of view). Yet the riders in the high speed stream of cars would suddenly see the road interrupted by a moving row of crosses, resembling a cemetery and Christian procession. Becoming literally “the way of the cross,” Rosenfeld’s marks acted as visual reminders of loss and pain, transforming an everyday act of passage and transition between two places into an (uncalled for, like graffiti) devotional pilgrimage. Each cross stood for a “here” and “now” sign, the latter a word which, as stated by Robert Pogue Harrison, etymologically stands for “grave.”<sup>1134</sup> As stated in *Revista Hoy* in 1980 when the work was projected, “the long pavement, hurt with tar”<sup>1135</sup> had its lines “cut” as the artist’s “body curved on the pavement, on the social

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<sup>1131</sup> In an article titled “Sitios urbanos: asalto a la ciudad” (Urban Sites: Assault on the City), María Ester Aliaga argued that since 1978, Santiago was experiencing “an apogee of lots” similar to that occurring during the 1940s and 1960s. According to the author, the “current National Policy of Urban Development along with other dispositions had in recent years liberalized the use of land to allow for the natural growth of urban areas according to the market’s tendencies.” María Ester Aliaga, “Sitios urbanos: asalto a la ciudad,” *Revista Apsi*, April 21-May 4, 1981, 6-7.

<sup>1132</sup> The government’s measures of expanding the urban radius to incorporate agricultural lands created a controversy that touched not only architects, but the Syndicate of Agricultural Producers and even the Chamber of Construction. The president of the School of Architects denounced the government project as “economist,” while the president of the syndicate pointed how the growth of the capital had already eaten up forty thousand hectares of “the best land in the Central Valley.” See “Ampliación del radio urbano provoca polémica,” *El Mercurio*, November 30, 1979. Curiously enough, the Municipality of Santiago started a campaign called “love your city” at the same time.

<sup>1133</sup> According to Emilio Duhart, National Prize in Architecture and participant of the 1979 Architectural Biennial, Santiago was a “torn city” that looked more and more like North American suburbs, “with people fleeing the city.” For Duhart, this was an imported pattern, a form of “transculturation” that did not reflect Chilean “cultural identity.” Duhart was particularly concerned of the disappearance of public spaces this meant. Duhart, quoted in “Creación/obra y reflexión entre dos bienales,” 32.

<sup>1134</sup> Robert Pogue Harrison, “Hic Jacet,” in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 351.

<sup>1135</sup> A.M.L., “Cruces de suma y dolor,” *Revista Hoy*, June 18, 1980, 43.

body (...) intervenes in the surroundings, in the city.”<sup>1136</sup> If the avenue was symbolic of the social body, Rosenfeld was inflicting wounds on it, scarring its surface with a temporary monument or burial site.

The repeated gesture in “Una milla de cruces en el pavimento” brought a triple action into play with strong graphic components. On one hand, the work made evident the serial character of both the traffic signs and the artist’s action, insofar as there was not only a repeated gesture of marking on a surface or matrix (the road), but also an edition of the artist’s work: only one mile of crosses.<sup>1137</sup> Yet the act of altering the pavement’s signs was twice repeated: in the work itself (and the multiple works to follow), and in the video reproduction. The video acted as another record, quoting the “matrix” of the performance, capable in turn of being copied and producing more reproductions. The notion of repetition and edition was tangible in the iterated breaks that the graphic marks performed on the cityscape and the discontinuity introduced into what was one whole (the white lines differentiating lanes) to enforce their meaning, just like the traffic signals assert their message and attempt to control movement through their iteration. Rosenfeld’s repeated action highlighted how the social message that the traffic signs spread needs to be reactivated at every stage of the road, a position assuming that otherwise disorder would ensue with subjects crossing over the tracks at will. Rosenfeld’s crosses suggested that the graphic line not only divides and establishes order, but encompasses and assumes its own transgression.

If the lines in the pavement could be interpreted as “negative” signs of repression, symbols of power formulating a correct path within the city, their double act of crossing present in Rosenfeld’s marks suggested the intersection of forces within the social landscape and the fragile nature of the signs that try to regulate them. By re-inscribing a given urban everyday sign and opening up its meaning, incorporating its negation and transformation into a three-dimensional sign, while including her body in the action, Rosenfeld was stressing the active role of city-dwellers in the shaping of the social landscape. An example was found in a 1980 video recording by Rosenfeld, which displayed the highway connecting Santiago to Valparaíso altered with a single cross.<sup>1138</sup> In the work, the pedestrian captured by the camera crossing illegally the lanes, the body intercepting the separation line and creating a spontaneous cross, pointed to how the transgression of limits is an everyday act performed by regular human beings. Citizens were not just victims of their surroundings in Rosenfeld’s works, but active agents who in their everyday lives were constantly performing acts of transgression. Instead of a messianic act of enlightenment, as the works of C.A.D.A. aimed to perform, Rosenfeld’s crossed marks pointed to the quotidian forms of disciplining in the city and, through the

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<sup>1136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1137</sup> In *Desacato*, Richard makes constant use of graphic references, such as calling the action a graphic work through the creation of “an edition of the crosses cemented in their support.” Richard, in *Desacato*, 21. Then she argued that the video documentation provided more editions of the single work, a position that as will be discussed in the next Chapter, needs more analysis. For Richard, video merely “prolongs the gesture,” a position I find too literal regarding the role of video art.

<sup>1138</sup> The video recording is referenced in Rosenfeld’s catalogue *Desacato*, in page 69. The work appears without a title and the only information given is that the recording was made in July 1980, with camera work by Juan Castillo, and photography done by Fernando Balcells and Magali Meneses.

inscription of simple yet stark contrasts, suggested ways in which these were and could be transformed by its users. To cross was to transgress, to step beyond the boundary.

### 5.5. The Limits of the Popular Landscape: Carlos Altamirano's Vernacular Editions

Many artists would be influenced by the boldness of C.A.D.A.'s actions and their socially oriented work, Altamirano among them. The shift towards acting on terrain, taking the city not just as a scenery but as a 'material' for art and a surface to be inscribed, was reflected in the displacement of graphic and conceptual ideas onto the city. The latter can be seen in the passage of Altamirano's works between 1980 and 1982, which turned from the two-dimensional support and its expansion into installations, to the questioning of the art system in the actual performance of actions within and on the city.

In 1980, Altamirano presented to the Segundo Salón de Gráfica organized by the Catholic University an eight part work titled "Ocho Paisajes" (Eight Landscapes), winning the first prize.<sup>1139</sup> Each part consisted of a wooden board onto which a collage of enlarged photographs, pieces of contact sheets, negatives, and black and white reproductions from the press, along with acrylic, cement, and tar, had been applied (fig. 5.14).<sup>1140</sup> Each panel bore a different stenciled word or words, all referring to the verbal landscape of art: "trichromy" along with "painting," "still life" with "monument," or the single words "popular print," "portrait," "mural," "xylography," "diptych," "watercolor" and "foreshortening." The work reduced on one hand several genres of the arts, mediums, and techniques to their discursive representation and juxtaposed them to current, everyday national references. Most of the photographs revealed fragments of the capital's urban landscape, from clouds on the sky and rocks, to deserted avenues next to empty lots, building tops, views of streets and construction work done on them, monuments, passers-by or accidents, passing to television sets within the home and stacks of *El Mercurio* newspapers.

The juxtaposed elements contrasted different views and modes of representation of the cityscape. In the panel bearing the word "diptych," the photograph of a man running in an empty street apparently followed by a car while another man turned back to look at him, was placed to the right of a blackened piece of contact sheet, balancing the action of the photograph with a visual emptiness or negative space. Beneath both images, and surrounded by thick layers of cement, was a postcard with the reproduction of the painting "Panorama de Santiago" (Panorama of Santiago) by the turn of the century Chilean painter Juan Francisco González. González' cityscape offered a placid panorama

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<sup>1139</sup> Even though Altamirano won the main prize and was exalted by the press at the time, an analysis of this work has been avoided by historians dealing with the artist's oeuvre, opting instead for either the works of 1977 or those from 1981 onwards. This is even more evident in the last catalogue corresponding to Altamirano's retrospective at the Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago in 2007, where the work is not mentioned in any of the critical texts, even though each of the panels is given a full page reproduction (along with a general view of them in the museum's room). Perhaps this is related to the irony embedded in the exhibition's title "Complete Works," since all of Altamirano's 1970s prints are missing, fire of 1976 notwithstanding. See *Altamirano, Obra Completa* (Santiago; Ocho Libros Editores, 2007).

<sup>1140</sup> "Ocho paisajes" is documented in color reproductions in the catalogue *Altamirano, Obra Completa*, in pages 146-155. Some of the works were also documented in articles of the time, such as "Plástica. Todo es válido," *Revista Hoy*, October 8-14, 1980, in page 45.

of the tranquil capital bathed in golden light as seen from a high vantage point, generating a distance between the beholder and the scene that was echoed in the framing tree on the right side of the canvas. Considered a local example of Impressionist painting, González' work was characterized by its impastos and looseness of definition, and was regarded radical within the Chilean academy, even though he was still 'portraying' an idyllic version of an otherwise changing landscape. Instead, the rush and anxiety evoked by the running man in the panel's photograph contrasted in its immediacy and apparent urgency with the uneventful aspect of González sunny cityscape, its static qualities accentuated by being partially covered in concrete. To the photographic document, Altamirano opposed the reproduction of the painting, countering the life in the streets foregone by González by choosing a high vantage point from which to portray the city as a prospect.

While the words in each panel corresponded in a literal manner to the images so combined, they also suggested a more poignant criticism of the traditional ways in which the landscape had been represented.<sup>1141</sup> Building upon his earlier textual attempts at criticizing Chilean art, its 'system' and its history, Altamirano was joining tradition and its inherent repetition (physically manifested in the stenciled jargon) to not only contemporary mediums, but also to current locations and social actors. The immobility of the academy and its forms contrasted in each panel with the everyday life captured on the streets, opposing the picturesque prospect with the grittiness of the street. In "Naturaleza Muerta" (Still Life), an enlarged photograph showing two rectangular openings done in the middle of the street surrounded by pieces of cement, rock, and pedestrians, was juxtaposed below to two enlarged details of the same image. The title of the work, "still life" was written next to the magnified briefcase carried by a man, its contours outlined in red, while the word "monument" acted as a caption for the blown-up photograph of the excavation. As if answering Baudelaire's call to artists to accurately represent their times, the downtown businessman's accretion in all its banality became the subject for a new art, while the broken up pavement was turned into a contemporary commemorative structure. The image celebrated by the still life and monument, which was immortalized in the fixed aspect of the photograph, was one of urban renovation and modern indifference, the street torn and analyzed by Altamirano almost like a crime scene.<sup>1142</sup>

Contemporary events were tacitly and indirectly referenced in the works in a manner resembling a police investigation. The panel labeled "xylography" counterpoised a large photograph of *El Mercurio* newspapers at the top with the enlarged image of a newspaper text whose words had been partially effaced with a black horizontal line, while next to it was a portrait of a young man outlined with a curving black contour. The headlines of the newspaper, which combined in a hierarchical manner a special article on the territorial expansion south ("Integration with Austral Chile") as marked by the photograph of a ferry with the news of economic fraud investigations, institutional debate, and statistics concerning terrorism, were contrasted to a blown-up yet half-hidden fragment of a testimony recounting street violence and the indifference of authorities to

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<sup>1141</sup> According to Luisa Ulibarri, who reviewed the Salon, Altamirano had "vivisected art history," while at the same time "negating and revising it." Luisa Ulibarri, "II Salón de Gráfica. Las estaciones del vía crucis," *Revista Ercilla*, October 1-7, 1980, 56-57.

<sup>1142</sup> The image bears a strong resemblance to Catalina Parra's "Coffin Capacity," of 1977, a collage based on the photograph of an opening filled with cables found by the artist in Germany.



the wounded bodies. The face of the young man, outlined with the same effacing black line, thus created a parallel with the bodies discursively mentioned and evidently marked down or eliminated from view and the references to terrorism buried within the newspaper's headlines. The black line of xylography was here used to trace the contours of the specific bodies forgotten and consciously effaced by the dictatorship. Contrasting a basic form of graphic depiction on wood, a "popular" medium, to the stacks of *El Mercurio* newspapers which were industrially produced by modern printing techniques, the popular body was both canceled and delineated, doubly marked.

The relation between printing processes and contemporary forms of representation culminated in the panel bearing the legend "grabado popular" (popular print) (fig. 5.15).<sup>1143</sup> The stenciled word that invoked a vernacular form of information and illustration was framed by the black contours of a photographed television set, the television supplanting popular forms of reproduction and entertainment with a more sleek and modern look. The television set also acted like a flat sheet of paper, as seen in the contemporary electronic extension of a visual inscription. This translation of mediums was noted by Luisa Ulibarri in her review of the Salon, when she stated that in Altamirano's work, "the print is not a print, but the photographic image of a naked television set,"<sup>1144</sup> a phrase that evoked a parallel between different forms of mechanical reproduction.<sup>1145</sup> Television was replacing older forms of visual production as a mass medium of communication and, as stated by Sergio Marras, it was becoming the new "demagogue"<sup>1146</sup> while creating its own visual landscape.

Yet the images briefly inscribed through light in the television set were mobile, like the car on the road from where the photograph of the landscape also attached to the panel had been taken. The act of editing involved in both the popular print and the images on television was related to the editing of the landscape provoked by the moving car and its windows, all producing fragmented images from different vantage points. The contrast generated by the bourgeois interior and the desolate avenue bordering empty lots and newly constructed housing apartments with the Andes Mountain framing the scene, also pointed to a temporal, physical, and economic fracture. The comfort suggested by the bed and floral wallpaper countered the peaceful setting outdoors that was booming,

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<sup>1143</sup> "Grabado popular" is documented in page 150 of Altamirano's catalogue, *Altamirano, Obra Completa*.

<sup>1144</sup> Ulibarri, 56.

<sup>1145</sup> Speaking of what his work shared with art produced outside Chile, Altamirano spoke of a coincidence in terms of materials and in the need to express an idea through those mediums and the signs associated with them. Altamirano then mentioned how what Chile shared with art from abroad was "man and his surroundings, the mediums of social communication, electronics and technology. The mediums of communication that determine what should or should not be seen. The world is what you see and read in newspapers, photography, movies." Altamirano, quoted in Ana María Foxley, "Plástica. Todo vale," *Revista Hoy*, October 8-14, 1980, 46. In the same interview, Altamirano mentioned Vostell and, notably, Beuys as his influences.

<sup>1146</sup> Sergio Marras, "Televisión: la gran demagoga," *Revista Apsi*, October 7-20, 1980, 2-4. Marras was referring to the recent plebiscite, during which the dictatorship had usurped all television channels to 'inscribe' its message of support for the construction of a new constitution, negating the right to the opposition.

nevertheless, with new constructions. The speed of the car and of the images reproduced by television suggested a new mindset and form of identification where nature and the exterior world could be safely brought to the bedroom, while keeping the new 'projects' on the margins of the speeding gaze.<sup>1147</sup>

Altamirano's continuing interest in the urban landscape was outlined by Fernando Balcells that year when he called Altamirano "the landscape artist of Chile."<sup>1148</sup> But according to Balcells, Altamirano was a perverted landscaper since he used the tools of publicity, adapting the language of street posters and commercial enterprises, to propose an "intervention" in the city. Balcells was speaking from C.A.D.A.'s perspective of social action, yet even while Altamirano stated that "the city is a language that constructs the citizen,"<sup>1149</sup> the cityscape was reduced in his prints to its reproduction and "chronicle,"<sup>1150</sup> whether artistic or mass-produced. Ironically, while González' landscapes could be read as either avant-garde precursors of both abstract art and anti-academicism or, on the contrary, as the upholders of tradition, they were also confined to complacent identifications with the land that were in the present simplified to a banal postcard reproduction. Less a collector's item than a 'popular print,' tradition was equally subject to mass and popular consumption as in photography and television. Balcells commented that against the "sweet idylls between the inhabitant and the landscape, the smooth emotional and also somewhat magic feasts which official discourse delights in,"<sup>1151</sup> Altamirano's works presented "a visuality that turns indigestible the sale of electrodomestic illusions."<sup>1152</sup> Such indigestion came not only from the landscape represented, one changing its face and made up of margins and commercial dreams, wounded bodies and celebratory national achievements, but from the fusion of high and low cultural forms and the undefined borders between them.

Altamirano's landscapes were also subjected to a process of alienation and reduction of forms. The city was evoked as an image, a visual sign complicated by its current changes and events of repression, persecution, and economic upheaval. As argued by Balcells, the economy of signs used by the artist overcame the subject matter, "the negative urban images becoming the rearview mirror of art's own production."<sup>1153</sup> But the questioning of artistic forms was here intimately tied to a criticism of the society upholding them. If visual languages and artistic traditions were the focus of Altamirano's

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<sup>1147</sup> And yet, as noted by W.J.T. Mitchell, "like all scenes framed in a rearview mirror, these landscapes may be closer to us than they appear." See W.J.T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," in *Landscape and Power*, 21.

<sup>1148</sup> Fernando Balcells, "Carlos Altamirano: la perversidad del paisaje," *Revista Apsi*, October 7-20, 1980, 23.

<sup>1149</sup> Altamirano, quoted in Ana María Foxley, 45.

<sup>1150</sup> Balcells, 24.

<sup>1151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1152</sup> Balcells, 23.

<sup>1153</sup> Balcells, 24.

work, they were the product of their time and place, a social landscape in a state of transformation.

Such a problem was addressed by Altamirano in his next two works, which shifted from the flat panel towards an intervention in the actual cityscape. “Versión residual de la historia de la pintura chilena” (Residual Version of the history of Chilean Painting) of 1980-1981 (fig. 5.16) and “Tránsito suspendido” (Suspended Transit) of 1981 were two related works dealing with Chilean art history, the city, and the landscape, and their role in the molding of identity.<sup>1154</sup> In the first work, Altamirano was photographed holding a bed sheet onto which transferred images of a newspaper reproducing famous Chilean works of art were printed along with the names of their authors below the title of Altamirano’s work.<sup>1155</sup> The reproduced paintings were taken from a cultural supplement for children called “Icarito” (Little Icarus) published in the newspaper *La Tercera*, which has led critics like Alberto Madrid and Mellado to emphasize the didactic aspect of the images’ original source and the specific form of art history presented: evolutionary, following the developments of European examples, in short, a history resembling that of Antonio Romera.<sup>1156</sup> Nevertheless, the images appeared inverted due to the precarious transfer with turpentine, while the names and title printed on top of the painting’s reproductions could be read by viewers “straight.” The transfer was performed in two parts, the first on the sidewalk in front of the newspapers’ offices and the second in front of the Museum of Fine Arts, creating a link between the source for mass production and the place where these works and symbols of tradition were actually stored.<sup>1157</sup> Altamirano then had himself photographed holding the sheet with a wooden support frontally in front of his legs and torso in different streets of Santiago on the same day, creating a physical trajectory for the work. The photographs

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<sup>1154</sup> “Versión residual de la historia de la pintura chilena” is documented in *Altamirano, Obra Completa*, pages 132 to 135.

<sup>1155</sup> The artists included were: Alberto Valenzuela Llanos, Alfredo Valenzuela Puelma, Juan Francisco González, Juan Mochi, Mauricio Rugendas, John Searle, Fernando Álvarez de Sotomayor, Alejandro Cicarelli, Raymond Monvoisin, Ernesto Kirchbach, Carlos Wood, José Gil de Castro, Thomas Somerscales, Nicolás Guzmán, Alfredo Helsby, Demetrio Reveco, Alberto Orrego Luco, Manuel Ortiz de Zárate, Onofre Jarpa, Clara Filleul, Eucarpio Espinoza, Roche, and Pedro Lira.

<sup>1156</sup> Alberto Madrid, “versión residual,” in *Altamirano. Obra completa*, 137, and Justo Pastor Mellado, untitled text in *Textos de Nelly Richard y Justo Mellado sobre “Tránsito Suspendido”, trabajo de Carlos Altamirano sobre Santiago de Chile* (Santiago: Buitano y Hurtado Ltda., 1981), 17-22. The idea of a history like Romera’s comes from Mellado. What the critic did not mention was how this history was being updated by Gaspar Galaz and Milan Ivelic, first in the text they produced for a video on Chilean art commissioned by Galería Época’s director Lily Lanz which began in June 1981 and was finished in December, and then in their first published book on Chilean painting, *La pintura en Chile*, published at the end of the year. See the article “Filmación antológica,” *Revista Hoy*, June 17-23, 1981, 48, and “En la vida y en la historia,” *Revista Hoy*, January 13-19, 1982, 34-35.

<sup>1157</sup> Madrid stated that “the action forms a semantic field in mediation, they are institutions which mediate art knowledge. The first is a medium of diffusion (...) the second the receptacle that conserves and exhibits the development of art through its collection and as a place of consecration.” Madrid, 138.

were later transferred to wooden panels, the dates and time of the actions recorded at the bottom.<sup>1158</sup>

As mentioned by Richard in 1981, the sheet acted as a fragile supplement of memory where the “remnants of tradition” were precariously embedded.<sup>1159</sup> Stained and diffuse, the images of the famous art works so imprinted were treated as ‘residues,’ discarded excesses of a grand history and pale copies of the originals, reduced by their mass reproductions to stains. Mellado called the sheet a “shroud,”<sup>1160</sup> endowing an official history of art with a religious and saintly connotation. While Mellado read the Christian reference as giving an official sanction to the transfer of history to a cultural supplement destined for the masses, the notion of the sheet “mixing spices and sweat” also evoked for him, as in earlier works by Dittborn,<sup>1161</sup> the body that it wrapped. The body could then be read (following Kay and then Mellado’s adaptation of the former’s theories) as a first matrix, creating an edition through its stain. But if Altamirano’s work was giving “body” to the history of Chilean art, creating a “corpus” in the words of Mellado, it also established a link to a history and a place of pain and suffering. This was not merely “crucifying” a history that Mellado associated with Antonio Romera, a reading supported by the fact that later the panels were called “stations,” but a corporalization of marginality as well.

For the itinerary traced by Altamirano was not merely historical. If the sheet was like a cross carried through Calvary (or purgatory), such road passed through a series of landmarks and stages bearing relation to a social geography. The fact that Altamirano posed in front of marginal locations at the city’s borders, from trash dumps to the ‘modern’ projects where shantytown dwellers were being relocated, and also in front of bus with a popular trajectory of its own (passing through Avenida Chile), recalled the signaling gestures of C.A.D.A. on one hand, as well as Altamirano’s previous connection between graphic art and a social notion of the ‘popular.’ If the version of history produced in “Icarito” was a form of popularizing art and instructing the masses, Altamirano’s selection of placement for his documentation was also a form of

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<sup>1158</sup> The date that appears in the canvas is 5 April, 1981, which makes the dating of the work as having been done in 1980 dubious. Nevertheless, Mellado states in his catalogue text that Altamirano had sent the work to the Graphic Salon in 1980 and was rejected by the jury. The retrospective catalogue in turn, dates the sheet as having been made in 1979 and the action in 1981, yet Madrid states that the work was made in 1980. Altamirano evades dating the work in the catalogue’s interview, though he mentions that the work was done in parts, with documentation first taken in front of *La Tercera* and the Museum, where the newspaper images were transferred, and then more photographs were taken of the panels some years after. In his catalogue text, Roberto Merino dates the work and actions in 1979 (page 90). I use the date 1980-1981 to encompass the two actions. In 1981, Richard dates the itinerary of the sheet to 1981.

<sup>1159</sup> Nelly Richard, “Nota 5: Altamirano/La historia del arte como energética,” *Una mirada sobre el arte en Chile* (Santiago: no publisher, 1981), 36.

<sup>1160</sup> Mellado, 20.

<sup>1161</sup> Mellado noted in his text that Dittborn had introduced a particular conception of the ‘shroud’ in his artist’s book *Fallo fotográfico* presented at a round table organized by TAV on 29 July, 1981. What he did not mention is that Dittborn, Leppe, and Altamirano had since 1980 shared a workshop and that there is a possibility that the image of the shroud was shared by these artists from earlier on. As mentioned earlier, Dittborn had already worked with the notion of the shroud in 1978.

proselytizing, pointing to the spaces where the instruction so promoted would hardly reach.<sup>1162</sup>

Such a mapping gesture marked the limits of a social landscape absent in the works reproduced on the sheet. According to Richard, Altamirano was “restoring history to the landscapes that had been subtracted from it (its negated geography), to the missing bodies (...) reading history from its geographical subtraction,”<sup>1163</sup> thus performing through his displacement through the city a form of marking the spaces deleted from official historical versions. In the ‘critical’ map traced by Altamirano’s documentation, the current landscape of social inequality was imprinted, a landscape divided by fences and walls that partially hid from the highways the living conditions of the shantytown’s inhabitants. All the photographs show Altamirano standing in front of physical and symbolic thresholds, bearing witness to the actual marginalization of certain sectors of the population. But unlike C.A.D.A.’s crossing of the marginal threshold, the message of this bearded prophet was not heard in the communities photographed at a distance behind him. Altamirano’s works were oriented towards the art world and the subscribers of *La Tercera*, aiming at a viewer in the museum who might see the panels documenting the work and (hopefully) reflect upon this countering of histories.

“Tránsito Suspendido” (fig. 5.17) instead stepped away from the marginal locations in order to address the problem of representation at street level.<sup>1164</sup> In June, 1981, Altamirano extended on the sidewalk in front of Galería Sur a long white sheet onto which Mellado, from the third story of the building, projected a series of slides with reproductions of paintings made by well-known Chilean artists from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century selected from the Museum’s permanent collection.<sup>1165</sup> The artist then began spraying with red acrylic the word “light” onto the sheet, followed by a dictionary definition of it. After the phrase was completed, Altamirano folded the cloth and went to the gallery’s second floor to continue the action.<sup>1166</sup> With a recorded

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<sup>1162</sup> Richard referred to the work as performing a “creative bringing into consciousness.” In Richard, “Nota 5: Altamirano/La historia del arte como energética,” 38.

<sup>1163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1164</sup> The performance in the street of “Tránsito suspendido” is documented in the exhibition catalogue *Textos de Nelly Richard y Justo Mellado sobre “Tránsito Suspendido”, trabajo de Carlos Altamirano sobre Santiago de Chile* (Santiago: Buitano y Hurtado Ltda., 1981). A photograph of Altamirano bent over the white sheet appears in the article by Ana María Foxley, “Con la voz y el cuerpo,” *Revista Hoy*, July 8-14, 1981, 49. It is ironic that in the same page where Foxley’s article on Altamirano’s exhibition (and Leppe, as will be discussed in Chapter Six) appears, there is another brief review and photograph of a completely different exhibition: “The birth of a nation. History of Chile through painting,” at the museum of Fine Arts in Santiago.

<sup>1165</sup> According to Ana María Foxley, Altamirano had been unable to get a permit for using the actual street, so he had to limit his action to the sidewalk. See Ana María Foxley, “Con la voz y el cuerpo,” *Revista Hoy*, July 8-14, 1981, 49. It is interesting to note that in early November of the previous year the museum had inaugurated ten renovated rooms for the display of Chilean paintings in its permanent collection. See the article “MNBA: inauguradas 10 salas de pintura chilena,” *El Mercurio*, November 5, 1980.

<sup>1166</sup> The text stated: “Light, clarity irradiated by bodies in combustion, ignition, or incandescence. In painting. Point or center illuminating all history and objects painted on a canvas.” Quoted in Foxley, 49.

soundtrack citing the names of the painters in the background, and a projection on the walls of slides recording the trajectory of “Versión residual de la historia de la pintura chilena,” Altamirano placed the canvas in a large wooden tub filled with water, closing it with a lid imprinted with the phrase: “grabado al aguafuerte” (etching).

At the time, Mellado interpreted the work as a homology of graphic art. In the action, the reproduced history of Chilean art as exemplified by Antonio Romera was reduced to a copy of a copy. Projected onto the canvas first and already copied through photographs and slides, the history of Chilean art was further reproduced in the aural recounting of artists’ names. Mellado read Altamirano’s act of spraying the words onto the canvas as the stylus etching an image onto a copper plate, in order to submit it later to a process of degradation in acid (or water).<sup>1167</sup> The result of this translation of graphic procedures to an actual performance would, according to Mellado, result in the erasure of a stain, similar to the act of washing.<sup>1168</sup> For Mellado, what Altamirano was doing was staging the photographic processes of certain graphic practices while simultaneously “putting in doubt a positive and progressive reconstruction of history, not only of Chilean art, but of national history.”<sup>1169</sup> In other words, the residual was equaled in the last paragraphs of Mellado’s text to a “non-mentioned social [entity],” a (photographic) negative which Altamirano had made “positive” through the shroud. What Altamirano was ultimately staging was the negative within Chilean history, the underside of progress; the latter meaning in national art historical terms the reproduction of international models.

Even though Mellado’s interpretation is lucid and compelling, particularly the reading of specific graphic practices being translated into other mediums, it specifically avoids dealing with the performative aspects of Altamirano’s work and its relation with the body. It is interesting that Mellado at the time openly confronted in his text’s first paragraph the position asserted by Ana María Foxley that Altamirano was effectively interrupting normal transit on the street. Instead, for Mellado this was too literal a reading, suggesting an “effective infraction of traffic” within the city, which “implies the existence of other art actions that elevate their indexes of transgression in the factual modification of the codes of urban circulation, easily extendable to the cultural conditions of the nation; to the metaphoric transgression of the social order in a period in which real infraction has been cancelled or differed.”<sup>1170</sup> Mellado was tacitly implicating C.A.D.A.’s actions in this critique, and attempted to distance Altamirano’s action from those of the collective by accentuating the conceptual translation of mediums rather than the social implications of the work summarily treated at the end of his text.<sup>1171</sup>

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<sup>1167</sup> Mellado even related the repetition of Altamirano’s pose in the previous work to the edition involved in graphic art.

<sup>1168</sup> While Mellado mentioned Altamirano’s contribution to the “Visualization of Purgatory” as an antecedent for the cleansing of an image in water, he did not refer to how Altamirano and Leppe had already made a work in 1978 which literally explained the procedures of a graphic technique.

<sup>1169</sup> Mellado, 22.

<sup>1170</sup> Mellado, 17.

<sup>1171</sup> Since 1981, Mellado has constantly critiqued C.A.D.A.’s works as too literal in their identification with the victimized sectors of the nation, a reading to which I am indebted, yet which I also find flawed insofar

While Mellado's critique of the explicit alteration of a situation as a facile way of determining the work's "effectiveness" is important, Altamirano's street interruption was as much a central part of the action as that involving the cleansing of the bed sheet from its stains.<sup>1172</sup> The street action not only involved the artist's body and the sheet cutting off the sidewalk's function for some moments, but incorporated the mass of viewers into that interruption as well. Viewers were both part of the action and voyeurs, active and passive at the same time, the crowd composed of mostly art-related viewers. If Altamirano had not crossed the threshold of marginality before, and remained safely enclosed in the art related arena, those involved as spectators-participants in the action formed only a miniature avant-garde version of the museum's crowds. Yet the viewers were involved in an act of looking that, while reproducing typical museum behavior of quiet contemplation, was also a way of performing an infraction on the street's own regulations.<sup>1173</sup>

Richard's catalogue text on the other hand, seemed to bridge this gap, supplementing the historical question with the corporeal presentation of the artist. Noting how Altamirano's body obstructed light (and the history of art reflected by the slides), as well as its definition in the canvas, Richard read this corporeal gesture as making "vision" (and "re-vision") opaque, thus marking the "latency" of history.<sup>1174</sup> Altamirano was physically re-editing history in a new "territoriality," one undefined by Richard but related to the "migrating" gestures of "Versión residual de la historia de la pintura chilena."<sup>1175</sup> By liberating art history from the grasp of the museum, Altamirano was literally bringing it to the streets.

But once again the question of efficacy seems to loom over such actions. This is a problem related to avant-garde gestures of blurring the boundaries between life (streets) and art, for beyond the support of the institution (the art gallery next to the sidewalk, the museum, the cultural magazine), art becomes too similar to social activism or artistic

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it obliterates the relations between specific spaces and the human actions performed on them. It is thus interesting to note that Mellado has favored a more 'conceptual' approach to pain and the marginal as manifested in the works of Leppe, over the 'literal' forms of torture and sacrifice enacted by C.A.D.A. members. While Mellado has often spoken of a Chilean "phobia of the body," I would argue that he in turn has a phobia of the streets. Interestingly, in his writings, Mellado has always avoided Rosenfeld's independent work, for as mentioned earlier they formed a different approach to artistic activism in the streets.

<sup>1172</sup> As Altamirano has stated regarding his earlier work, "the printed sheet (...) was a secondary part of the complete work. At the time, I perpetrated the transfer of ink from the newspaper to the sheet as an "art action," one part in front of *La Tercera*, another in front of the museum; that act in the street was for me the important, the artistic." Altamirano, quoted in Martín Rivas, "Interview," *Altamirano. Obra Completa*, 187.

<sup>1173</sup> Altamirano has recently criticized his own works of the time, as in his retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, stating that they were vain since the passersby did not care or understand the "art" component of his works.

<sup>1174</sup> Richard, untitled text in *Textos de Nelly Richard y Justo Mellado sobre 'Transito Suspendido'*, trabajo de Carlos Altamirano sobre Santiago de Chile, 11-12.

<sup>1175</sup> Richard, *Textos de Nelly Richard y Justo Mellado sobre 'Transito Suspendido'*, trabajo de Carlos Altamirano sobre Santiago de Chile, 13.

proselytism. While Mellado opted to disregard the effectiveness of shutting down transit, and Richard turned it into an act of enlightening the masses (even though as documented in the catalogue, most assistants belonged to the press and art circles), I return to the question of inscription in relation to identity. Even though Mellado is right in contesting the efficacy of interrupting the street, the work also pointed to an interruption of vision and a reversal of roles in the act of gazing and acting.

Claiming a right to manipulate a history that descends from above, and is illuminated by a theological kind of light, Altamirano was also pointing to the frailty of such inscriptions, the illusionism behind the slide lecture, and the limits of art itself, including his own works. For the images only passed temporarily on the canvas as shadows, their litany stained in an impermanent manner onto the canvas, and the originals safely stored in the museum. What was cleansed in the tub was the written reference to light as source, the unmarked blind spot that illuminates picture and text, making them visible. By placing his body in the picture, in the canvas, and interrupting the light's apparent transparency, Altamirano appeared as an object like those portrayed in the series of marines, landscapes, and portraits of his mock slide lecture.

Yet this object or stain in the picture was rendered mobile, unstable, and the marks impermanent. Altamirano was not only juxtaposing the real live body to its representations, but such words and reproductions exceeded the limits of the white canvas stretched on the street. The mismatch between frames and modes of representation in the action pointed to the inability of the subject of vision to circumscribe and retain the objects as permanent fixtures, no matter how ornate and heavy the frame might be.<sup>1176</sup> If the mirror was for Foucault the ultimate heterotopical space, for the subject is never quite there in the space of the reflection, the illusion of "presence" embedded in both language and visual representation, and the history produced by their intersection, was itself brought to light, made an object of transient contemplation. As displaced signs that stand ephemerally for their objects and are already framed and given meaning by active subjects of vision, the mastery of the optical invoked by the reproduced paintings and words describing light, a mastery based on knowing and possessing, was momentarily 'suspended' by the artist's actions, framed itself and brought to the screen/canvas as a stained inscription. Altamirano's very act of artistic illumination was precarious, subject to erasure and decomposition.

The action is nevertheless ironic for the artist had to ask for a permit in order to disrupt transit and bring art to the street, being furthermore surveyed by the police. Even art had its limits and was subject to social regulations. But such an embrace of action on the streets and the interruption of everyday customs and urban flow, and the idea that such an expansion was based on graphic practices, became a prevalent mode of action in Chilean art works of the time as in those of Hernán Parada (1953) and his collaborations with Luz Donoso.<sup>1177</sup> Here Mellado's critique of the effectiveness of such actions is once

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<sup>1176</sup> All the paintings reproduced by Altamirano's projector were shown framed.

<sup>1177</sup> The collective "Artistas plásticos al interior de Chile" and "Jóvenes Plásticos" should also be mentioned as examples of young artists making works in the cityscape, even though their actions tended to be "exercises" rather than full fleshed works.



again pertinent, for it points to the blurring of boundaries advocated by the avant-garde and the 'artistic' content of such interactions.

Closer to the actions of C.A.D.A. in their interventions of the actual landscape and identification with the wounded body politic, yet less ritualistic, Parada's actions focused on the missing bodies of the nation. Parada's brother was one of the disappeared, and his actions literally made visible the bodies rendered invisible by the dictatorship. In November 1979, and collaborating with Donoso, Parada interrupted the signal of the television sets displayed on a shop-window in a commercial street of downtown Santiago in work that became known as "Acción de apoyo" (Supporting Action) (fig. 5.18).<sup>1178</sup> For the space of twelve hours, the portrait of a female disappeared political prisoner appeared on the screen of all the television sets facing the street. As an apparition emerging through the light of the screen, the close-up of the young woman's face evoked a ghostly emergence that gained corporeality through the illusion of the television set. The work invited passers-by to gaze however briefly at the gazing woman, to look in the face at those missing through the only evidence of their existence, their portraits detained and congealed in the past. In so doing, the work interrupted the banality of commerce, appropriating its modes of transmission and reproduction, in order to question what the Chilean public was seeing and being shown through television and, by implication, other media. Openly associating the indifference of the market selling its wares (as displayed in the numerous price tags selling SONY color television sets) with the content of the images reproduced on them, the artists were reclaiming a medium of vision and a space within the city for those absent, making of pedestrians unintentional (and unconscious more often) witnesses of corporeal lack in the nation.

A similar action was performed by Parada in 1980, when he walked the streets of Santiago wearing a mask on his face that reproduced the features of his disappeared brother. Visiting art institutions and cultural events, as well as the school where his brother studied and the commercial Paseo Ahumada, Parada was embodying memory, intersecting daily life and traffic with the face of loss. Assuming the identity, as embodied in the portrait, of another, Parada was not only visualizing, but actively supplanting the missing body with his own.

Parada's street interventions were nevertheless supported by a theory that diverged from C.A.D.A.'s or Altamirano's, in spite of their development out of a graphic extension. Building on the notion of "open work" as theorized by Umberto Eco and Allan Kaprow's notion of extension as manifested in his happenings,<sup>1179</sup> Parada developed the notion of "Obrabierta" (Openwork).<sup>1180</sup> The basis of "obrabierta" was attempting to make

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<sup>1178</sup> "Acción de apoyo" is documented in *Copiar el Edén*, in page 269.

<sup>1179</sup> In his undergraduate thesis, Parada specifically cited Eco's *La definición del arte* (Madrid: Martínez Roca, 1970) and *Obra Abierta* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1966), as well as Kaprow's *Assemblage Environments & Happenings* quoted from Vostell's catalogue at Galería Época. For Parada, the most important achievement in Kaprow's text was his chronological tracing of the expansive movement in art as derived from painting. While Parada then claimed that his own work was similar to happenings, and established a series of analogies between them, his own extensive practices derived from graphic sources. See Hernán Parada, *Obrabierta* (Undergraduate Thesis: Universidad de Chile, 1980), 6-10.

<sup>1180</sup> In *Copiar el Edén*, Catalina Valdés only mentions "C.A.D.A.'s actions" as a referent for Parada's 1979 intervention. See Catalina Mena's description of the work in *Copiar el Edén*, 268. Parada, nevertheless, also quoted at length Duchamp's definition of the ready-made and explained that the concept of

of the 'real' art, to expand the limits of art's definition and the means to produce and receive it.<sup>1181</sup> Parada's ideas had come from his work in graphic practices and a series of contemporary events that led him to think of the problem of "inscription" in an expanded material and conceptual manner that could effectively intervene in life.<sup>1182</sup> To inscribe meant for Parada to 'influence' a support, an effect which could be extended to life itself and its non-artistic situations. "Obrabierta" was meant to imitate life in its creation or underlining of an 'unfinished' event. Because of its occurrence in everyday life, the event in a state of becoming<sup>1183</sup> would be experienced and participated in, whether consciously or unconsciously, by a variety of different subjects. The purpose of such an extension of art into life and the creation of works that could interfere in everyday situations was to seek the becoming conscious of those occurrences and not merely to make individuals react (as in a happening) to the work.<sup>1184</sup>

Like the conclusions drawn by Richard and some of the artists who attended the 1979 seminar, Parada explicitly turned into the central aspect of his work the consciousness of a historic-political moment and its effects. While this intention is similar to that proposed by the earlier avant-gardes, the emphasis placed on intervening real life situations and not merely artistic ones suggests a politicization of art that deemed earlier practices exhausted. The shift from a fixed art work to the temporal and spatial, and thus to the performative, signals a change in the conception of not only the art work and physical spaces of manifestation, extending its limits, but also of the work's relations with a broader cultural, political, and social context. From a conceptualization of the sheet or canvas as body (as in Dittborn and Parra) to the landscape and the city, their life and inhabitants as extensions of art and the body politic (in Smythe, Altamirano, and Leppe) and as changing sites in which to act and inscribe different versions of history, habitation, and corporeality, certain practices in Chilean art were attempting to reconfigure spatial politics and the politics of art through an extended reading of graphic markings. The city, the nation, its territory and its bodies were conceptualized as physical locations subject to social acts of marking, with the body a geographical territory and geography a body, each producing and intersecting the other.

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"obrabierta" was indebted to Duchamp's declaration of a non-artistic object as art. Parada, 15. Marshall McLuhan is also quoted in the text, which signals the importance given by Chilean artists to new technologies and mediums of communication at the time.

<sup>1181</sup> Parada, 34.

<sup>1182</sup> The specific event quoted by Parada was the Gilmore case of 1976, concerning the death penalty of Gary Gilmore, who was executed in 1977. Parada wanted to use a photograph published in the press for a lithographic work, but ended sending a letter with more litographies to the mayor of the jail in Salt Lake City where Gilmore was detained. As stated by Parada, his letter was meant to "interfere (however it could) the trajectory that (conceptually) the parts of the event drew." Parada, 33.

<sup>1183</sup> Parada, 40.

<sup>1184</sup> Parada, 10.

## 5.6. A Geography Lesson: The Intersection of the Landscape and the Body

In June 1980, an article titled “Aprendiendo geografía... y algo más” (Learning geography... and something else) was published in *Revista Apsi*.<sup>1185</sup> The article referred to a phrase made famous in an open letter sent to the Ministry of the Interior by the father of a man who had been “relegated” to an unknown southern town which concluded: “Thanks to you, I will now know Freirina.” By 1980, relegations of politically undesirable subjects (or enemies of the state) to marginal, often extremely poor and rural locations, had not only become commonplace but were legalized by the government.<sup>1186</sup> The geography “lesson” implied in the article’s title reflected a perverse irony: because of these relegations, Chileans now had knowledge of the most remote and unheard of places in the nation.<sup>1187</sup> Geography was made visible and tangible through missing bodies.

In November 18, 1980, two parallel exhibitions of Dittborn and Leppe opened at Galería Sur. Titled “Impinturas, Serigrafías y Offset” (Un-Paintings, Serigraphy, and Offset) and “Sala de espera” (Waiting Room) respectively, the shows presented two different approaches to the concepts of the margin and the nation that were reflected in the parallel launch of two books referring to each artists’ works: *Del espacio de acá* by Kay, and *Cuerpo Correccional* by Richard. Dittborn’s works continued with his investigations into the socially marginal and the use of imagery revolving around portraits of delinquents and prostitutes, photographs taken from the press of exhausted athletes combined with everyday expressions, and well known poems written in children’s script and stains, summarizing his production. Though Leppe also seemed to repeat earlier themes regarding the home, family, and gender, he created a video installation that marked a turning point in the use of mechanical mediums within the Chilean art scene, and placed the relations of body and nation in the foreground of artistic discussion.<sup>1188</sup> The joining of the two artists in a single gallery seemed to be a laudatory celebration of the position they had acquired as “fathers” of the Chilean avant-garde, marking the turn of a decade.

Dittborn presented both new and older works in which he recycled past iconography,<sup>1189</sup> leading some critics to wonder if the images presented were “worn

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<sup>1185</sup> Manuel Páinda, “Aprendiendo geografía... y algo más,” *Revista Apsi*, June 3-26, 1980, 8.

<sup>1186</sup> The decree, effective since February 7, 1980, permitted the detention and relegation of nationals without any accusation or trial. See the article “Tiempo de dureza,” *Revista Hoy*, May 26-April 1, 1980, 6-9.

<sup>1187</sup> “How much geography can now be learned! We have started to know of places that did not even appear in maps! But their names cannot be forgotten, as Pisagua is not forgotten with time.” *Ibid.* Pisagua is a northern, desert town near the coast between the first and second regions, whose jail was used since the 1973 coup as a center of detention and torture. In June 1980, the bodies of six political detained men, executed at the jail in September 1973 and buried in a nearby cemetery in plastic bags with blindfolded eyes and tied hands, were unearthed. In 1990, more bodies were found at the same location.

<sup>1188</sup> Leppe’s installation is discussed in the next chapter dealing with the emergence of video practices as an extension of the graphic mark.

<sup>1189</sup> The new edition of Ronald Kay’s *Del espacio de acá* (Santiago: Metales Pesados, 2006) contains reproductions of the works presented.

out.”<sup>1190</sup> The criticism is valid on a surface level insofar images such as Benny Kid Paret’s death in the boxer’s ring were still used by Dittborn under the same title of “Pietá” as in his 1977 works, and the concept of “honor portrait” employed in an ironic relation to the delinquent was also maintained.<sup>1191</sup> Even though the images had been altered and given new meanings by the inclusion of text, the most important difference with the artist’s prior work seemed to be the medium used to reproduce the press’ cut-outs, serigraphy and offset, and the importance acquired by the staining process in the content of the works and the idea of “un-painting.” I would argue that Dittborn’s 1980 exhibition presented the culmination of a material process started in 1974, after which followed a repetition of themes and forms until the airmail paintings were developed in 1985. Yet this process was punctured and extended in the meantime through other means such as video, which provided another mobile surface onto which to inscribe the margin, and the incorporation of specific landscape marks.

In Dittborn’s 1980 exhibition, the relations between repetition, mechanical reproduction, the stain, and the subjects portrayed centered on the definition of national identity and made of the body its locus of operation. A work like “Sudor y lágrimas” (Sweat and tears) of 1980 (fig. 5.19) not only alluded in its title to a popular expression used to imply extreme exertion of energy (“it cost me sweat and tears”) but made evident the connection between marginal bodies and corporeal excesses.<sup>1192</sup> Next to the roundels containing the portraits of anonymous men precariously rubbed onto four cardboard pieces were mold letters forming words describing corporeal fluids: pus and tears, saliva and tears, semen and tears, sweat and tears.<sup>1193</sup> Below the words were large burnt oil stains, which were repeated in a diffuse manner next to the portraits. While the images’ photographic and mass media origins were accused by a dotted weave, the mechanical referent implied in the serialization of the delinquent portrait was countered by the corporeal signs, both discursive and material. The stains’ impregnation of the cardboard

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<sup>1190</sup> Untitled and unsigned article in *El Mercurio*, December 14, 1980. Ana María Foxley used instead the word “leit motif” to refer to such repetitions. Ana María Foxley, “Tras las huellas del hombre,” *Revista Hoy*, November 19-25, 1980, 51-52. Víctor Carvacho, who reviewed the 1980 Second Salon of Graphic Art in which Altamirano won first prize, regarded Dittborn’s submission (where he presented several works shown at Galería Sur the following month) as the example of a “great bad printer” who had fallen from “creative stability to depressive instability.” Besides a general “suicidal” theme, Carvacho regarded the works’ display of “negative formulas” as the imitation of North American models (from Rauschenberg to Warhol, passing through Mimmo Rotella) which he characterized as “a whole legion derived in part of the pope of modern art, symbol of failure: Marcel Duchamp.” Víctor Carvacho, “Crítica de Arte. Segundo Salón Nacional de Gráfica,” *La Nación*, October 18, 1980.

<sup>1191</sup> See for example how the reproduced images in the article “Tras las huellas del hombre” of *Revista Hoy* seem mere variations or simply repetitions of older works, as in the case of “La Pietá” and “Por última vez” dealing with athletes, or “Cuando no tenía te daba,” making a link between prostitution and delinquency.

<sup>1192</sup> “Sudor y lágrimas” is documented in the 2005 revised edition of Ronald Kay’s *Del espacio de acá. Señales para una mirada americana* (Santiago: Ediciones Metales Pesados, 2005), in pages 60 and 61.

<sup>1193</sup> The work could be compared to Kiki Smith’s jars reflecting on human fluids and in general with the importance acquired during the 1990s of practices centering on the body, particularly “abject” art. But the Chilean examples were “grounded” in specific local experiences concerning disappearance and marginality.

and their lack of definition were used by Dittborn as signs of an element that “spoils, interferes, disarranges, decomposes, interrupts, and taints”<sup>1194</sup> what is otherwise ordered, establishing a disruptive link between the portrayed and the materials used (the cardboard as “aborted paper” in Kay’s words). The socially marginal as exemplified by the delinquent was like the stain or cardboard, a rejected, abjected physical expression of a social body.

The relation between stain and body was clearly manifested in Kay’s text on Dittborn’s oeuvre, whose third segment was titled “the body that stains.” Developing his earlier ideas on the body as a producer of graphic marks, Kay stated that the “visceral excretions” produced by the body were the most immediate manifestation of its interiority, forming a primordial form of expression and edition that anteceded language.<sup>1195</sup> While he had expressed similar ideas already in 1976, Kay’s language turned more visceral as he theorized about the stain’s threat to order. Even though the stain was the “humid imprint, the primordial letter of this corporeal language,” society had looked at with “opprobrium.” The stain reflected an animal state, connected to the “involuntary, the automatic, and the transgressive of those mechanisms that invade and fill nature, in other words of sperm and shit, the sublime field of history.”<sup>1196</sup> According to Kay, the stain became the “monstrous” which contaminated and altered the materials it encountered, while language, painting, and photography were the “corrected and calculated version of the direct and organic expressions, the impressive revelations of the body.”<sup>1197</sup>

Dittborn’s work seemed almost to illustrate Kay’s argument. “Sudor y lágrimas” repeated the strategy already used in 1977 in a work like “Muerte del nombre,” opposing the mechanically produced to the ‘informe’ state of the stain while bringing them together under the sign of the socially ‘repressed.’ The topographical element associated with psychoanalysis was also present in Dittborn’s excavation from the mass media archives of the faces and bodies of the “collectively repressed and forgotten,”<sup>1198</sup> bringing them to the surface for a collective recognition. Yet if these strategies resembled closely those of 1977, a new emphasis was placed on the Chilean landscape as the space where this corporeal repression occurred.

“Lágrimas nonatas” (Tears not naturally Born) of 1980 (fig. 5.20) was a silkscreen on canvas presenting an arid desert plain framed by distant hills and mountains resembling the sterility of the southern “pampas.”<sup>1199</sup> The landscape was in turn framed by painted borders, displaced and mismatched in color and orientation. A text was placed

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<sup>1194</sup> Foxley, 51.

<sup>1195</sup> Kay, *Del espacio de acá*, 30.

<sup>1196</sup> Ibid. According to Kay, the burnt oil used by Dittborn recalled the oil stains on the pavement, creating a “displacement” between the street and the support (canvas, cardboard) for the “liquid ashes, (...) the fatigued lubricant, (...) the excrement of the machine.” Kay, 31.

<sup>1197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1198</sup> Dittborn, quoted in Foxley, “Tras las huellas del hombre,” 51.

<sup>1199</sup> “Lágrimas nonatas” is documented in the 2005 reedition of Ronald Kay’s *Del espacio de acá. Señales para una mirada americana* (Santiago: Ediciones Metales Pesados, 2005), in pages 64 and 65.

below the image reading in molded letters: “and it is because of this, perhaps, that each of these views mechanically retained has the air of an indelible melancholy that dims them from inside like tears not naturally born.”

As symbols of the limits of territorial conquest, the northern and southern planes could be read as simultaneously embodying the limit to human habitation and the allure of a pristine state of nature. As earthly landmarks and margins in relation to the center’s expanding urbanization, the immaculate, arid, and empty deserts were ‘natural’ frontiers resisting human presence. The reproduced photograph emphasized the immensity of the plain, its inhospitality and inaccessibility, through framing devices such as the distant mountains and high vantage point, which provided a sublime view of an unknown land. But the prospect of unspoiled nature was also shown as waiting to be discovered. As suggested by the existence of the photographs and the track line present in the foreground, an act of appropriation had already occurred.<sup>1200</sup> A human eye had seen these remote landscapes, and while maintaining at the moment of the photographic exposure a respectful distance from the object, the photographer would potentially (if not already) tread, maculate, and mark its surfaces. The photographed landscape had been framed, disrupted from its ‘natural slumber’ by the scanning gaze of the adventurous photographer.

The melancholy evoked in the text and title of the work further suggested the transformation of the landscape caught ‘objectively’ by the camera into a sublime space of contemplation and self-reflection. By tainting the image with feeling of a particularly sentimental kind (the mistiness and moistness produced by the tears), the text acted like a subjective frame, imitating the painted ones on the canvas. The speaker’s perception of the view (and others like it) as melancholic, brought a temporal dimension to the image, a sense of the landscape having changed or about to be altered. As if illustrating the tears of the title, the oil stain on the canvas that supplanted the sun, also participated in the creation of such a mark by spoiling the natural beauty with the remains of an industrial product.

Such was the view of Kay, who had authored the fragment printed by Dittborn on his canvas.<sup>1201</sup> In the text coming from *Del espacio de acá*, Kay connected the import of photography to America in 1850 to the exploration of its territories. For Kay, it was not painting which had produced an image of the new lands but photography, insofar as landscape painting did not have a longstanding pictorial tradition in the continent. By “following imported models,” painting in America was characterized by the “censuring of the visual pre-Columbian cosmos,”<sup>1202</sup> which was “repressed and castrated, turning

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<sup>1200</sup> It is interesting to note here that Derrida spoke of writing as “the possibility of the road and of difference, the history of writing and the history of the road, of the rupture, of the *via rupta*, of the path that is broken, beaten, *fracta*, of the space of reversibility and of the repetition traced by the opening, the divergence from, and the violent spacing, of nature, of the natural, savage, salvage, forest.” Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 107-108.

<sup>1201</sup> The full text goes: “The exotic is the last shining of an indigenous humanity or nature that surfaces and departs at the same time in that, its last, instantaneous [image]. And it because of this, perhaps, that each of these views mechanically retained have this air of indelible melancholy, that dims them from within like tears not born naturally.” Kay, 29.

<sup>1202</sup> Kay, 28. One of the problems of Kay’s interpretation is his generalization and transformation of what is a Chilean situation in the arts to the whole American continent. Though it is true that landscape painting as

into psychic resistance.”<sup>1203</sup> But the photography of the New World did not merely reflect a natural landscape. On the contrary, according to Kay photography was also in the service of conquest, violating the space represented. The photographs of the new lands not only served as documents of a place but “connoted the inventory of what would be dominated, occupied, exploited. They are in a certain way *targets*. Graphically, the photographic take in the New World accomplishes an act of possession.”<sup>1204</sup>

But while Kay’s theory on the photography of the New World suggests that the photographs were not merely faithful reproductions of factual matter, but served a utilitarian purpose, it lacks an analysis of the land presented hand on one, and the connections made with contemporary forms of exploitation on the other.<sup>1205</sup> Kay remains the poet lamenting the change that has occurred in those sights/sites recorded by early photographs, looking back with nostalgia to their unprimed surfaces. And yet, though the photographs served the survey and inventory of lands to be administratively controlled and their resources extracted by both foreigners and locals, they also recorded the unbounded and monstrous aspect of the landscape, its resistance to human investment. Their depopulation not only suggested the absence of indigenous inhabitants, eliminating their resistance and claims to prior habitation, but rejected the existence of any other. The landscape was presented as the ultimate ‘other’ in these photographs, unintelligible and remote.

Dittborn’s desert landscape and the tears or stains evoked in the text also had contemporary resonances. The association between landscape reproduction and industrial progress, with the latter understood as the development of natural resources, was a constant preoccupation of the dictatorship. The efforts made by the government of colonizing the nation’s frontiers<sup>1206</sup> reflected the need to assert its sovereignty, particularly in the face of territorial disputes with Argentina and the economic prospects these unspoiled lands evoked.<sup>1207</sup> The most important project carried out during

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a genre was an imported one, there are several examples of landscape practices in other Latin American countries which developed a stronger tradition than in Chile. Furthermore, Kay did not take into consideration any prior visual attempts at rendering representations of the land, whether from a “native” or “naturally born” (innate) perspective, as in Mapuche or Ona cosmologies (to name a few).

<sup>1203</sup> Kay, 28.

<sup>1204</sup> Kay, 29.

<sup>1205</sup> Kay did not make anything out of the fact that photography was also an imported medium which came with its own ‘traditions’ (in formation, nevertheless), many of which were originally derived from landscape painting.

<sup>1206</sup> In July, 1978, a cycle of talks was inaugurated at the Museum of Contemporary Art, sponsored by the Department of Geography of the Institute of Military Geography. Titled “Problemas Límites de Chile” (Limit Problems of Chile), the cycle aimed to understand how “the unawareness of such vital matters has been a contrary factor to the Chilean cause in the defense of its territorial integrity.” See the article “Se inicia hoy: ciclo sobre los límites de Chile,” *El Mercurio*, July 17, 1978.

<sup>1207</sup> It must be noted that while the conflict with Argentina was the most pressing geopolitical affair since it had nearly ended in war and even came to involve the opinions of intellectuals and writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, there were parallel disputes with Peru and Bolivia. Bolivia broke relations with Chile in March 1977 a few days after Bolivian troops were sent to the northern borders in a dispute (to this day

Pinochet's regime was the construction of what would later be known as the "Carretera Austral" (Austral Highway) in 1976.<sup>1208</sup> Originally named after Pinochet (Carretera Longitudinal Austral Capitán General Augusto Pinochet), the long highway would connect the tenth region with the southernmost ones, passing through virgin forests and small towns. The aim was to break with the isolation of the southernmost areas,<sup>1209</sup> reclaiming the regions' sovereignty,<sup>1210</sup> while developing these forsaken lands.<sup>1211</sup> The dictatorship called these efforts a "recolonization" of the south which should be performed by Chileans who would be rewarded for their adventure in the nation's "Far West" with agricultural lands.<sup>1212</sup> The highway was envisioned as the "backbone of development and prosperity in the region,"<sup>1213</sup> which aimed at seamlessly harmonizing nature with culture and industry.

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unresolved) over its claims to a route towards the sea. While Chile sought the support of Peru in 1977, two years later the Peruvian military was shifting positions, speaking of "stains that are not erased" and which "cover a nation with a stigma that time cannot destroy," referring to the Chilean appropriation of Peruvian (and Bolivian) territories during the Pacific War of the 1880s. See "Encendido discurso del Presidente peruano," *El Mercurio*, October 9, 1979. Interestingly, while *El Mercurio* had referred to the Bolivian claims to the sea as "obsessive" it used the same adjective to describe the current Peruvian aggressive position.

<sup>1208</sup> "Comienza construcción de la longitudinal austral," *El Mercurio*, August 21, 1976. The final plan for the highway was established in June, 1978. See "Trazado definitivo de Carretera Austral," *El Mercurio*, June 15, 1978. A route of the "conquerors" crossing the 8<sup>th</sup> region had been planned in 1977, yet did not come to fruition.

<sup>1209</sup> Culture was also given a prominent role in this crusade for ending 'isolation.' Exhibitions of Chilean paintings were also taken to the provinces during 1978. See for example, "Exposición rompe aislamiento cultural," *El Mercurio*, June 27, 1978. It is interesting to note that a few days later, and in relation to a current exhibition of Spanish maps of American territories, *El Mercurio* claimed that the Spanish conquest and colonization of the continent had been filled with a "impulse to diffuse culture and a creative force," connecting urbanization to civilization. The Spaniards had been even able to construct new cities even in "inhospitable environments and settlements of bellicose naturals." See "Fuerza creadora de la colonización Hispana en América," *El Mercurio*, 7 July, 1978.

<sup>1210</sup> See, for example, "Aisén "construye" su soberanía," *El Mercurio*, July 30, 1978. Aisén was the first southern fjord where the neo-colonizers received their titles of domain in 1979, and remained an example of the colonizing breakthrough as manifested in several articles published describing the new homes and urban development. By 1980, whole southern islands were placed in auction by the government. See the article "Se rematarán islas, fundos y edificios," *El Mercurio*, November 29, 1980.

<sup>1211</sup> According to an article, the inhabitants of the south were "afraid of civilization" and "using white porcelain modern toilets." In "Chilenizar es misión de escuelas fronterizas," *El Mercurio*, April 8, 1979. Later that year, in an article published on December 12, the frontier communities were characterized by *El Mercurio* as "hungry for progress." These were also god-forsaken lands, and a celebratory article was published in September 29, 1977, when the "most austral chapel" was constructed in Isla Wallington. The chapel did not receive a saint's name but that of a star, Stella Maris.

<sup>1212</sup> See the characterization of the southern and frontier town of Traiguén as the "Chilean Far West" in "Traiguén, el Far-West chileno, cumple 100 años," *El Mercurio*, December 2, 1978.

<sup>1213</sup> General of carabineros Lautaro Recabarren, quoted in "El Sur será recolonizado por chilenos," *El Mercurio*, October 7, 1978.



Pinochet's colonizing gesture found its parallel in an earlier historic model. According to the historian Mateo Martinic, it had been General Bernardo O'Higgins who with "clairvoyance" had affirmed the importance of southern sovereignty and colonization for Chilean interests,<sup>1214</sup> realizing that Argentina would one day "dispute what is ours."<sup>1215</sup> During August 1978, and in relation to the celebrations of the bicentenary of the 'exalted' father of the nation's birth, several historic talks and pictorial exhibitions were organized which celebrated the 'visionary' and intrepid position of the nineteenth century general regarding the southern territories.<sup>1216</sup> A historical mission thus supported the dictatorship's developments in the south, even though the highway's construction was denounced in 1984 as "pharaonic," since "thousands of workers employed in the minimal job plan (PEM) between the years 1977 and 1981 have worked under military discipline."<sup>1217</sup>

Even the Antarctica came under the eyes of economical development, while at the same time asserting the sovereignty over this last redoubt of pristine nature. Since 1976, efforts were made to make of the frozen landscape a site of tourism which could teach Chileans about the "richness" of their nation.<sup>1218</sup> The southern lands were generally described as having an "imposing beauty"<sup>1219</sup> holding "treasures" that could be

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<sup>1214</sup> Mateo Martinic, quoted in "La Patagonia en la visión O'Higiniana," *El Mercurio*, August 19, 1978.

<sup>1215</sup> Martinic, quoted in "Ensayos, la epopeya del fin del mundo," *Revista Hoy*, August 31-September 11, 1977, 36-37. Martinic had published in 1977 a book on the history of the Strait of Magellan.

<sup>1216</sup> Among the exhibitions were "Exposición Bicentenario de O'Higgins" at the Museum of Fine Arts, "Rugendas en Chile" at MAC, and "Nuestra cordillera en la pintura," all beginning in September 1978. It is interesting to note that the Museum of Fine Arts simultaneously hosted the First Salon of Graphic Arts, in which Bru, Dittborn, and Smythe won first prizes.

<sup>1217</sup> "Esclavismo en la carretera Pinochet," *Revista Cauce*, no. 9, March 13-26, 1984, 24-27. It must also be noted in this regard that the dictatorship began taking in 1983 whole shantytown dwellers to the north, instead of the capital's margins, creating settlements that could alleviate the evident signs of poverty in the nation's center while colonizing the nation's borders. *Revista Apsi* published an article titled "Exodus to the North" which described the three hundred families had been displaced to the third and fourth regions. See "El éxodo al norte," *Revista Apsi*, November 1-4, 1983, 16. PEM was the "Plan de Empleo Mínimo" (Plan of Minimum Employment), a relief program which gave 1300 Chilean pesos a month. *Revista Apsi* analyzed that the amount could bring a family half a kilogram of bread. In "Plan de Empleo Mínimo: subsidio a las cifras de cesantía," *Revista Apsi*, no. 98, May 5-18, 1981.

<sup>1218</sup> According to the government "implementing tourist cruise liners" would be "one more manifestation of sovereignty." In "Estudian impulsar turismo masivo hacia la Antártida," *El Mercurio*, June 1, 1976. The first form of settlement in Antarctica had been a military base founded in 1947 and named after the 'father' of the nation, General Bernardo O'Higgins. These efforts were continued in the following years, culminating in the four documentaries seen on Chilean television in November 1979 regarding the nation and its natural beauty.

<sup>1219</sup> Several exhibitions of the Chilean landscape were mounted with government support, such as "Mar de Chile" in the Moneda building, or the exhibition of marine scapes and landscapes of Thomas Somerscales at the Instituto Cultural de Las Condes in June of that same year. See "Expo fotográfica: inaugurada muestra sobre "Mar de Chile," *El Mercurio*, March 18, 1978.

exploited.<sup>1220</sup> Tourism was joined to territorial claims, commercial development, and scientific knowledge, as was also seen in the military led efforts to explore the northern desert, where explorations of the subterranean grounds at Atacama had led to the compilation of not only geological but archeological and cultural material.<sup>1221</sup> The mission of these modern explorers was to “massively diffuse these natural riches, directed towards science and tourism.”<sup>1222</sup> Several mining projects were started in the desert between 1977 and the 1980s, being privatized or sold to foreign developers.<sup>1223</sup> The dictatorship also started plans to reforest the desert and stop its advance, a plan carried out by the nation’s youth, which associated the vitality of the new generations with the growth of nature in the midst of a wild landscape.<sup>1224</sup> To domesticate the wild and plant a forest where there had been only aridness and lifelessness, was an image that marked the regime’s foundational efforts. The trees would be natural colonizers, affirming life and sovereignty. The limits of the nation evoked in Dittborn’s work and Kay’s phrase with their Eden-like landscapes were thus joined by the dictatorship to an extensive project of economic development and colonization which was effectively marking the landscape with new routes and reframing its meaning.<sup>1225</sup>

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<sup>1220</sup> One such treasure was oil. In 1976, Pinochet authorized the construction of a petroleum plant, which he opened in 1979. See “Petróleo. El tesoro del estrecho,” *Revista Hoy*, January 17-23, 1979, 16-17.

<sup>1221</sup> The Jesuit father Gustavo Le Paige had found in the northern lands several archeological remains, among them one of the world’s oldest mummies, which formed the basis of a museum bearing his name created in the second region. The connection between these three elements -economy, sovereignty, and tourism- was commonplace. In the discussion regarding the Beagle canal the government announced that the area offered prospects to develop the economical possibilities of “centollas, tourism, and wool.” In *El Mercurio*, March 3, 1978. An article on tourism in 1977 had also stressed how travel could provide a basis for national identification, and as long as tourism was turned into something “interesting, recreational, and economic for our co-citizens, we will be making fatherland.” See “Turismo nacional,” *El Mercurio*, September 21, 1977.

<sup>1222</sup> “Mar subterráneo en el Salar de Atacama,” *El Mercurio*, February 12, 1977.

<sup>1223</sup> Most prominently, the departed “Anaconda” Copper Mining Company which had been nationalized by Allende. See “Regresó la “Anaconda,” *El Mercurio*, November 24, 1978. Juan Downey had created an installation in 1975 titled “Map of Chile” which included an encased live anaconda crawling over a Chilean map. The installation was presented at the Center for Inter-American Relations in New York without the anaconda, which had been censured by the organization.

<sup>1224</sup> According to *El Mercurio*, twenty-five thousand young Chileans had begun the process of reforestation in La Serena. See “Juventud reafirma la defensa territorial y de recursos chilenos,” *El Mercurio*, July 11, 1978.

<sup>1225</sup> Dittborn would question this Eden-like vision in 1983, when he made an artist’s book with a long text for a performance of Leppe done in 1981. The book’s title “La feliz del Edén” (The happy of Eden) referenced the national anthem and its first verses: “Pure, Chile, is your blue sky/pure breezes cross you too/and your fields embroidered with flowers/ are the happy copy of Eden.” See Dittborn, *La feliz del Edén* (Santiago: no publisher, 1983). Leppe’s performance directly related the body of the artist as a graphic source by using his torso as the matrix for an image which, through an embrace, got passed or imprinted onto the body of another person (Mellado’s brother). Leppe’s performance was announced in *Revista Hoy* in 1981, and took place at TAV where several events surrounding graphic arts were staged. See Ana María Foxley, “Los brotes de la plástica,” 41-42.

It is interesting that in a 1980 interview, Dittborn referred to his recent work in new mediums such as serigraphy and video, as being “liberating, like discovering America.”<sup>1226</sup> Though the phrase was used in a metaphorical way, it was related to one of Kay’s sections in *Del espacio de acá* titled “La reproducción del Nuevo Mundo” (The Reproduction of the New World) and to the content of the essay written by the philosopher Patricio Marchant read during the book’s presentation, titled “Discurso contra los ingleses” (Discourse against the English). The ideas of discovery and encounter with the new and other implied by Dittborn were connected by Marchant to those of imperial ambition and particularly the underlying worldview and philosophical outlook supporting it.

In his text, Marchant attacked the disembodiment of Western philosophy and metaphysics from his position on the periphery of philosophical thought. Marchant’s criticism centered on an imperialistic agenda embedded in (Western) knowledge, which he summarized as the English-like utilitarian tendency to separate the body from the object of knowledge, thereby reducing “things” to “objects of commerce.” Such a pragmatic approach, which Marchant connected to the empiricism of Locke and Hume and the English merchant army at the service of their sovereign, discarded the corporeal element of knowledge, the embodiment of the subject who knows.

Marchant also spoke of the body as the un(re)presentable in Western culture.<sup>1227</sup> While seemingly contradictory, since the exhibition referred to in the philosopher’s text made the body evident, Marchant was invoking the corporeal as the materialization of desire, the opposite of a mental analysis of things. For Marchant the body was a thing in itself, an irreducible material form, a necessity, the locus of desire and perception. This necessity could nevertheless be denied, made un-presentable and obscene by a humanist discourse that disparaged the corporeal and instead enthroned reason and a distanced (objective) position.

Marchant concluded that the body was something an Englishman could not understand, since the English approach to knowledge was materialistic yet not concerned with desire. Being English for Marchant was “being something very ugly. But there is one thing uglier than an Englishman: an Englishman in South America.”<sup>1228</sup> Marchant was evoking the everyday phrase “the English of South America,” a reference to Chileans as the refined neighbors in a poor region.<sup>1229</sup> But his phrase can also be interpreted under the light of the current economic and social developments in the nation, where bodies were left out of the picture, and the land as an object in itself, separated from the subject,

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<sup>1226</sup> Dittborn, quoted by Foxley, “Tras las huellas del hombre,” 51. Dittborn was at the time producing his first videos with the help of the cinematographer Carlos Flores.

<sup>1227</sup> Patricio Marchant, “Discurso contra los ingleses,” reprinted in Patricio Marchant, *Escritura y Temblor*, ed. Pablo Oyarzún and Willy Thayer (Santiago: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2000), 27-31.

<sup>1228</sup> Marchant, 29.

<sup>1229</sup> Conversely, the Argentineans are the French of South America.

yet filled with unexploited riches and beauties, was outlined.<sup>1230</sup> In other words, Chileans were becoming English, as the body was denied representation.

But Marchant saw a glimmer of hope in the works of Dittborn, Leppe, Kay, and even the critical production of Richard, insofar as all of them were “exposing their bodies” in different ways. According to Marchant, these authors were exposing the(ir) body through texts,<sup>1231</sup> paintings and actions, exposing them to criticism and history while generating more texts. What all four authors were doing was to write with the body, to inscribe the corporeal back into visibility, a body that according to Marchant “writes (...) inscribes (...) marks its secret pulsations.”<sup>1232</sup> If the Englishmen of South America had evacuated the body from the landscape, for Marchant it was Dittborn, Leppe, Kay, and Richard who were engaged in a crusade of their own to re-inscribe not just bodies but a whole corpus of Chilean art. The mission established by the 1979 seminar was being completed by these peripheral, non-English producers who were bringing into consciousness a localized political and social situation through the body.

In the following Chapter, Leppe’s 1980 installation held in parallel to that of Dittborn will be discussed in the context of another shift in Chilean art which had at its center the development of video art practices. While seemingly belonging to a history of its own, video practices in Chile were informed by the earlier experiments in graphic arts and appeared at first as an extension of printing practices. This was seen in the 1982 Graphic Salon, which began incorporating video under the new category “Multiple mediums” as well as in the critical confusion regarding the medium. Video appeared as the continuation of graphic art and of the struggle regarding identity through other means, as alternative visions of the landscape and social body began interrupting the smooth flow of the media.

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<sup>1230</sup> As were its limits. In December, a book on the frontiers of Chile of Chile was published in 4 volumes, *Historia de las Fronteras de Chile*, by Guillermo Lagos, which will be addressed in the following chapter.

<sup>1231</sup> Richard’s *Cuerpo Correccional* is explicit in its subjective approach to Leppe’s work. I will refer to this writing more in Chapter Six when Leppe’s 1980 video installation is analyzed.

<sup>1232</sup> Marchant, 29.

## Chapter Six: Video as an Extended Marker and Hybrid Recorder of Memory

When Waldemar Sommer described the year 1980 as one in which “graphic arts became identified with the extreme vanguards,”<sup>1233</sup> he was confirming the importance acquired by graphic practices in the Chilean art scene and associating their expansion into everyday life with the historic avant-garde. With the assertion that this generated a “vagueness of limits”<sup>1234</sup> between the arts operating in two- and three-dimensions, Sommer was able to relate the prints of Altamirano and Dittborn with the new video works of Leppe and Gonzalo Mezza. Perceiving in the first two a certain “tiredness” because of their use of older formulas and iconography, Sommer spoke of Mezza’s and Leppe’s works as “heating up” the current artistic ambience, expanding the avant-garde actions of border disruption to a world dominated by television, while challenging audiences with a new form of expression and perception. Video, according to the critic, was bringing a breath of fresh air into the Chilean art scene, even though the medium was perceived as somehow still tied to graphic art, particularly in its popular, mass culture end.

Sommer was not the only art critic in Chile to establish a connection between graphic arts and video. In the 1982 Salon of Graphic Arts, a new category was added to acknowledge the pervasiveness of the new medium in the national milieu in an attempt to bridge the evident material gap between video and graphic practices. “Multiple mediums” joined the categories of “drawings” and “prints,” an ambiguous and overarching term that diffused the particularities of video, photography, etchings, drawings, and other graphic techniques as these expanded into sculpture and installation. Under this light, video seemed to amalgamate other artistic forms, bringing together disparate visual and physical elements under the sign of the television set and its screen, producing both an object and a continuously moving stream of images.

The intrusion of video art into the graphic world and the implications of such a merger went largely unchallenged in Chilean art criticism. There were few attempts in the early 1980s to define video’s specific character, even though several art critics commented that video had emerged as the “new toy” of Chilean art, noting its trendiness.<sup>1235</sup> The medium’s borders seemed hard to define as attested by the different

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<sup>1233</sup> Waldemar Sommer, “1980, un año inquieto para las artes plásticas,” *El Mercurio*, December 28, 1980.

<sup>1234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1235</sup> Hans Ehrmann, “Video arte, el juguete nuevo,” *Revista Ercilla*, 4-10 November, 1981, 35. In his article, Ehrmann explained the tardiness of video’s arrival in Chile as a technological problem, since “access to cameras is more or less recent.” According to Ehrmann, four years had to pass between the first exhibition of video art at Museum of Fine Arts in 1976 and its “proliferation in our medium.” The first direct encounter of the Chilean public with video art had come through the travelling exhibition “Video-Art U.S.A” curated by David A. Ross, first shown first at the XIII São Paulo Biennial of 1975. See the

positions regarding its genealogy. The passage from the page to the television screen was envisioned by critics like Sommer as the natural outcropping of graphic art produced by modernization in the arts, while in the case of Sonia Quintana it was seen as the extension of artistic needs.<sup>1236</sup> A few years later, the use of video was described by Richard as the conscious effort of artists to rebel against “the fixity of frames and framing,” countering the sacral status of historically specific mediums through “nomadic creativity.”<sup>1237</sup> According to this reading, video was a postmodern attack on artistic conventions and genre specificity, forming a primary model of hybridism and border crossing.

Nevertheless, video first appeared in the Chilean scene as an extension of graphic documentation. Because of its closeness to photography in the precision of its reproductions and mechanical operations, video was presented by artists as another ‘objective’ form of recording reality, focusing on its descriptive capacities. This approach was evidenced during the Primer Encuentro Chileno-Francés de Video Arte (First Chilean-French Video Art Encounter) in 1981, where the first Chilean participation consisted mostly of video recordings of past performances and art actions rather than new videos made as autonomous works. Video gave the document an unfolding temporal dimension, bringing continuity to what was otherwise a fixed fragment of an action or event. Unlike cinema, to which the first Chilean videos were closely tied,<sup>1238</sup> the electronic medium offered a cheaper, more flexible form of recording reality, providing a similar attraction to that exerted by the graphic arts’ “economical and quick mode of production” and “its infinite possibilities of reflecting what is happening.”<sup>1239</sup> In the immediacy of its image capture and reproduction, video was treated as both mirror and trace of current reality.

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catalogue *Video-Art U.S.A, XIII Bienal de São Paulo, Octubre-Diciembre 1975* (Santiago: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1976).

<sup>1236</sup> Sonia Quintana, “El sentido del arte cambió con el video,” *El Mercurio*, 10 February, 1980. Quintana opposed the thesis that video art had emerged from a television boom, stating instead that it arose from aesthetic concerns that ended with the rejection of the art-object. In her article, Quintana mentioned Nam June Paik and Vostell as video art’s international precursors.

<sup>1237</sup> Richard, *Márgenes e Instituciones. Arte en Chile desde 1973*, 97. My translation. The English translation in the first edition eliminates the reference to fixed frames and the nomadic, substituting it with a more rigid semiotic approach to systems of meaning. The original English version states: “moving from film to video, from video to photography, from photography to the body, from the body to writing from writing to film, these works postulated a subject traversed by languages, a subject for whom the image is overloaded with the different claims of reality communicated between the competing sign systems of culture.” Richard, *Margins and Institutions*, 81.

<sup>1238</sup> Throughout the 1980s, many of the participants to the French-Chilean Encounter of Video-Art came from cinema, theater, or television, as in the case of Tatiana Gaviola, Ignacio Aliaga, and most prominently Carlos Flores, who had working connections with Dittborn, Leppe, Downey, and others. To mention just one example of his expanded work, Flores produced in 1981 the video “20 años de pintura chilena” whose screenplay and narration was in charge of Galaz and Ivelic, following the arguments of their soon to be published book of a similar title: *La pintura en Chile*. The video ended with the category of “new mediums” in which video art was included, a contradiction insofar as the work was meant to trace the history of painting.

<sup>1239</sup> Sonia Quintana, “Panorama del grabado chileno,” *El Mercurio*, May 6, 1979.

But the mobility of video, including its temporal unfolding and the electronic transformation of images, was a characteristic soon appropriated by Chilean artists as a sign of an unstable and shifting identity. As a medium imbued with transition which creates a fictional and changing presence, video emerged as a technology capable of expressing and embodying the idea of becoming while undoing a diversity of limits. The latter concerned not only medium specificity and its “institutional” associations, but the frontiers of the everyday world as embodied in the mass-media, the fictions transmitted by it, and their impact on subjectivity. Video’s very lack of definition in terms of categories was given by Chilean conceptual artists a symbolic value associated to otherness and the blurring of borders.

One of these frontiers and sources was television, to which Chilean video was intimately linked. This was not only evident in the series of video installations of 1980 in which the television set became an important signifier often placed under attack, or in the first “official” uses given to video within art institutions as a form of “cultural diffusion,”<sup>1240</sup> but also in the current debates surrounding its role in the nation. Video appeared in Chile as part of the first financial bonanza produced by the dictatorship’s implementation of a free-market economic system and the lifting of restrictions on imports, which had as a consequence the rapid influx of modern technologies from 1978 onwards.<sup>1241</sup> This massive inundation of new electronic commodities posited a correlation between television and modernization, as well as technology and progress, a relation celebrated in the media through multiple articles.<sup>1242</sup> Yet, a different connection was made by other social actors between television, consumption, and ideology that questioned the euphoric response to a liberal market and its avalanche of foreign

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<sup>1240</sup> “Video-Arte,” *El Mercurio*, July 12, 1981. The Museum of Fine Arts created a special room in “Sala Forestal” dedicated to video, which contained eighty-two seats, a Betamax camera and projector, and four television sets provided by SONY to “diffuse cultural values.” While it was meant to provide a space for artists to create and show their works, with more than a hundred tapes and mixing equipment available, the first video shown at the new space was a documentary. Titled “La Historia de Chile en la Pintura” (The History of Chile in Painting), the video was related to a current exhibition at the museum focusing on how the history of the nation had been rendered in pictorial form.

<sup>1241</sup> Black and white television sets had already formed part of Chilean everyday life since the 1960s, yet color television only appeared in 1978 after the ban on its sale was lifted by the government. Within two months, eighty-five thousand television sets had been imported and a year later, the sum reached a hundred and twenty thousand. See “Comenzó la TV color en Chile” *El Mercurio*, April 13, 1978; “En dos meses; importados 85 mil TV color,” *El Mercurio*, June 28, 1978, and “150 mil TV en color importados en 1 año,” *El Mercurio*, April 20, 1979.

<sup>1242</sup> Modernization was tied by the government with a new process of democracy after the period of national “reconstruction.” A growing neo-liberal economy would be the motor behind this process. See “Después de la reconstrucción nacional comienza el gobierno de la modernización,” *El Mercurio*, September 12, 1979. The newspaper *El Mercurio* used a constant device for supporting the government’s economic measures, quoting North American articles on the subject, as in “Crecimiento chileno, uno de los más altos del mundo,” *El Mercurio*, September 4, 1978, which cited the magazine *Nations’ Business*, or the article on March 27, 1979 quoting *Businessweek*’s celebration of the rebirth of the Chilean economy after a financial ‘disaster.’ The year ended with the praises coming from *The Wall Street Journal* regarding the Chilean economy which were promptly published in the official Chilean press. See, “Elogios del *The Wall Street Journal* para la economía chilena,” *El Mercurio*, January 19, 1980.

consumer products.<sup>1243</sup> When in December 1980, the television series titled “Free to Choose” featuring Milton Friedman as host and guide of its ten chapters appeared on the official national channel TVN,<sup>1244</sup> it was followed by a public debate on television programming that brought to the foreground the relationship between the market, visual images, and television as a form of ideological dissemination and reproduction.<sup>1245</sup> While the economic boom soon exploded and a long recession followed, fueling opposition against the government and casting doubt on the adequacy of a model based on unrestricted capitalism, video and television continued to expand, even though the links among modernization and national identity were increasingly disputed.

This chapter focuses on the intersection between video, graphic markings, television, and everyday life in Chile. It explores the ways in which video was understood by artists as an extension of earlier graphic models through the notions of repetition, inscription, and editing in the construction of identity. The videos produced between 1980 and 1985 in Chile continued the exploration of nationality, land(marks), and identity, translating into fluctuating, mediated visual images other forms of marking the territory. Television became the “new frontier”<sup>1246</sup> for artists and cultural agents at large, providing both a virtual and physically mediated site for the dispute over identity marks. Video also allowed artists to continue their exploration of the relations between art and life through a medium that seemed to push the popular connection of print culture to its mass cultural limits.

### 6.1. Homeland, Motherland, and the Video Matrix: Carlos Leppe’s “Sala de espera” and Marcela Serrano’s Bodies

One of the first places where graphic arts were shown side by side with video was at Galería Sur in December 1980. A double show was mounted including Dittborn’s exhibition of (un)paintings and silkscreen works in one space and Leppe’s video

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<sup>1243</sup> The connections between market and art were closer than they seemed. To make a living, Altamirano worked in *Almacenes Paris*, one of the large department stores in the country that sold television sets. There he could work with the new devices, an opportunity that not many artists had in the early 1980s.

<sup>1244</sup> See “Milton Friedman por TV,” *El Mercurio*, December 3, 1980. The series’ first chapter was titled “The power of the market” and the second “The tyranny of controls,” establishing a clear polarity and antagonism between two economic models, with freedom associated with capitalism.

<sup>1245</sup> The conferences were organized by the Catholic University in Santiago and counted with the participation of many Chilean universities. The discussion centered on what was perceived to be a cultural crisis directly related to the mass media. See “Crisis de la cultura en debate nacional,” *El Mercurio*, December 7, 1980.

<sup>1246</sup> I take this phrase from the title of the exhibition “The New Frontier: Art and Television 1960-1965” organized at the University of Texas, Austin, in 2009. It is interesting to note that the Chilean media gave television a “colonizing” role. *El Mercurio*, for example, celebrated the arrival of television and national stations to the southern town of Puerto Williams as a form of cultural progress. See “Televisión llega a Puerto Williams,” *El Mercurio*, April 14, 1979.



installation “Sala de Espera” (Waiting Room) in the next (fig. 6.1).<sup>1247</sup> Though spread out all over the room, the installation’s focal point was found in three color television sets playing the video “Las cantatrices” out of synchrony under a large neon sign stating the exhibition’s title.<sup>1248</sup> The monitors were assembled in a horizontal row on top of white metallic tables at the end of the room facing the incoming audience, thus resembling a small altar. Framing this row on one side was a black and white television set placed on a similar table playing a video featuring Leppe’s mother, the monitor’s screen partially covered with gauze and tape. The television faced in turn a mock one made out of mud that had been placed on the floor at the center of the room. Inside the mud television set stood a small statue of the Virgin Mary surrounded by flowers and photographs of the artist’s infancy. Following this axis on the opposite side was a canvas on a tripod onto which was projected a photograph of Leppe as a child with his mother in a park. Closing the installation on the remaining side was a monitor showing images from the regular programming in Chilean television. The whole installation was further framed and illuminated by neon tubes arranged in asymmetrical positions throughout the walls and floor, which created an artificial blue light and a buzzing interior of fragmented lines.

The video “Las cantatrices” (The Singers) was the symbolic center of the exhibition (fig. 6.2).<sup>1249</sup> In the installation, the work was divided into three non-synchronized parts which were independently shown on the three different sets. Its Trinitarian form was echoed in the installation’s distribution of reproductive surfaces, as the videos were framed on one side by the lopped vision of Leppe’s mother recounting a narrative about the artist’s birth and on the other by the couple’s static photographic image, thus creating a familial triangle. “Las cantatrices” began with a close-up of Leppe’s painted red lips, blue eyelids, and made-up face set against a red background as he lip-synched to an opera performed by a woman. Exaggerating his facial expressions to appear at times suffering or surprised, and making evident the fact that he did not know the lyrics by often overlapping his opening mouth with moments of silence in the audio, Leppe appeared as an artificial, aspiring singer imitating the sounds of European music, yet unable to faithfully reproduce them. After two minutes, Leppe’s gesticulating face was replaced by a close-up of his torso revealing that the singer’s body was in a white cast running from his hips to neck, his right arm fixed to the waist and the other permanently elevated. The cast also had two round perforations on the chest, exposing Leppe’s breasts. The following cuts alternated close-ups of Leppe’s hairy breasts, face,

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<sup>1247</sup> Leppe’s installation “Sala de espera” is documented in Richard’s *Margins and Institutions* in pages 70 and 90, Galaz and Ivelic’s *Chile Arte Actual* in page 200, Leppe’s *Cegado por el oro* in pages 24 and 25, *Copiar el Edén*, in pages 414 and 415, and in *Over Here. International Perspectives on Art and Culture*, ed. Gerardo Mosquera and Jean Fisher (Cambridge, Massachusetts: the MIT Press, 2004), in page 319.

<sup>1248</sup> The work has been translated in *Copiar el Edén* as “The Singers.” Yet the singular “cantatriz” derives from the Italian “cantatrice” referring to an ‘opera singer,’ while the Spanish version combines the words ‘singer’ and ‘actress’ in a similar manner. In Italian, a “grande cantatrice” is a diva, a word that aptly applies to the massive body of Leppe singing to opera tunes in the video.

<sup>1249</sup> A copy of the video “Las cantatrices” can be found at Centro de Documentación Palacio La Moneda, Santiago, Chile. Still images from the video are documented in black and white in Richard’s *Cuerpo Correccional* (Santiago: Francisco Zegers editors, 1980), alternating with text between pages 72 and 90. Color reproductions of the video can be found in *Copiar el Edén*, page 415.

fingers, eyes, and mouth, at times zooming-out to reveal Leppe uncomfortably swaying in his cast while lip-synching.

In the second video, Leppe appeared against a blue background with the cast, yet this time he also wore a metallic structure strapped around his head which kept his mouth wide open. With the operatic music continuing in the background, Leppe's swaying became more pronounced as he attempted to sing even though the borders of his lips were tightly pulled back by the metal strips. In a close-up of his face, foam and drool began appearing and accumulating in his mouth's borders, trickling and staining the make-up while Leppe made painful faces, opening his mouth even more.

In the third part of the video, Leppe continued lip-synching a different opera against a white background with the metallic structure in his mouth, though this time the cast only had a large round perforation on the stomach. The video alternated rapid cuts of Leppe with and without the metallic structure in his mouth, zooming at times into his pelvic area where the cast ended in a triangular form, or focusing instead on his hairy belly button, making a connection between a lost umbilical cord and his veiled groin. With trembling mouth and continuing with his swaying, Leppe's image appeared at times diffuse, at times extremely close, contrasting the rigidity of the cast to his bulging flesh and stained face. Before the video looped, Leppe's teeth were covered with saliva which slowly ran down the corners of his mouth.

Leppe's tripartite singing was accompanied on its left side by Catalina Arroyo's looped, monotonous recounting of the artist's birth and early childhood (fig. 6.3).<sup>1250</sup> In the video, Leppe's mother appeared in a fixed close-up reading from a self-written text telling of the pains and suffering caused by Leppe's birth, which had to be accomplished with the use of forceps. This physical torment was joined to the absence of a father who left their home during Arroyo's pregnancy and would not see their son after his birth. Arroyo's narration described her relationship with a son she called "a biological accident," yet loved so much that she would not let others touch him.<sup>1251</sup> By alluding to both Leppe and his father in the third person masculine, an ambiguity was established in Arroyo's address regarding the "he" that had departed and caused her suffering. This was apparently the same person whose death would cause her a pain so unbearable that she prayed to God to kill them both on the same day. While towards the end of Arroyo's narration it became evident that the latter was Leppe, her identification with and love for her son ("he turned, we turned one year old") were nevertheless tempered by the overall sense of fatality and "bitterness" that the artist's birth had caused her (including the possible separation from her husband). Though Arroyo argued that the sourness generated by the separation of mother and child could be ended with suicide, for her this was only a manifestation of mental renouncement and a "pale" determination.

Richard's analysis of the work in *Cuerpo Correccional*, particularly the Chapters "Via Cosmética y ortopédica de corrección corporal" (Cosmetic and Orthopedic Way of Corporeal Correction), "El incesto vocálico" (The Vocal Incest), and "Oratorias"

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<sup>1250</sup> Still images from the video with Catalina Arroyo's narration can be found in *Cuerpo Correccional* from page 92 to page 101. An early image of the video was published next to one of Leppe in Ana María Foxley, "Psicoanálisis artístico," *Revista Hoy*, November 26-December 2, 1980, 51.

<sup>1251</sup> Catalina Arroyo's text in Spanish is printed in Nelly Richard's *Cuerpo Correccional*, in pages 106-113. All quotes are my translations.

(Oratories), remains the most complete examination of Leppe's video.<sup>1252</sup> To summarize her argument, according to Richard the work formed part of a long standing endeavor through which Leppe was evidencing the corporeal process of sign production. In Leppe's case, this "semiotic practice"<sup>1253</sup> consisted in the appropriation of cultural signs (such as opera) and the transgression of sexual order through corporeal signifiers. Leppe's accentuation of the cosmetic in "Las Cantatrices" and his "hyperbolism"<sup>1254</sup> of gestures and poses were set up against the "reformatory methods"<sup>1255</sup> operating on the body as exemplified by the casts. Castigating physical mobility and repressing any natural pose or manifestation of carnality, the casts' "enveloping of a traumatism or trauma"<sup>1256</sup> was a motif exaggeratedly used by Leppe as a form of "revealing" the "traumatic coefficient of the cultural apparatus fracturing bodies."<sup>1257</sup> For Richard, the fleshy, erotic materiality of the corporeal was naturally opposed to the cultural (the cast) as a restraining, repressive force. Leppe's imprisoned body could be interpreted as an "allegory" of the nation, as manifested in the video's tri-color background referring to the Chilean flag and the casts which would make of Leppe a "national sculpture."<sup>1258</sup>

Leppe's semiotic body was nevertheless ambiguous. For Richard, the corporeal excesses manifested in the stomach and breasts bulging out from the casts' openings, contrasted with the imprisoned male sexual organ, establishing an "opposition between masculinity and femininity."<sup>1259</sup> According to Richard, the masculine was associated with the "inhibition of the cast apparatus,"<sup>1260</sup> whereas the feminine was that which overflowed those boundaries. This inhibitory model also operated on the level of music and language. Richard read the use of the opera as a form of synchronizing the scream of corporeal pain with the chant of high culture, while contrasting the order of linguistic syntax to the unruly pulsation of music. For Richard, the metallic structure repressing the artist's mouth was a sign of culture pressuring the natural through education during the phase of language acquisition, and could thus stand in for other forms of repression such as a "torture chamber."<sup>1261</sup>

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<sup>1252</sup> While I agree with most of Richard's arguments, I am adding and questioning parts of it. I revise the role of the cast, the problem of identification and identity, the role of the Virgin and television, as well as Richard's own as "mothering" the avant-garde and their works' interpretations.

<sup>1253</sup> Richard, 67.

<sup>1254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1255</sup> Richard, 69.

<sup>1256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1258</sup> Richard, 73.

<sup>1259</sup> Richard, 75.

<sup>1260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1261</sup> Richard, 79.

Even in Leppe's artificial singing there was a confusion of boundaries. Leppe was adopting several "foreign" elements: a feminine identity in the make-up and the cast's holes replacing female breasts, as well as the opera's high cultural language. The operatic voice created a "vocal conflict"<sup>1262</sup> resembling that of the censoring "orthopedic" plaster, since it operated as a sign of negation of a natural identity (as in Leppe's own voice versus the trained operatic singing). The focus on artist's mouth as an opening pointed instead towards a primary space of liberation, even though its physical contiguity with the video of Leppe's mother gave a different meaning to this opening. The mouth was posited "as a primary zone of maternal contact –directly alimentary or erogenous,"<sup>1263</sup> thus establishing an incestuous, erotic identification with the mother figure. According to Richard, Leppe's body reenacted and simulated two instances of maternity, pregnancy and delivery, which allowed him to create a fantasy family triangle where he could occupy all three positions: mother, father, and son.<sup>1264</sup>

For Richard, other references to the maternal function were the photograph of Leppe and his mother and the "pseudo television portrait of the Virgin del Carmen."<sup>1265</sup> The two were reduced by the author to folkloric signifiers, carving in the installation a "sentimental geography" that was eminently patriotic. To support her argument, Richard mentioned an external part of the exhibition composed of neon lights found in the staircase leading to the apartment of Leppe's mother, making of her another virgin of sorts. Overall, the maternal function acted as a luminal site "weaving" a series of natural, biological, and cultural relations, from the reproduction of the species to the family and the duality of sexuality and virginity. Leppe's identification with his mother was nevertheless tampered by references to castration, which would "cross out the first dual order of the imaginary (mother/son) to insert the subject –through the intrusion of a third factor- within the mediated order (symbol) or third order (Name of the Father) or triadic order (family)."<sup>1266</sup>

Other critics complicated the evident repressive and masculine symbolism of the casts noted by Richard. For Ana María Foxley, the casts did not merely "paralyze" and restrain Leppe, but "also disguise[ed] him, giving him an ambivalent, bisexual and equivocal expression."<sup>1267</sup> According to Foxley, the whole exhibition was a form of "artistic psychoanalysis," insofar as Leppe went beyond the presentation of a social situation to introduce instead a conflictive biographical element, where the mother acted "not just as reproducer of the son, but as an enveloping, omnipresent, and overly protective subject that leads him to a dependency and a traumatic break of personal and

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<sup>1262</sup> Richard, 81.

<sup>1263</sup> Richard, 83.

<sup>1264</sup> Richard, 85.

<sup>1265</sup> Richard, 87.

<sup>1266</sup> Richard, 95. In *Cuerpo Correccional* Richard reveals for the first time her indebtedness to Julia Kristeva and psychoanalytic theory which she summarizes as "(Freud, Klein, Lacan)." Richard, 12.

<sup>1267</sup> Foxley, "Psicoanálisis artístico," 51.

sexual identity.”<sup>1268</sup> In a similar way, Fernando Balcells interpreted the transvestism in Leppe’s assumption of a female operatic role as offering a “feminine virtuality in a body also repressed (the cast),”<sup>1269</sup> a gesture that presented “a divided identity.”<sup>1270</sup> For Balcells, this was a contradiction that had “collective” implications and “overflowed the analogy masculine/authority and feminine/affectivity.”<sup>1271</sup> If for Richard theatricality and the body were eminently feminine signs in their excess and overflowing of patriarchal boundaries, particularly the repressive role of culture and language (or Lacan’s “Symbolic”), Leppe’s actions and parental references complicated such binary readings.

Richard’s brief mention of castration and her use of a Lacanian model are important when analyzing Leppe’s identification processes. As made evident in Arroyo’s narration and Leppe’s physical imposture of femininity, the lack of a father figure created a fissure in Freud’s oedipal complex.<sup>1272</sup> If, as suggested by Foxley, Leppe was illustrating the psychoanalytical family and the son’s love for his mother, symbolically killing his father by negating the display of the penis through the cast’s ‘veiling’ action, he was also countering such a masculine ‘aggressive’ action through its transvestite affected replacement. Leppe’s imposture did not confront masculinity with its evident ‘other’ as embodied by a woman, but with the homosexual, the masculine masquerade, rupturing the symbolic enclosure of the casts with contradiction. As the cast was made penetrable, opened with holes replacing the breasts and stomach, the desire of self-enclosure and coherence in identity suggested by its armored surface was punctured and replaced by the hairy male version of maternal attributes. The body presented by Leppe was a non-normative one, where the female corporeal parts alluded to were evidently still surrounded by “male” anatomical elements.<sup>1273</sup> An anxiety regarding the coherence of the ‘normative’ male (and female) body was thus created, piercing customary forms of gender identification with the corporeal.

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<sup>1268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1269</sup> Fernando Balcells, “La separación de las aguas en el arte,” *Revista La Bicicleta*, no. 10 (March- April 1981): 21.

<sup>1270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1272</sup> According to Freud, the young boy identifies first with his father and takes him as a model while he begins to develop an attraction to his mother as an object of affection. Eventually conflict is generated when these affections come together, originating the Oedipus complex in which “the little boy notices that his father stands in his way with his mother. His identification with his father then takes on a hostile coloring and becomes identical with the wish to replace his father in regard to his mother as well. Identification, in fact, is ambivalent from the very first; it can turn into an expression of tenderness as easily as into a wish for someone’s removal.” Sigmund Freud, “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* 13, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1986), 105.

<sup>1273</sup> Amelia Jones speaks of Lyle Ashton Harris photographic work in a similar fashion. She states, for example, that in Ashton Harris works the “cross-gendering is only fragmentary, his “feminine” characteristics still attached to his “masculine” attributes.” Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 217.

Leppe's narcissistic display of his own body as a prima donna and an object of desire played upon the autoeroticism evoked by Freud as a primary phase of homosexuality. Though for Freud all subjects take as first sexual objects those nurturers who provide basic satisfactions (such as eating), particularly mothers, and have narcissistic inclinations, the lack of a father and a strong identification between mother and male child could lead to a feminized childhood world that makes the resolution of castration anxiety difficult and thus could lead to homosexuality.<sup>1274</sup> Leppe's display evoked the fixation on the self as a love interest (instead of the mother) and the posterior symbolic actualization of such fixation onto another male body. But in this feminine world, the cast could also be read as a female and maternal threat of a return to the boundaries of the womb as another form of enclosure. The cast and Leppe's restrained body could be read instead as an expression of what D.W. Winnicott referred to as the fear of returning to a state of infantile dependency.<sup>1275</sup> In Leppe's work, mothers could also be unlikely nurturers (the not so "good mother" of Winnicott) and even cannibalistic gorgons, making the oedipal triangle and series of identifications more complicated in its relations.

The reference to the dual position of the mother figure in Leppe's video installation was manifested in two contrasting examples. Set against Arroyo's confession that she had been "egotistical" during Leppe's upbringing, was the small statuette of "Virgen del Carmen" (Virgin of Carmen) contained within the mock television set as a symbol of motherly renunciation. Yet the saintly mother had more than one connotation in the local context. Even though Richard noted that "Virgen del Carmen" was the patron saint of the nation, her figure suffered several transplants and transmutations in the history of South America and Chile.<sup>1276</sup> With origins in the Carmelite hill in Palestine and brought to the Americas with the conquest and its spiritual colonization, during the South American independence wars the Virgen del Carmen became the patron saint of the "liberation army" lead by General José San Martín in Argentina and Chile. This connection to the military was confirmed in Chile when the father of the republic General O'Higgins declared her the patron of the national army.<sup>1277</sup> The image of the Virgin

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<sup>1274</sup> Freud, "On Narcissism," *Standard Edition* 14, 73-103.

<sup>1275</sup> D. W. Winnicott, *Boundary and Space: An Introduction to the Work of D.W. Winnicott*, ed. M. Davis and D. Wallbridge (London: H. Harnak, 1964). Winnicott spoke of a "regression to dependence" referring to a state of absolute dependence to the mother (or a state of primary narcissism) in the development of the individual as an independent being. Nevertheless, for Winnicott such regressions could be healing in an appropriate psychoanalytic environment. See D. W. Winnicott, *Human Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1988), 141.

<sup>1276</sup> While the history of the Virgin is mentioned in the following footnote, it is pertinent to note in relation to Richard's comment that the Virgin was first declared patron of the army in 1818 and a special request to the Pope had to be made in 1923 to make her patron of Chile.

<sup>1277</sup> O'Higgins promised the construction of a temple at the site where the most important independence battle was to be fought and eventually won. The vow led to the construction of a votive temple in Maipú, Santiago, after the Chilean victory at the Battle of Maipú in 1818. O'Higgins declaration was reproduced in a contemporary periodical which stated: "In the same place where the battle is given and victory taken, a sanctuary to the Virgen del Carmen, Patron and General of the Armies of Chile will be raised, and the foundations will be laid by the same magistrates that formulate this vow and in the same place of her mercy which shall be of her glory." Quoted in *Gazeta de Santiago de Chile*, no. 36, March 14, 1818. It should be

acquired in Leppe's installation an ambiguous status, being protector not only of the family but of the nation and its masculine forms of defense. The religious symbolism permeating the installation, particularly in its Trinitarian form, endowed the oedipal family complex with larger national implications.

The locational strategies used by Leppe in the video installation framed the problem of the normative and the non-normative body. As briefly noted by Richard, the casts and title of the work referred to the clinic that, as Michel Foucault pointed, is a space where bodies get a particular form of disciplining. While Richard interpreted the clinic as a space of "temporary reclusion" or definite enclosure where bodies are "confiscated"<sup>1278</sup> and thus stripped of their identity,<sup>1279</sup> Leppe's reference to a "waiting room" also suggested a form of transition. Whether this passage from one state to another involved moving towards the "symbolic" order as Richard argued,<sup>1280</sup> or evoked purgatory as an in-between space of corporeal suffering,<sup>1281</sup> this act of border crossing from one place to another could be read as a state of becoming.

The cast itself suggested such a state of passage between trauma and cure. Leppe had his casts made at the Orthopedic Institute (Instituto Traumatológico) of Hospital El Salvador, explicitly establishing a relationship between a physical trauma and a psychological one.<sup>1282</sup> Though a cast 'corrects' the bone's position insofar as it forces the bone into place until its 'healing' can be determined, its effectiveness is only possible through forced repetition. If homosexuality was being treated by Leppe as a form of social deviancy, in need of straightening out, the cast's success was restricted by its temporal, transitory, and manipulative nature. Furthermore, in the mold's attempt to control the body, the latter responded by secreting even more 'natural' forms of self-expression, distorting the 'prima donna' image and staining the white cast.

Even the effects of repetition in the video proved to be of a dubious kind. Leppe's mock singing was often out of tune, delayed, and discordant with the Italian words heard in the audio. The artist's exaggerated, suffering countenance, exacerbated by the metallic mouth opener, not only invoked corporeal suffering through the effluvium of bodily secretions (saliva and tears), but by way of the melodrama and sentimentality of the operatic dramatic conventions predictably ending in tragedy. The theatricality of Leppe's

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noted here that Virgen del Carmen was appropriated by other nations as patron saint of the army, among them Bolivia, while in Peru she is the patron of "criollismo" or the Creole. In Spain, the "motherland" of the Americas, she is also patron saint of the sea and army, calling her "Stella Maris" which, as mentioned in Chapter Five, was the name given to of the southernmost chapel in the Chilean territory during the dictatorship.

<sup>1278</sup> Richard, 37.

<sup>1279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1281</sup> And one where the Virgen del Carmen also plays an essential role, since it is believed she will pray for the souls of those who have in turned prayed to her scapulary, with which she is often represented.

<sup>1282</sup> A sequence of photographs taken at the hospital was published in *Cuerpo Correccional* documenting the process of casting Leppe's body, in pages 62 to 70.

posing and acting, particularly of his bad lip-synching, pointed to a distortion of an original model as a set of conventions and the distance between the Caliban-like, grotesque monster defacing the language of the European 'master.' Imitation of foreign models ended in farcical reproductions and ironical commentaries on the supposed originals' traditions. The video's own cuts and framing fragmented Leppe's self-presentation, accentuating its mediated and artificial nature, contrasting with the monotonous loops of Arroyo's self-referential narrative. These breaks evidenced the difficulty of full coverage in the video's attempt at recreating a full presence and presenting a unified perceptual experience, offering instead only pieces, holes, and delays. Repetition was treated by Leppe as a failed act of appearance in a stage, which in the video's case was the simulated space of the television set. The bandages on Arroyo's screen only underlined the distance between reality and fiction, social body and maternal body, as did their precariously mocking, third world mud mirror on the floor.

Television's simulated reality was placed under attack by Leppe in 1981, when the artist made a performance on the last day of the First Chilean-French Video Art Encounter (fig. 6.4).<sup>1283</sup> Appropriating the title of Richard's book, "Cuerpo Correccional" (Correctional Body), the performance started with Leppe "disemboweling"<sup>1284</sup> a television set, taking out its electric system and screen in order to leave its frame as a carcass. Once finished with the butchering, and after packing the television's 'contents' into a wooden box, Leppe sat behind the monitor with pants rolled up and nude torso, placing his legs inside the frame and proceeding to pour liquid plaster into it, immobilizing his feet within the monitor. After waiting for the plaster to dry, Leppe began laboriously to hammer the plaster, carving it away until his feet were "liberated"<sup>1285</sup> again. During the whole action, the video "Las Cantatrices" played in three monitors.

In an action resembling those of Wolf Vostell and Nam June Paik in the 1960s, Leppe was tampering and physically attacking the illusionism of television by emphasizing the materiality and object nature of this communication technology.<sup>1286</sup> But in a turn from previous works that had violated the monitor's unity and signal while focusing on its physical mediation, Leppe countered the fictional sense of immediacy and presence advanced by television by presenting the actual body of the artist in a futile attempt of correspondence. Stripped of screen or skin and of the complex system of cables and electric panels composing it, the monitor was left as a meaningless skeleton, a frame and cage providing little room for the living body or the promises of bountifulness suggested by the screen's fleeting images. If the metaphor of confinement and 'liberation' from the grasp of the plaster alluded to television's immobilizing hold on the viewer's consciousness and its "corrective" effect on the spectator's body through programming and commercials, Leppe made concrete this relation between life and

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<sup>1283</sup> Photographs from the performance "Cuerpo correccional" are published in *Margins and Institutions*, page 89, and *Cegado por el oro*, pages 28 and 29.

<sup>1284</sup> Patricio Rojas, "El gran referente," *Revista Casa Diseño*, no. 78, 48.

<sup>1285</sup> "¿Acción de arte?," *Revista Ercilla*, November 4, 1981.

<sup>1286</sup> For example, Vostell's "Television Décollage" exhibition of 1963 in New York.



technology. Producing a spectacle while critiquing those reproduced by the monitor, Leppe's performance opposed an 'experienced' event to the space of its reproduction. By accentuating the physiological response of artist and viewers and the temporality of everyday life,<sup>1287</sup> Leppe was implicitly contrasting them to the virtual space and time of technology.

Richard's brief mention of the role of television in Leppe's "Sala de espera" is illuminating yet incomplete in this respect. Similar to her reading of Rosenfeld's work, for Richard the artist performed a critique of television's 'uni-directionality' insofar as it created a "one-way entrance (...) to national information."<sup>1288</sup> Dismissing television as "ordinary" and "popular," for Richard this technology represented a "degenerate" form of reproduction in contrast to the "regenerative" role of photography.<sup>1289</sup> Yet the television image and its modes of operation were incorporated in Leppe's work as more than symptoms of cultural decadence. Leppe's installation highlighted the ideological character of television, its ability to virtually link multiple viewers through electronic, fluid, and changing images claiming to recreate reality while buttressing power relations, and the reiterative effectiveness of its communication methods. These were brought to bear not only in the multiple images of the transforming Leppe in each television set and the repetition of his mother's narrative, but in its connection with current forms of political propaganda.

A few days before the September 11, 1980 plebiscite called by the dictatorship to decide on the reformulation of the Chilean Constitution, a series of spots funded by the government were shown on national television. Sergio Marras commented in *Revista Apsi* in October how the spots' slogan: "We or chaos," created a simplified version of the socio-political situation in the nation that antagonized "a healthy Chile identified with the government with an unhealthy opposition enemy of Chile."<sup>1290</sup> Marras argued that the government had recurred to a basic propagandistic principle formulated by Joseph Goebbels in the context of Nazi Germany, according to which "political propaganda should be limited to a small quantity of continually repeated ideas. The mass will remember the most simple when they are repeated hundreds of times."<sup>1291</sup> Marras then turned to the problem of television programming in the nation and its inability to address current social problems. Leppe's 1980 installation alluded to this situation in the television set which showed contemporary programs from Chilean television featuring passages from soap operas, construction sites, bulldozers, mining activities, and national landscapes.<sup>1292</sup> The innocuousness of the sentimental narrative in the soap opera and its

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<sup>1287</sup> In *Revista Ercilla* it was noted that Leppe's action took a long time, requiring a "great [deal of] patience (his and the public), as he proceeded to break the plaster." *Revista Ercilla*, Ibid.

<sup>1288</sup> Richard, 41.

<sup>1289</sup> Richard, 87. Richard did not address directly in her text the difference though.

<sup>1290</sup> Sergio Marras, "Televisión: la gran demagoga," *Revista Apsi*, October 7-20, 1980, 2-5.

<sup>1291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1292</sup> The excerpts had been taken from Canal Nacional TV.

reductive representation of social reality were opposed to the propagandistic images of progress that were literally changing the landscape by inscribing new marks in it.

Richard did not mention how her own text and the images contained in the book were framed by photographs of the Andes Mountains. It is interesting that Richard often spoke of the corporeal territoriality and geography of gestures present in Leppe's video, even mentioning her subjective approach to the artist's works, yet evaded mentioning her direct participation in the editing and direction of the videos (a fact only stated in the final credits of the book), or the photographs of the Andes Mountains taken by Altamirano that bordered and contained her text.<sup>1293</sup> It would seem as if Richard's own motherly functions of breeding and inscribing the works of the artists she advocated was occluded or treated as a 'natural' participation in the development of Chilean art, as native as the Andes. The maternal function could thus be extended to Richard in relation to the Chilean conceptual practices as she inscribed a scene, just like the national landscape was conceived as a matrix of identity.

The last photograph of the mountains in the book was accompanied by a text written by Leppe titled: "Epílogo: Cordillera de los Andes" (Epilogue: Andes Mountains). In brief notes the artist stated his intention to create an installation at his mother's house when she died, illuminating a room with neon lights and covering it with tiles, and mounting sixteen urinals where paid men would urinate while the nude and gauzed body of his mother laid on a stretcher at the center of the room. At the four corners there would be videos showing Leppe as a "diva, as what I am, as "The Continent's Doll",<sup>1294</sup> throwing kisses from the screen towards his mother's recumbent body. The images accompanying the text established a relation between landscape and mother, since as matrix and physical frames both could be read as generative and creative forces in the development of the subject's identity. If the mother's womb provided the first matrix, the original source from where biological re-productions emerged, the looming snow covered peaks of the mountainous landmarks were also treated as a second 'natural' womb, another familiar and unavoidable enclosure. Gustavo Buntinx has read the image of the mountains in *Cuerpo Correccional* as a "profile resembling that of a reclined woman, a "Sleeping Beauty" that the accompanying text identifies with the maternal figure fused with that of a patriotically inscribed nature."<sup>1295</sup> Though Buntinx connects nature with the female body, he does not address the aforementioned text which posits a more complicated relationship with the mother-land.

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<sup>1293</sup> It is worth noting, as Richard already did in a 2006 interview, that when an article by the author on Chilean art appeared on *Domus* magazine in 1981, the editors chose to 'frame' Richard's severe looking portrait with Altamirano's panoramic photograph of the Chilean Andes used in the 1980 book. Richard acknowledged that this was done without her knowledge, but the identification of the Chilean nation with the mountain from an outsider perspective remains significant, and her own evasion of the point in *Cuerpo Correccional* as well. In her introduction to the book, Richard noted that Leppe's body was "contextualized" by "popular and national elements," yet avoided mentioning the mountains.

<sup>1294</sup> Leppe, in *Cuerpo Correccional*, 118. The continent's doll reappeared in 1982, yet in a completely different context, as will be seen in the conclusion.

<sup>1295</sup> Gustavo Buntinx, "The Return of the Sign: The Resymbolization of the Real in Carlos Leppe's Performance Work," in *Over Here. International Perspectives on Art and Culture*, ed. Gerardo Mosquera and Jean Fisher (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2004), 320.

In his text, Leppe's manifest desire to defile the mother, to subject the object of love to both reverence (kisses, mourning) and maculation (urine), presented an ambivalent relation to that object.<sup>1296</sup> The symbols of the mother-land and their pristinely sublime status would be abjected and tainted by stand-ins for the artist, paid laborers ejecting their natural fluids on it. In the meantime, the deviating son all "dolloed-up" would blow his farewell kisses from the delayed, looping images on the television screen, lovingly watching in a detached manner this act of corruption. It was not only paternal law that Leppe was defying in the work, especially regarding sexual difference as argued by Richard, but the motherly matrix exalted by the paternal order as well, as seen in the mud-made television set where the Virgen del Carmen stood among other sentimental paraphernalia.

In 1981, Leppe presented the video installation and performance "El día que me quieras" (The Day You Love Me) at Galería Sur (fig. 6.5).<sup>1297</sup> The title quoted the theme song performed by the tango singer Carlos Gardel for the 1935 American-Argentinean movie of the same name, which became one of Gardel's most popular works. In the performance, Leppe appeared with a nude torso on a stage set up against one of the gallery's walls where a table with old-fashioned ceramic jugs and bowls as well as other grooming utensils had been set up along with a television monitor playing a video of the same name. After slowly filling a bowl with water, the artist wetted his hair and brushed it back until it mimicked the sleek hairdo of the tango star, proceeding to apply make-up to his eyes, lips, and cheeks so as to recreate Gardel's famous androgynous image. As Leppe transformed his visage in front of the audience, the taped voice of his mother could be heard in the background singing Gardel's song, at times broken and out of tune.

Leppe then took a second television monitor, where a silenced image of his mother appeared talking, and began rocking it in front of his body. While Gardel's voice could be heard intoning his song in the audio, Leppe began singing in synch, making exaggerated facial expressions of pain and imitating the singer's poses. At the same time, the video on the table showed images of a dark and modest interior with stained walls and cement floor, slowly revealed as a small kitchen (fig. 6.6).<sup>1298</sup> After the camera moved continuously from left to right of the room displaying objects such as a bottled gas container, rusted pots and pans, a steaming kettle, a popular coffee container, a hot-water bottle, a calendar, a wash basin, a mirror and a series of ordinary popular adornments and family memorabilia, it dropped to the ground, exposing a human foot. With the same slow pace, the camera began tracing the topography of Leppe's body lying half-nude on the floor, moving from feet to thighs, torso and face. With eyes out of their orbits and

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<sup>1296</sup> When seen in relation to Leppe's 1979 defilement of the Marcel Duchamp's star, the proposed action of 1980 could be regarded as the revenge of the Duchampian father.

<sup>1297</sup> Records of Leppe's performance "El día que me quieras" can be found in *Margins and Institutions* in page 70, *Chile Arte Actual* pages 202 and 203, and *Cegado por el oro* in page 36.

<sup>1298</sup> Still images from the video "El día que me quieras" are found in page 202 of *Chile Arte Actual*, page 37 of *Cegado por el oro* and page 405 of *Copiar el Edén*.

painted lips parted, the artist appeared as if dead, bearing on his torso the traced phrase “el día que me quieras.”<sup>1299</sup>

The love song’s plaintive longing for the restoration of a harmonious unity was reenacted by Leppe as an ambivalent desire to reunite the self with a lost object.<sup>1300</sup> Leppe’s handling of the television monitor reproducing Arroyo’s visage imitated the caring rocking movements used by a mother to hush and bring to sleep a small child, producing an inversion of roles between mother and son (and between brother and sister insofar the monitor replaced the latter’s ‘doll’). Yet in this child-like game of make-believe reunion, familial love could be transformed into a sexual one as suggested by the song, confusing the boundaries between ‘proper’ objects of affection. While Gardel sung of heterosexual love, Leppe appeared to be painfully singing to a mother, whose attention and song had turned elsewhere, suggesting incest and an unrequited love relation in the family. Though the mother figure could still be read ideally as a model of love and devotion (the Virgin), Leppe was recasting her as a ‘bad’ mother, a site of anxiety, separation, and even death. The video’s played out agony and suicide located the end of the tango-like tragedy at ‘home,’ in the midst of the familiar space of the kitchen where the son became a victim of female aggression. A different ‘crime scene’ from the 1977 graphic version was represented; one where the domestic became sordid, passion deadly, and desire was transformed into negation.

The impossibility of returning to the mother as an original matrix and to a unified state of selfhood was enacted in the performance and video installation in multiple ways. Leppe’s adoption of Gardel’s external appearance as if it were a mask, presented a split self-image of the artist and a conscious assumption of another self through the performance of a role. The ‘son’ was variously cast as an ambiguous lover, a performer playing a famous actor/singer, and an actor who was in turn an international ‘image’ of romance and exotic passion. An ‘original’ or authentic speaking self was avoided by Leppe, who presented instead a kaleidoscopic subject, formed by a multitude of different voices. The role of author was transformed into an empty signifier to be assumed by different actors who at times sung individually, in synch as chorus, or recited the lyrics, confusing its boundaries.

The multiple performers (Leppe, Arroyo, and Gardel) were further present by means of different sources of reproduction: the video, the sound recorder, and the ‘live’ performance. Leppe’s exaggerated singing was directed towards a reproduced image of his mother, her presence displaced in the television’s screen. As a virtual and timeless electronic icon, Arroyo’s visage was turned into a sign of motherhood and a depthless image rather than a concrete object.<sup>1301</sup> The devotion shown to the mother by the male

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<sup>1299</sup> There is an unedited video with several takes of this scene at Centro de Documentación in Centro Cultural Palacio de la Moneda, Santiago. In the audio, Richard’s voice can be heard directing Leppe’s placement (with phrases like: “Carlos, move to the left, “Carlos, close your eyes”), and she even appears tracing the phrase on the artist’s torso with a pencil. If there is any proof of the critic directing, producing, and “mothering” a work of art, this is it.

<sup>1300</sup> In Gardel’s song, nature will rejoice and bloom when the loved object corresponds to the speaking subject’s feelings. According to the song, love will heal and enable forgetting pain.

<sup>1301</sup> Even though I use the term ‘sign’ to refer to the image/figure of the mother, I differ from Galaz and Ivelic’s reductive semiotic interpretation of the performance. For the authors, “a semiotic interaction was

child was displaced onto the ‘toy,’ the television set acting as an intermediate object, a comforting matrix of dreams and illusions. In their reproductive qualities, mother and television were joined by Leppe to the endless repetition of the song, echoing the mass-production of feelings in the media. Through its exaggerated recreation in the performance, Leppe parodied the conventions surrounding the popular love theme, its sincerely felt artificiality, and its transformation into a popular emblem of nostalgic longing. The mundane objects reproduced in the video reflected a world of consumerism and kitsch in a poor background, the receiver’s end of the mass-produced romantic dream, marking the distance between the glamour of Gardel’s image, its pale reflection in the Chilean woman’s longing, and its imitation by the woman’s son.

By adopting Gardel’s heavily charged romantic persona and androgynous aspect, Leppe was pointing to an ambiguous sexuality as well. While Gardel’s hybrid appearance was meant to enhance his sex appeal through the combination of masculine activity with female tenderness, Leppe’s reenactment of Gardel’s feminized masculinity revealed in the ambiguity of such a construct. Leppe’s self-displays exacerbated the slippage between the man who looks and seduces his mistress, and the one who is gazed at as an object of consumption. Gardel’s own appearance had gone through several transformations. The tango singer associated with the marginal lower classes had been turned into a prepackaged ‘exotic’ Latin lover with ‘smoky’ eyes and languid poses catering to English-speaking audiences. The latter image had returned to its South American ‘source’ through cinema and the international ballroom versions of tango.<sup>1302</sup> The song “El día que me quieras” was transformed by Gardel from a tango into a mellower ‘song’ without a genre to fit romantic parameters of both exoticism and legibility abroad, returning to the south as a universal sign of love. In Leppe’s reincarnation, the returning “son” was less than prodigal, but rather a hybrid impersonator with mixed origins, seriously playful as he invoked Gardel as a possible father figure in his bizarre love triangle. If the “son’s” identity was at play, his origins were highly mediated, doubtful, and possibly twice foreign.

Leppe’s questioning of gender, stereotypes and national symbols in his early 1980s videos and performances posited an identity that was not pure, fixed, or straightforward. His use of television and its strategies of reproduction questioned the

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created between the body-sign of the artist and the image-sign of the television; the screen returned the image of the body in a different action from the one performed directly in front of the viewers.” Galaz and Ivelic, *Chile, Arte Actual*, 201.

<sup>1302</sup> Marta E. Savigliano has traced the transformations of tango, which was “polished and accepted by the wealthy and powerful as it made its way from the slums and brothels of the South American harbors to the cabarets and ballrooms of Paris, London, and New York. By the 1920s it had become clear that the sin of tango was related to its racial/class origins rather than to its erotic content. When appropriated by “high society,” especially that of Europe, dancing the scandalous tango became an enjoyable, spicy entertainment. As a performance of exotic passion, like many other exotic products, tango was promptly packaged and distributed by the show business industry: records, dance handbooks, films, fashion, stars.... Tango in its new bourgeois version was readdressed to the world market including, ironically, those Third World nations where it had originated.” Marta E. Savigliano, “Tango and the Postmodern Uses of Passion,” in *Cruising the Performative. Interventions into the Representation of Ethnicity, Nationality, and Sexuality*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case, Philip Brett, and Susan Leigh Foster (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 131.

clearly delimited and traditional images of home-land and mother-land supported by the dictatorship, as well as those proposed by other artists. A comparison between the video works of Leppe and Marcela Serrano is useful, for Serrano not only came from a graphic art background, but was associated with C.A.D.A., her work evidencing another form of understanding the body, the landscape, and video in relation to gender. Serrano's "Autocríticas" (Self-criticisms), which preceded Leppe's 1980 video installation by one month, posited a different gendered version of the motherland and corporeal marking.

In October 1980, Serrano presented at Instituto de Arte Contemporáneo (Contemporary Art Institute) the installation "Autocríticas" (fig. 6.7). The work consisted of five television sets placed on the floor at one end of the gallery over a rectangular patch of earth.<sup>1303</sup> A 16 mm black and white video was projected on the wall above the sets and a metallic mesh encased and separated the viewers from the screens on the floor. In the television sets, three videos played an action performed by Serrano, while one showed images of Serrano and her sisters, and the last repeated the images from the film that included fragments of the artist's daily life at her home and the past art action.

The action started with Serrano standing nude within a completely bare and white room, where she proceeded to slowly paint her body with white latex (fig. 6.8).<sup>1304</sup> Bent over, Serrano began by covering her feet, ankles, thighs, pelvis with the paint drawn from a tin can, slowly moving upwards until her whole body was submerged in white, including her face. Without speaking, Serrano then stood in front of the camera, immobile and gazing outwards, as the lenses zoomed in and out of her body. The cinematographer Carlos Flores, the cameraman Leo Cocking, and Eduardo Tironi taped the action, which was exhibited in three fragments in the installation's television sets, while the 16 mm projection hovering above them was overlaid with Serrano's voiceover recounting the fears and anxiety she felt when performing.

In her narrative, Serrano interpreted the covering of her naked body with white paint as an act of self-effacement and criticism. The artist characterized this act as one "decomposing, embalming, ossifying, burying"<sup>1305</sup> her body and self, literally walling in her flesh and pores with a synthetic material. Enveloped in white, a color that as mentioned in the catalogue's quotes had been interpreted by other artists as "the color of absolute silence"<sup>1306</sup> and "of beginning and end,"<sup>1307</sup> Serrano was erasing her features and corporeal appearance, "annulling her sex and personality."<sup>1308</sup> Through this act of

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<sup>1303</sup> A photograph of Serrano's installation "Autocríticas" can be found in the article by Héctor Soto, "La imagen como expiación," *El Mercurio*, November 16, 1980.

<sup>1304</sup> A catalogue was produced to accompany the exhibition including a text by Serrano recounting the action and photographic documentation of it. The catalogue, *Autocríticas* (Santiago: Editora Granizo Ltda., 1980) was edited by Lotty Rosenfeld.

<sup>1305</sup> Serrano, *Autocríticas*, 25.

<sup>1306</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, quoted in *Autocríticas*, 69.

<sup>1307</sup> Antoni Tàpies, quoted in *Autocríticas*, 69.

<sup>1308</sup> Ana María Foxley, "El arte como redención," *Revista Hoy*, November 12-18, 1980, 47.

painting Serrano was turning her body into a visual emptiness, apparently fusing with the white walls and floor around her.

Serrano explained that the denial of the corporeal through the white paint was intended to generate a “social projection”<sup>1309</sup> that would connect her corpo-reality with those of others. This was an attempt to strip the body of its sexual and gendered marks, to become a featureless entity, a tabula rasa where other images could be projected. Yet, insofar as the body is the one of the most important and evident signs of identity, Serrano marked her own as a female body. By both exposing herself nude and effacing momentarily her most visible anatomical marks, breasts and pubis, as physical signs socially connected to sexuality, Serrano appeared to be simultaneously denying and re-marking her gender.

The erasure of female identity was taken by Serrano to be prototypical of the Chilean woman. In her voice-over recounting the action, Serrano stated that she recognized the bodies of other women in her reproduced, self-effaced image, as if the video was a social mirror. Seeing her own whitewashed body like those of “thousands and thousands of Chilean women,” the artist’s “uniqueness” and selfhood was questioned, her image merging with those of others.<sup>1310</sup> The video and photographs presented the artist with the image of an ‘other,’ her ‘self’ continually becoming a different one. In the artist’s retrospective narrative, the ‘other’ was understood as the body of a woman and the corporeal defined by the feminine. The national character given to this self-effaced object of contemplation and projection was further associated by the artist with an image of Chilean women as abnegated beings, self-effacing, restricted, and barred behind fences.

But if this was an act of erasure, it was also a form of “self-revelation,” invoking both a spectacle and the overexposure of a photograph. On one hand, Serrano’s voice-over discourse suggested a theoretical position adopted by the artist, a distanced questioning of her action and feelings from an intellectual point of view. Posing and yet at the same time adopting the philosopher’s stance, Serrano was countering the association of the female body with a raw state of nature or a mere object of consumption, aligning instead that body with knowledge. On the other hand, if the body paint was a double form of corporeal disclosure and enclosure, Serrano was also playing with the gaze of the viewer and the expectations of dominion and knowledge implied in the act of gazing. As Serrano turned her body into an object of contemplation, she denied the viewer the visual ‘thrill’ of the erotic, delivering not the woman as a substitute of the phallus, or reveling in the site of ‘lack,’ but revealing a blank mask and a seemingly de-sexualized body. Her body was overexposed, too naked, with only her dark hair, eyes and nostrils giving away the presence of a person underneath. The video’s looped repetitions accentuated this frustrated encounter, mimicking the expectations regarding the nude female body as passive and subjected to the quotidian space of the family (as shown in the scenes taken from Serrano’s home).

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<sup>1309</sup> Serrano, *Autocríticas*, 15.

<sup>1310</sup> The voice-over stated: “I melted into them. My self-image collapsed.” Serrano, 21. Richard interpreted this phrase in 1981 as the “assumption of a corporeal failure, of a body let down in its similitude/in its dis-identity.” Richard, *Una mirada sobre el arte en Chile, octubre de 1981*, 51. But then she continued to describe this body as an eminently “matricial one because [of it being] transindividual.” Ibid.

The action could be read in this sense as one of displaced castration, bringing little comfort to the male viewer's desire of possession of a submissive female object. Yet the question of the gaze and the double act of revelation and effacement was complicated by Serrano's collaboration with three cinematographers who were literally casting their "male" gaze on the artist's nude body and mediating its representation.<sup>1311</sup> The slow zooming in and out of Serrano's body was described by critics as "delicately treating the [artist's] action,"<sup>1312</sup> offering a fondling, flowing continuity in the images differing from Leppe's abrupt editing and cuts.<sup>1313</sup> According to Héctor Soto, the violence of Serrano's work "did not come from the reposed images"<sup>1314</sup> produced by the men, but from the artist's submission to the "impertinent gaze of the camera."<sup>1315</sup> While the camera was regarded by Soto as the "worst executioner,"<sup>1316</sup> since it presented a "documentary" and thus objective image, it could also cast a 'caressing' gaze on its object of contemplation. The fact that Serrano would mention in her voice-over that she was "being spoken, being repressed, being fragmented," is ironic if seen in relation to this act of othering and self-presentation. Serrano was turning her body into a blank page, ready for more inscriptions, coming both from her own consciousness and from others gazing at her. While attempting to bring the body back to a ground zero of representation, avoiding stereotypes, hierarchies, and values, or as Richard wrote in 1981, presenting less a "purified body than [one] neutralized in the white as a support for critical revision, of visibility; a body in work – in project,"<sup>1317</sup> Serrano's reflections also pointed to the impossibility of turning away from classifications and the difficulty of erasing the body's history and social markings.

Serrano further interpreted her action as one of purification and redemption. Such a notion was reasserted in the quote of Susan Sontag at the end of the catalogue, which spoke of Antonin Artaud's search for a total work of art and the body's redemption, concluding that "art will be redemptive when, like the redeemed body, it transcends itself."<sup>1318</sup> Here is where the influence of C.A.D.A. bears its most evident marks in the

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<sup>1311</sup> There are a few published photographs of the action being taped, with the cinematographers caressing, moving, and directing Serrano during the action, as in the article by Antonio Gil, "Marcela Serrano: blanco de autocríticas," *Revista Apsi*, November 18-December 1, 1980, 24.

<sup>1312</sup> Foxley, 47.

<sup>1313</sup> Serrano distinguished her work from that of Leppe explaining that while Leppe was dealing with audiences in a theatrical, direct manner that "in the short run transforms reality," she was instead creating a distance with the audience. This made her work become "almost a discourse (...) that transforms reality in the long range." Serrano, quoted in "Body Art. Un compromiso y un riesgo," Dossier Especial Rumbo '81, *La Tercera*, November 24, 1981.

<sup>1314</sup> Héctor Soto, "La imagen como expiación," *El Mercurio*, November 16, 1980.

<sup>1315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1317</sup> Richard, *Una mirada sobre el arte en Chile, octubre de 1981*, 73.

<sup>1318</sup> Susan Sontag quoted in *Autocríticas*, 69.



work of Serrano, insofar as the action resembled a purification ritual and proposed the identification between the artist's body and the social body. Choosing herself as an expiatory lamb like Eltit had done before, Serrano was aligning her body and self-image with those of 'others' who were ejected or effaced by society (the 'thousands of Chilean women'), but who her action would redeem in a virtual manner. This act of transcendence of the flesh recalled on one hand the primacy given to *logos* as the foundation of subjectivity in modern Western culture. On the other hand, if Serrano's self-image was 'fragmented' by oppressive external forces, her act of cleansing and self-effacement led her to join a larger essence, that of Woman. Serrano was thus repeating the salvation gesture of C.A.D.A. and of the historic avant-gardes, only this time under a differently gendered sign.

Such messianic intentions were supported by the metaphorical translation of the artist's body to a shared one, creating a passage from the personal to the collective. Several critics noticed a connection between Serrano's rituals to an act of symbolic cleansing that could be extended to a larger social situation. Soto spoke of the action as "a ritual that has something of self-castigation and something of purification,"<sup>1319</sup> where the artist was making herself "a metaphor of confinement and liberation."<sup>1320</sup> For Foxley, the artist was evoking a primordial ritual during which "primitives offered sacrifices and exposed themselves half-hidden with masks and painting in front of the universe's immensity, conjuring evil and exorcising the demons,"<sup>1321</sup> aiming to pass "from sacrifice to salvation"<sup>1322</sup> through this primordial reenactment. Only Antonio Gil defined what exactly Serrano was purifying beyond her unspoken 'primitive,' female condition. The critic read Serrano's body as transcending itself, becoming "a collective body"<sup>1323</sup> by making her own public, and addressing through her action a "repressed and contained society. The Chilean society of 1980."<sup>1324</sup> Thus, Serrano's female, denied body could be understood as a metaphor for the body politic, going beyond her feminine carcass to become an allegory of a repressed nation.<sup>1325</sup>

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<sup>1319</sup> Soto, "La imagen como expiación."

<sup>1320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1321</sup> Foxley, "El arte como redención," 47.

<sup>1322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1323</sup> Gil, "Marcela Serrano: blanco de autocríticas," 24.

<sup>1324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1325</sup> Leppe's works could also be read as extrapolating the body politic to the artist's body. In a collective exhibition at Galería Sur in May 1982, Leppe presented a video installation featuring the video "El ruiseñor y la rosa," in which the artist appeared in front of a decayed wall in downtown Santiago, whistling like a bird while he revealed under a white shirt a metallic contraption of spines drawing blood from his arm. In a review by Sommer, he quoted Merleau-Ponty's notion of intertwining of flesh with objects of the world in relation to Leppe's video, tacitly alluding to the relationship between body and body politic. Waldemar Sommer, "Hechizo, vanguardia, ingenuas, San Diego," *El Mercurio*, May 23, 1982.

All critics approached the installation as a symbol of social confinement. The forced physical separation of Serrano's screened images from the viewers through nets and earth, were generally understood as acts of "repression" that had to be transcended. For Foxley, these were tied to the media and general "surroundings," whereas for Gil these were symbols of a general manifestation of "the Barrier, repression, reality contained."<sup>1326</sup> In this way, the caging of the images reproduced in the television sets recalled not only a repressed female situation, a denuded body mediated and "fixed"<sup>1327</sup> by the camera and a long history of representations, a ghost and blank screen awaiting new social inscriptions, but that of the nation as a contained, subjected body, and television as a technology for exerting control. In its staging, scripting, editing, and framing, television can be read as a site for inscriptions, where collective messages are joined with the personal. This virtual stage can determine viewers' choices by hammering its information through repeated codes and messages. Television was envisioned by Serrano as another cage, reproducing endless and fluid representations.

Serrano related her approach to body art and society with a sociological vein mediated by the corporeal actions of Gina Page. Referring to the French artist as a "precursor of the sociological body in Body Art,"<sup>1328</sup> Serrano spoke of Page's understanding of the "body as a social entity that is a symbol of many other bodies."<sup>1329</sup> Serrano was indirectly alluding to the relation between Page and "sociological art," a movement with origins in France, the Situationists, and the events of May 1968, which had left a mark in the Latin American art scene during the 1973 São Paulo Biennial and at C.A.Y.C. in 1975.<sup>1330</sup> During the 1970s, art and even video were regarded as more than mediums for artistic expression but sociological elements of communication, able to intercept and influence society. By quoting Page as an artistic mother and connecting her work to a "sociological" intention, Serrano was invoking one of the great goddesses of Body art to support her ritual relation to "a Chilean woman" and the merger of the repressed, the corporeal, the feminine, with a specific society. If in Leppe's performances Chile was envisioned as a transvestite, a giant doll, with a homosexual attachment to the mother, Serrano was instead feminizing that image, turning it into a hysteric female body.

Hysteria as a displaced form of repression was emphasized in Serrano's 1981 work presented at the Concurso Colocadora Nacional de Valores. In "El caso Dora"

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<sup>1326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1327</sup> Serrano, *Autocríticas*, 21.

<sup>1328</sup> Serrano, quoted in "Body Art. Un compromiso y un riesgo."

<sup>1329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1330</sup> Fred Forest organized in 1974 an exhibition of "sociological art" in Paris, where works by Gina Page were shown. In 1973, Forest attended the São Paulo Biennial and called the participating artists to take to the streets in opposition of the Brazilian military dictatorship. Interestingly, the action involved taking over public systems, for example by installing "blank" spaces in printed media for readers' responses and staging a protest in the streets with white signs in a work titled "The city invaded by blank space." Such an action recalls C.A.D.A.'s 1979 work and their frustrated desire to intervene a magazine with a "white" page. In 1975, Forest travelled to Argentina, exhibiting at C.A.Y.C. which, as mentioned earlier, had a strong "systems art" orientation.

(Dora's Case), Serrano juxtaposed a text written by Freud dealing with the psychoanalytic case of a hysteric woman to three photographs of the "Autocríticas" performance.<sup>1331</sup> The parallel between Serrano's stages of white self-effacement and Freud's interpretation of Dora's symptoms as displaced marks of an attachment to, and sexual desire for, her father (and other father figures, as in Herr K.) that had turned into disgust and self-punishment, linked the artist's corporeal 'repression' to an exemplary psychoanalytical model. While the 'case' study suggests specificity and individuality, Freud's conclusions regarding 'female' hysteria and his own empirical methods, as well as Serrano's desire to "extrapolate [the most classical case of psychoanalysis] to the hysteria of the Chilean woman,"<sup>1332</sup> reflect the law-finding intentions of a social science. But if for Freud Dora's hysteria was self-inflicted, Serrano was mocking that unconscious form of passive agency, returning Dora's "case" to the particular, to an actual living body. The work can be considered a contestation of a male perspective on a female experience, body, and desire, as it undermined the claims of psychoanalytic mastery and female subjection implied in Dora's case. Yet again, Serrano's identification and substitution of all other bodies with her own, the assumption that Chilean women were doubly marginal because of their gender, nationality, and hysteric state of denial, suggests that the artist was assuming a position of authority regarding the viewer, the subject, and the identification processes. When Serrano spoke of her previous work as presenting "only a sample," the body "of any woman," adding that this created "a great sense of identification (...) it permits different readings, depending on the female spectator's strata and education,"<sup>1333</sup> the contradictions embedded in her work become apparent. The artist was presuming that her own body was unmarked and that by covering it in white latex, her history, her class, family (all addressed in the surrounding videos) were somehow effaced and she simply could enact a primordial and pure female condition with which any other woman could relate to.

Serrano's works are interesting insofar as they can be read as both criticizing and to a degree accepting different conventions regarding gender and identity. As Serrano was questioning the ways in which the representations produced by society make inscriptions on actual bodies through the repetition of images and actions (the "habitual" mentioned by Richard in relation to Serrano's work<sup>1334</sup>), defining and contouring them, the artist was also reproducing in her own discourse some of the premises she was interrogating, yet without questioning them. This ambivalence was further manifested in Serrano's references to the landscape and her posterior use of such images in relation to the female, 'primitive,' colonized body, a demonic triad that came to define different versions of Chilean feminism during the 1980s.

According to Serrano, the fragment of fresh earth that separated the television sets from the viewers in her 1980 video installation was a reference to the "the only true and

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<sup>1331</sup> In an interview with Eltit, Neustadt refers to a performance on Dora's case done by Serrano, though Eltit refers back to the *Autocríticas* work. See Neustadt, 99.

<sup>1332</sup> Serrano, quoted in "Body Art. Un compromiso y un riesgo."

<sup>1333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1334</sup> Richard, *Una mirada sobre el arte en Chile, octubre de 1981*, 73.

immutable thing.”<sup>1335</sup> Even though identity and the body might be subject to a series of social inscriptions and self-manipulations, the ‘earth’ was presented by the artist as unchanging, always there, a natural element grounding the subject. The earth was thus transformed into the *über*-mother or matrix, the literal motherland preceding human existence and providing the fertile basis for any being. As ‘truly’ autochthonous, the land became a privileged site for the development of identity.

That the artist would absolve the earth from social constructions and the effects of representation while critiquing the projections on the female body is contradictory. Serrano’s repetition in the 1980 catalogue of the photograph of a rough patch of earth next to the photographic sequence of her performance acted as an almost propagandistic natural element. The parallel created between the generative feminine earth and the artist’s body suggests not only a connection to C.A.D.A.’s identification with the ‘dark skins’ of the nation (whether these were laborers, the middle class, the lower classes, all Chileans or only marginal Chileans, remained unsaid), but points to the complications of addressing identity as a permanently ‘fixed’ characteristic, particularly one that has been ‘naturalized’ or appears as natural. The earth with its roots and pebbles became in Serrano’s work an element similar to the ‘mountains’ in the Chilean imaginary, insofar as both could frame and determine a national character because of their ancientness and territorial enclosure. Serrano did not question the culturally, historically and geographically constructed character of the land and its physical and symbolic transformations, or the way its representations mediate our understanding of the concept “earth.” In Serrano’s 1980 work, both the close-up of the earth in the catalogue and its physical reality in the space of the exhibition, where its ‘genuine’ character was opposed to the virtual fantasy played on the television screens, were treated as uninhabited, body-less elements, the earth a mere prospective support for future life. This referred to a space that, according to Gil, was “not [that of] the person,” but that became instead “the earth and the landscape of Chile.”<sup>1336</sup> Serrano’s characterization of the earth as an essential ground of identity was similar in its reduction to the militant geopolitical vision of the dictatorship, though in Serrano the motherland became a symbol of ‘authentic’ marginality.

The connections between landscape and inhabitants, the female body and nature, performance and ritual, were taken up again by Serrano in 1982. That year, the artist won a mention in the new category “Multiple Mediums” at the Third Graphic Salon with the work “El paisaje de la pintura chilena” (The landscape of Chilean painting). The work consisted of two large photographic reproductions depicting women standing in front of a landscape placed one above the other, each containing the title of the work at the top, and an identical text at the bottom (fig. 6.9).<sup>1337</sup> The bottom reproduction was an enlarged copy of a photograph taken by Martin Gusinde of three “fueguinas” or Fuegians (a general name for the natives of Tierra del Fuego) belonging to the Kewanix ethnic group

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<sup>1335</sup> Serrano, quoted in Foxley, 47.

<sup>1336</sup> Gil, “Marcela Serrano: blanco de autocríticas,” 24.

<sup>1337</sup> “El paisaje de la pintura chilena” is reproduced in the catalogue *Tercer Salón Nacional de Gráfica* (Santiago: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1982), no page number. The work can also be seen hung on a wall in a vertical orientation in the article by Ana María Foxley, “Plástica. Actual, real, vital,” *Revista Hoy*, October 20-26, 1982, 30-31.

in their traditional attire of long heavy skirt and body paint on their torsos, looking at the camera with their hands crossed over their abdomens. The image, which had been previously used by Kay as an illustration in his book *Del espacio de acá* and was published in 1979 in *Revista CAL* along with fragments of Kay's text, was mirrored in the top reproduction that depicted Serrano in the same pose of the "fueguinas," wearing a similar skirt and her torso painted with analogous vertical white lines and dots. The main difference between the two images, beyond the number of women represented, was the landscape acting as backdrop and the reference in the title to the location and year when the photograph was taken. The bottom reproduction's caption read "Tierra del Fuego, 1920" (Land of Fire, 1920),<sup>1338</sup> and showed a vast plain framed by hills in the remote horizon, while the upper image stated, "Valle Central, 1982" (Central Valley, 1982), and was framed in turn by tall snow capped mountains.

The text below each image corresponded to an extract from Martin Gusinde's *Expedición a Tierra del Fuego*. This was a travelogue of the German anthropologist's expeditions in the southernmost archipelago of the South American continent made between 1918 and 1923. The text was a description of the Yaghan women's practice of painting their bodies, and had been originally published with illustrative photographs. Serrano's chosen text read: "They are always supplied with the coloring earths with which they paint their bodies. Such a use should not be lacking to them because they keep reuniting, even today, in the distant mountain, far away from the indiscrete gaze of the civilized."

The text provided an ethnographic description of the group's custom of body paint, appearing objective and merely asserting a fact that the photographs then illustrated. The tracing (graphos) of the ethnic group's traits produced by the anthropologist's text was accentuated in Serrano's work by overlaying and graphing in mold letters Gusinde's original commentary over the bodies of the women. The resulting reproduced image would prove visually and physically the discursive representation, the photographed painted bodies confirming the text, and the text reaffirming their reality.

But the author's reference in the last part of his second phrase to the male gaze stepped away from the distance of the ethnographer and introduced three interrelated problems. First, the nudity of the women that was 'veiled' or replaced by body paint; second, the 'uncivilized' state in which they and their group dwelled versus the civilized dressed men who had met and photographed them; and last, the indiscretion committed by these same civilized men who by looking may also begin to covet. The relationship established by Gusinde between the Yaghan practices of the women gathering together away from the gaze of others to perform the ritual body painting activities was connected by the author not to a ritual meaning, but to a question of propriety, a value not necessarily locally attached to this act, but overlaid by the Western onlooker. In the anthropologist's explanation of seeking remoteness, there was also an implied suggestion of a feeling of modesty coming from the women (as some kind of natural reaction to being observed while "nude"), which was tied to the anthropologist's rebuke of those who imprudently gaze upon their naked bodies, just like he was doing for the sake of

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<sup>1338</sup> "Tierra del fuego" was the name given to the archipelago by the Portuguese sailor Ferdinand Magellan when he saw multiple fires in the mainland that had been set up by the local inhabitants. While Magellan interpreted the fires as signs of an ambush, they were commonly used by the Yaghan tribes to ward off the low temperatures of the region.

science. Gusinde's own contradictory gaze was at the same time illustrated by the photographs, for these women were no longer in the solitude of the caves 'dressing' themselves with paint, but were posing (or forced to pose) for Gusinde.

Though Gusinde's text inscribed several socially constructed concepts into the image of the Yahgan women without questioning their validity, he also surreptitiously inserted contradictory elements into it. Gusinde did not question the distinctions he made between civilized and non-civilized based on the cultural practice of dressing (covering) the body with clothes (as opposed to using graphic, painted marks) connected to a long history of Western morality, rationality, and conquest, or probe into his position as another onlooker just as foreign and potentially covetous as the men he tacitly admonished. Yet he introduced an element of desire, subjectivity, and politics into his scientific endeavor. By bringing in the 'improper' and assigning it to the European gaze, Gusinde was re-inscribing the women's bodies as sites no longer simply 'other,' but that could potentially be possessed and conquered against their wishes (thus, their seeking refuge from such gaze in the mountains). Gusinde's remark introduced the discrepant behaviors of the civilized men who could also 'fall' into a state of 'nature' by overriding their own moral boundaries. Desire was brought into the picture as the gaze was disclosed as non-innocent, and with them came a history of politics and power.

Gusinde's phrase was re-edited by Serrano in relation to images of women past and present and the Chilean landscape, expanding and complicating its 'original' meaning. Following Kay's notions on the invention of the Chilean landscape by photography and the elimination of the indigenous in painting and life, Serrano's title "The landscape of Chilean painting" put in tension the notion of 'tradition' in Western painting (oil on canvas) by opposing it to the native Chilean version (body paint). To the suggestion that the first canvas was not a piece of cloth but the body itself, and that this 'primitive' stage of 'art' had been eliminated from art historical accounts, was joined the idea that the tradition of landscape as developed in painting had eliminated the 'natural' body from its picture, reducing it to either ethnographical data or marginal folkloric notes. The irony in Serrano's title emerged not only in the multiple interpretations of the word 'painting' and the differing traditions it evoked, but also in the photographic presentation of what painting suppressed. For it was photography as a 'documentary' and thus 'objective' mass medium that had restored the native body to a level of visibility, even if this corporeality would soon disappear under Western civilization's arms.

Serrano's work further implied that this was a specifically female body that was excluded, repressed, and desired in art and the social sciences. Serrano's joining of the body, the indigenous, nature, desire, and women as equivalent sites where vision and conquest were performed, conflated a diversity of concepts under the colonial, scientific, and masculine gaze. Without considering the differences between her own position in time and space and those of the earlier natives, or the kinds of cultural 'traces' and meanings inscribed onto these women's bodies from an-other perspective, the female body in its past and present versions was transformed into a liminal territory to be conquered and subdued by a male gaze for the sake of civilization, knowledge, and territorial expansion.<sup>1339</sup> Identifying with the bodies of those remote 'others,' Serrano was

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<sup>1339</sup> There is a long tradition of associations made between the American colonies and women. Stefan Todorov quotes Father Bartolomé de Las Casas, a well known defender of Indian rights during the conquest of America, as adopting the position that, "this land [the colonies] must be "wrested from the

not only evoking a presently “extinct” ethnic group and the history of its disappearance,<sup>1340</sup> but suggesting that if the indigenous ‘question’ had apparently been erased from history, it continued to live in the current bodies of women. And these were women who were still framed and inscribed within a landscape, who continued to be regarded as ‘primitive’ nature to be traversed and exploited, women still “spoken” by the patriarchal order.

Like C.A.D.A., Serrano was using a conception of the marginal as an overarching concept under which different minor or ‘repressed’ positions could see themselves represented or simply be fused. Differences between histories, genders, cultures, social hierarchies, locations, and desires were swiped under the sign of a victimized feminine national body, while the concept of the ‘nation’ as the enactment of a territorial claim by different groups and interests was left untouched. Though pointing to the gendering of the landscape and the ways patriarchal power takes spatial form, Serrano’s equation of women, nature, and Indians obscured her own post-colonial take-over and identification with a radically different ethnic group.<sup>1341</sup>

By elevating the ‘powerlessness’ of woman and making it equivalent to that of a native from a distant time and to nature as a nurturing passive mother, Serrano was creating her own cipher for marginality in the present, supporting the claims of feminism on a historical narrative. The original scene of crime in Serrano’s revision of history, or the source of social injustice in the nation, was based on gender difference and an act of violence derived from such a distinction. Such an argument could easily be extended to the American continent, and Serrano was repeating current feminist discourses in Latin America, which had begun to identify any form of imperialism with a male order of consumption and exploitation. In both cases, an original act of violence had been performed on a passive and non-combatant body defined as female, one ‘natural’ order

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power of these unnatural fathers and given to a husband who will treat her with the reasonableness she deserves.”” Stefan Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984), 171.

<sup>1340</sup> In January 1982, *El Mercurio* published an article announcing that “Abuela Rosa” (Grandma Rosa), the “last” member of the Yhagan ethnic group, had died, and with her the Yhagans as a whole ethnic group. Four years earlier, in an article dealing with Puerto Williams as one of the recently founded southern towns which would witness the developing effects of the southern highway, Abuela Rosa was also mentioned as the last remnant of the tribe’s tradition and would receive an homage as a tribute to the Yhagan people. See, “Puerto Williams cumple 25 años,” *El Mercurio*, November 21, 1978, and “Con la abuela Rosa se extinguen los yaganes,” *El Mercurio*, January 6, 1982.

<sup>1341</sup> If Indians in America were, as noted by Todorov, identified by the Spanish with women, “which makes an easy transition from internal to external *other* (since it is always a Spanish man who is speaking),” Serrano was not taking into account the reciprocity implied in Todorov’s next phrase: “moreover we recall that the Indians were making a symmetrical and converse distribution: the Spaniards were identified with women, by reason of their speech.” Todorov, 153. The ‘category’ women appears in both cases as the natural repository of the inferior part of the modern binary, the ultimate ‘other’ to the male self, a problem not questioned by Serrano. Nor were women’s changing ‘fate’ through time and place discussed in her work.

forcefully supplanted by a foreign one. America was ‘raped’ by conquerors and colonizers, a traumatic event that was still repeated in the present.<sup>1342</sup>

The symbolic and material embodiments of the ‘nation’ in the works of Leppe and Serrano pointed to the centrality of the body as a site of inscription and projection in the processes of identification. Even though the focus in each went from the personal and transvestite to the specifically feminine, the body became a ‘site’ identified not only with a place and a concept of nationhood, but also with the social body and the struggles for its definition. The body was envisioned by Leppe and Serrano not just as canvas (or mold) but as screen and a territory to be disputed by the media, capitalist interests, the dictatorship, and all social actors. This was a territory with a history, with previous social marks of internal and external colonialism, yet for the same reason one capable of change. If video provided a medium with which to capture the fluctuating history of the body, it also embodied its susceptibility to reproduction and capacity of transformation. While the body has been interpreted as the ‘other’ of rationality and the social orders built upon binary foundations, the space in which the body inhabits can also be subject to ‘othering.’ As the notion of the margin became associated in the works of Chilean conceptual artists with different forms of ‘otherness,’ both social and spatial, the margins of the territory were also treated as fringes to the concept of nationalism, as spaces of difference.

## 6.2. Landscape as Other: The Trespass of the Landscape’s Borders in the Videos of Lotty Rosenfeld, Diamela Eltit, and Eugenio Dittborn.

The intimate relationship between body and space was conceptualized by a series of Chilean artists between 1981 and 1983 as a problem of borders. The limits of the Chilean landscape were associated with the frontiers of representation and identification, using the human body as their main model. Starting with the video installation “Traspaso Cordillerano” and passing through the series of local entries for the French-Chilean encounters of video art taking place in Santiago since 1981, the problem of boundaries, such as their trespassing and reconstitution, became the centerpiece of an artistic discussion that even tested the limits of the dictatorship’s censorship.

“Traspaso Cordillerano” (Mountain Trespass) of 1981 was the product of the collaboration between two members of C.A.D.A., Lotty Rosenfeld and Diamela Eltit. The video installation was presented at the Séptimo Concurso de la Colocadora Nacional de Valores (Seventh Contest of National Placement of Values) taking place at the Museum of Fine Arts, winning the first prize (fig. 6.10).<sup>1343</sup> The artists’ participation in

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<sup>1342</sup> Such was the position of Eltit at the 1983 Second Latin American Congress of Women, celebrated in Peru, where she spoke of Latin America as a raped and colonized feminine body.

<sup>1343</sup> The video installation “Traspaso cordillerano” was first documented in the article by Ana María Foxley, “En la calle y el museo,” *Revista Hoy*, November 25- December 1, 1981, 43. The installation also appears in page 30 of *Margins and Institutions* with the neon lights turned on, and in page 243 of *Chile Arte Actual*, where other works submitted to the contest can also be seen. Fragments of the video shown on the monitors and further documentation can be seen in Lotty Rosenfeld’s *Antología Digital*, a series of DVD volumes documenting her works and those of C.A.D.A. A copy can be found at Centro de Documentación Palacio de la Moneda, Santiago.



the contest, and the official recognition they received from the museum, generated a discussion regarding the ‘marginal’ position of C.A.D.A. and its stated opposition to “institutions.” According to the artists, their incursion into the ‘official’ spaces of culture was not a betrayal of the collective’s principles, insofar as they had “never denied closed spaces,”<sup>1344</sup> even though their collective works could only “function” in open ones. According to the duo, they had realized that the means of altering institutional spaces was to work within them.<sup>1345</sup> For Rosenfeld, the lifespan of the Chilean ‘vanguard’ was associated to its presence in “all terrains”<sup>1346</sup> of culture, official or not, and its conscious marginalization from these centers of artistic reproduction would be its death certificate. This change in perspective, from margins to center, from symbolically closing the museum’s doors to entering and exiting the building with a prize, evinced several problems within the rising ‘avant-garde’ scene. These included the precarious distinctions made between inside and outside in art, the problem of the self-named vanguard and its incorporation (or co-optation) into the official canon, whether the vanguard could survive without its institutional yet validating arch-enemy, and the institutional critique that artists could perform within a conservative, and at times censoring, context.<sup>1347</sup> But more importantly, this shift points to the effectiveness of the politics of marginality advocated by conceptual Chilean artists, C.A.D.A. most prominently among them, and whether the margin could concretely operate as a site for a successful social critique.

In Eltit and Rosenfeld’s installation, four television monitors were placed on the corner of a square base a foot high and fifteen feet long covered with white tiles. From behind the monitors emerged four curving neon fixtures crawling upon the tiles and emanating a blue light that hid the cables connecting the monitors to a sound recording machine at the other end of the platform. In the television screens, four steady images of the Chilean Andes were displayed, forming together a long panorama of the mountains. Every few minutes, the images were interrupted with a trembling vertical scroll which was synchronized with an acute sound coming from the audio player. As explained in the credits at the end of the video, after the images on the screens had changed to reveal a different mountainous landscape with snow covered peaks in the background and verdant hills in the foreground, the audio reproduced the sounds of the procedures involved in a brain surgery, including the dimly heard instructions given by the doctor, the movements of the surgical tools, and the patient’s heartbeats. Only the sound of the saw penetrating the cranium could be clearly distinguished, its metallic squawk echoed in the altered television images.

While the installation did not re-present the body directly through visual images, its presence and physicality were everywhere present and invoked as phantasms. The

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<sup>1344</sup> Eltit and Rosenfeld, quoted in Foxley, “En la calle y el museo,” 43.

<sup>1345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1346</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1347</sup> For Rosenfeld, the fact that the Museum of Fine Arts as an institution had embraced a work that “speaks of thought and the modification of thought” was already a “subversive” action in the Chilean context. Ibid. It might be argued, nevertheless, that the Museum in Santiago had since 1969 embraced works that questioned its modes of operation, from the works by Juan Pablo Langlois and Cecilia Vicuña, to the more recent graphic arts contests.

regular pulsation in the audio, the human voices and muffled sounds of movement, and particularly the non-natural screeching noise of the saw, carved out the contours of imaginary bodies whose exteriors and interiors were coming into contact. The apparent immateriality and invisibility of sound contrasted with the evident hardness and concreteness of the evoked body, its skin and bones acting as tangible barriers to outside elements. The trespass could be read as multiple physical metaphors and actual transfers incarnated by the installation, beginning with the horizontal alignment of the monitors resembling a recumbent body placed upon an operating table, which in turn echoed through its position the horizontal mountain panorama reproduced in the screens. Within this minimalist setting, the white tiles conjured the sterility of the surgical environment, bloodless and immaculate in spite of the screeching sounds. Connecting the monitors to the sound as if they were arteries and nerves, the neon lights also functioned as a circulating system, creating luminary paths bringing energy and life to the two mechanisms of reproduction. The video image and television in general could be read as circulatory systems, with electric flows and energies fluctuating between their parts, connecting physically separated entities through their pulsations and messages.

In this electrical body, the 'brain' evoked in the sound physically and symbolically stood opposite from the mountain as a natural entity. If the mountain was conjured as another body, it appeared at first as an inert mass, the edges of the rocky landscape acting as an enveloping barrier, distant and impenetrable. As one of the territorial limits of the nation, the Andes could be interpreted as providing a 'natural' separation between two spaces that were culturally transformed into distinct groups of people and nations. The mountains could thus be regarded as the nation's skin, protecting the unity of the 'nucleus' within, naturally securing its identity.<sup>1348</sup>

If the horizontal Andean panorama could be compared to a female figure and particularly to the mother as matrix, it formed as much a structural part of Chilean society as the family did in the eyes of the dictatorship. In fact, the mountain was like a mother nourishing the patriotic spirit, instilling through its robust example national virtue. The familiar role of the mountain was emphasized in a series of advertisements published in *El Mercurio* in 1978, where the mountain was exalted as a national asset that should be vigorously explored.<sup>1349</sup> August was declared that year the month of the mountain and free guided hikes were offered to families as part of the celebrations. The hikes were meant to join a healthy outdoor activity with a nationalistic sense of conquest and possession, the climbs uniting the family members under the elation produced by physical exertion and high altitude. The mountain as a natural member of the Chilean family, or its geographical backbone and protector, also became a site where the space of the individual body could be intervened by transforming it into a part of a larger

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<sup>1348</sup> This is a common point of view in Chile, endlessly reproduced in the media, and given more intense nationalistic accents during the dictatorship. In a photograph of Santiago published in *El Mercurio* in August 2, 1979, for example, the city was shown 'framed' by the mountains while the caption reinforces its determining role in the formation of national identity. The caption read: "The city that grows up there, in the midst of the mountain, is a true symbol of the closeness between the Chilean inhabitant and the Andean block, which frames with its magnificence the national territory."

<sup>1349</sup> Under the title: "Let's stretch our legs, let's go hiking!" and the subtitle "Chile, country of mountains," free hiking rides supported by DIGEDER (an acronym for General Direction of Sports) were advertised for families. See in *El Mercurio*, August 5, 1978.

collective and patriotic entity. Climbing the Andes was a demonstration of national vigor and a family reunion.

In Rosenfeld and Eltit's installation, the physical joining through umbilical-like cords of the signs denoting intellect and body suggested a dependency binding the passive mountainous image to the unconscious brain. If the mountain was symbolically an 'other' to rationality because of its natural status, it was also its unconscious product. The installation evinced the dependency of the 'natural' on the mind's activity, particularly through its reconstruction as "image" or landscape. Exhibited on the screens as a series of separate images, the mountain appeared less as a unified sign of nature than as a product of an electric 'consciousness.' Its representation was further susceptible of being tampered with, disrupted and modified, just like the brain as a physical object could be manipulated and laid open. The disconnection and interruption of the mountain's image in the installation forced a perceptual and semiotic act of gestalt from the viewers, making of them participants in its reconstruction as a whole with a fixed meaning. As a physical image in the video and a sign open to semiotic and cultural re-constructions, the mountain was exhibited as more than an unavoidable physical presence or ancient topographical accident defining national identity, but another form of corporeality subject to social inscriptions.

The allusion to television malfunction pointed to the illusory symbolic status of the mountain in the Chilean imagination. As the scan in the monitor lost synchronization, the medium's frailty was underlined, its transparency questioned, and the image within it broken and upset. Though such a critique of television's illusion resembled previous video works like Joan Jonas' 1972 "Vertical Roll,"<sup>1350</sup> the use of the mountain and its connection to the body went beyond a questioning of the medium. As a symbol of the nation's territorial limits, the mountain's image suffered a visual breakdown, undergoing a small electric earthquake that altered, however briefly, its inalienable solidity. The synchronicity between the loss of clarity in the image and the sound of the saw pointed to another transfer between the individual body in surgery and the body of the nation. The body's perforation (any-body since the patient was left anonymous in the video), was connected under the ominous sign of the mountain to the body politic as a larger social entity disrupted by an act of violence. If television formed a daily part of national life, violence also formed part of its landscape.

The notion of trespassing heightened the perception of the physical elements in the installation as dual instances of the real and the imagined, whether they were natural, territorial, or human. The surgery, the transfer of signals and energy between the television monitors and the audio through the neon lights, the crossing of space, and the interruption of the mountainous image all involved an act of passing through another element, of penetrating a barrier, going beyond limits. And in this moving from one place to another the state of the thing in motion was altered. The central act of trespassing in the installation was the evoked overstepping of the body's natural limits: the ripping open of skin, flesh, and ultimately bone. As the outer shield separating the interior organs from the outside world, the skin is the outermost barrier, that threshold and point of contact with what is not the body. Yet this corporeal frontier was trespassed by the

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<sup>1350</sup> Joan Jonas' "Vertical Roll" was one of the videos shown in the 1976 exhibition *Video Art USA* at the Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago. While Jonas' work involved much more than just a critique of the medium's transparency, the two works converge in the methods used to 'unveil' television's illusionism.

meticulousness of the surgical procedure, exacerbated by the gnawing sound of the saw. If such an act of penetrating a natural limit could be read as rupturing the body's sacredness and an attack on its integrity, it was the glaring light of science and medicine that illuminated such a penetration. This act of piercing and entrance was associated with knowledge and with a potential medical cure. But such a light and infiltration could be transferred to the torture chamber as another operating theater, suggesting another form of corporeal trespass. There the light of science turned dimmer, extracting through physical coercion hidden truths. The emblematic national landmark could contain dark caverns and be transformed from a lofty sanctuary into a tenebrous envelope hiding politically suspect bodies.

If surgery was an act of border crossing, it emphasized the material side of the human body, including the mind. Lowered to the status of a 'thing' and demystified by the light of science, the brain under surgery was rendered a mere object to be dissected and touched by the scalpel, its 'independent' life marred by its corporeal dimension. The fetishization of the mind/body duality in Western thought was underlined in the installation by the similarity between the mind's potential to 'malfunction' and its need of 'repair' as in the television monitors.

The concept of trespassing natural limits was taken up again by Rosenfeld in the 1983 video "Proposición para (Entre) Cruzar Espacios Límites" (Proposal to Cross (In Between) Limit Spaces) (fig. 6.11).<sup>1351</sup> Opening with the sound of a telegraph and typed subtitles reading "Frontier: Chile/Argentina (to cross the tunnel)" and "Frontier: RFA/RDA-Berlin (to cross the wall)," the video presented two sequences of still and moving images recorded by the artist at the two geopolitical limits mentioned. The first sequence was taken from a car speeding on an empty highway framed by the Andes, alternating cuts of different mountain views with the road signs indicating the closeness of the Chilean-Argentinean frontier. As the car approached the border's banners, the audio switched from a regular whistle-like sound pulsing like heartbeats into a piercing shriek that transformed into a series of electronic sounding voices when the car entered the tunnel connecting the two nations. Fragmented English words and phrases like "border," "government," and "substantial lack of..." could be heard as the car was submerged in the tunnel's darkness. The sequence was followed by a series of photographic stills inside the tunnel and of a sign saying "good voyage" in Spanish, closing with photographs of the German internal border where a sign in English read: "Allied Checkpoint."

The following sequence counterpoised images of Rosenfeld at the two borders. They consisted of black and white photographs of the artist inscribing a cross inside the South American tunnel interspersed with color ones of Rosenfeld standing in front of the barrier separating the two sides of Germany. In the meantime, the audio switched languages, beginning with a French speaking woman followed by the sound of mixed radio frequencies, and then changing to Spanish as the images zoomed into the photographs of Rosenfeld's tunnel cross. By the time the continuous movement of the car resumed and light was glimpsed at the other side of the passage, a clear discourse from the radio could be heard referring to the pursuit of a consensus among Chileans and the

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<sup>1351</sup> "Proposición para (Entre) Cruzar Espacios Límites" is found in *Antología Digital*, at Centro de Documentación Palacio la Moneda. Still images can be seen in *Desacato*, in pages 28 and 71, with a text by Rosenfeld titled "Videotape. Proposición para (entre) cruzar espacios límites," in page 29.

formation of an “alliance” between different political parties which had “repeated its exigencies that President Pinochet renounce and a transitional government is formed.” As the car emerged from the tunnel, the audio changed once more into an English news program reproducing the news appeared in the Communist paper *The Morning Star* announcing the Soviet disarmament in space and its abandonment of lethal weapons. The video ended with the car was speeding its way on the other side of the mountain and a long take of the surrounding peaks and sky.

In the video the juxtaposition of two different contested borders and the physical act of crossing them established a parallel between the Chilean situation and the problematic of the Iron Wall. Though the Chilean-Argentinean border was apparently a ‘natural’ frontier between the two nations lacking excessive control and the German instead was an evidently man-made separating line enhanced by a highly defended wall, both stood as cultural and geo-political points of division. Though materially different and existing at opposite ends of the world, the Chilean-Argentinean border and the checkpoint in Berlin were revealed as guarded points of contact between different places and worldviews, limits that were hardly natural and whose passage had to be severely controlled.

Nevertheless, crossing the border in Germany and in Chile provided a different experience filled with historical implications. The tunnel joining the Chilean city of Los Andes to the Argentinean city of Mendoza was part of an “international highway” opened in 1980 by the Chilean dictatorship. The passage was meant to provide a link for the exchange of goods between the two nations. The fluidity of commerce was captured in the video’s continuous takes from the moving car, suggesting a swift passage and crossing between the two sides of the mountain. Such an easy flow was contradicted by the intense frontier disputes with Argentina, particularly between 1977 and 1978, making the excavation of a large hole in the mountains to ‘unite’ the nations with a telluric umbilical cord a highly charged political and economical act. This bond was commemorated in the name given to the mountain pass and tunnel: “Paso Libertadores” (Liberators’ Pass), alluding to the historical joint efforts of the emerging nations’ armies in the quest for independence from Spain. Ironically, the site was also known as “Cristo Redentor” (Christ Redeemer), because of the large scale sculpture of Christ as Redeemer of the Andes that had been placed on the Argentinean side in 1904. The context for its erection was another territorial dispute between the fraternal countries with the sculpture intended as a symbolic reminder of the nations’ union under the Christian cross.<sup>1352</sup> The sign of the cross inscribed by Rosenfeld in the tunnel was dually sited and meaningful, as it mirrored from the dark bowels of the mountain the elevated Christian version, indicating a deeply rooted historical division between the two budding nations now being bridged by economic agendas.

On the other hand, the crossing of the Allied checkpoint performed by the artist suggested a more tight control of movement that recalled both the effects of Allied occupation in Germany after World War II and those emerging from the Cold War. Since

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<sup>1352</sup> During 1978 and in the midst of the controversy and near war regarding the southern islands, several acts of reunion and peace were performed by Christian youth groups from Chile and Argentina at the feet of the statue. See for example, “Jóvenes de Argentina y Chile oran por la paz,” *El Mercurio*, October 8, 1978.

1948 there had been physical, economical, and political restrictions to the flow of people and goods between the zones in Germany occupied by the United States, France, and England, and those controlled by the Soviet Union. The division between politics and powers as manifested spatially in “east” and “west” became incarnated in the physical partition of the German city with the erection in 1961 of the Berlin Wall, further restricting movement and interaction between the two sides. That these zones of influence extended beyond Germany’s borders was indirectly present in Rosenfeld’s appearance at the Allied checkpoint in 1983, reflecting the Chilean dictatorship’s alignment with the ‘western’ forces and their ideologies, as manifested in its repudiation of communism.<sup>1353</sup>

Known as “Checkpoint Charlie,” the frontier pass photographed by Rosenfeld was a designated area in the Berlin Wall that allowed only a one-way flow of tourists and allies into East Berlin. The artist’s “passage” from one side to the other was thus an act not so easily allowed to Germans, suggesting a more complicated understanding of border crossing and the political restrictions involved in who was allowed to cross at all from West to East and back. In the video, Rosenfeld was documented photographically as standing ‘still’ in the area in between the two nations, the no-man’s land of frontiers. While people walked at her side in opposite directions, Rosenfeld was ‘fixed’ in the site of passage, marking with her body the dividing line in a perpendicular, upright manner. To the illusion of easy transit between the two sides, the artist counterpoised the static and rigid, the hindrance and detention of the checking act, making with her body a three dimensional cross interrupting traffic.

The crossing/cross gesture was repeated in the action at the Chilean-Argentinean tunnel, where instead of the video’s flow the artist used still photographs. The detention of the video’s seamless progress of images established a parallel with the complete stop of the car’s movement inside the tunnel,<sup>1354</sup> Rosenfeld’s action of interrupting the traffic signal with another perpendicular line to create a cross shown only through photographic reproductions, frozen and static. The sudden change in the narrative’s pace and forms suggested a break repeated in the creation of the cross as a road sign turned into a graphic marker of death. The cross duplicated those found on the sides of roads in Chile commemorating the death of a person at the site,<sup>1355</sup> and installed in the fluidity of this site of passage the presence of memory, the interruption and edition of the past.

The single cross made by Rosenfeld halfway in the tunnel not only mirrored that held by the Christ sculpture located at the entrance as a symbol of goodwill or territorial disputes. The inscription of a scar in the mountain’s symbolic womb, a lowered cross entombed in the mountain’s bowels, reversed the sculpture’s fraternal symbolism and

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<sup>1353</sup> A discourse that had not lost its valence in the dictatorship’s mind, since throughout Pinochet’s government, he continued asserting the need to battle Communism as a corrupting, foreign force. See for example, “S.E.: el comunismo no retornará al poder,” *El Mercurio*, October 3, 1979.

<sup>1354</sup> This switch from video to photography in the context of the mountain could perhaps also be read as a technological regression to a womb. I will address the question of video’s genealogy in the following two sections.

<sup>1355</sup> These small road constructions or memorials of popular origin were also part of a 1980 work by Juan Castillo, who collaborated and travelled with Rosenfeld, as mentioned in the next section.

pointed to the joint presence of death. For the nations were joined in more than an economic way, sharing a recent history of disappearances, torture, death, and political maneuvers to detain what some governments regarded as the Communist influence in the Southern cone.<sup>1356</sup> If the tunnel itself was a man-made violation of the mountain's 'natural' space, a route carved violently into its interior, it also formed another in-between space interrupted by multiple areas of influence, cultural, historical, political, economical, and personal.

Rosenfeld's actions at the Chilean and German borders implied an interruption of transit emphasizing the liminal and precarious state of the frontier. They performed a delay and obstruction in a flowing passage, stressing the limit's position as a site of joining and confusion. This detainment of communication was enhanced by the juxtaposition in the video's audio of Morse codes to a series of interrupted radio signals in different languages, which reinforced the notion of interception and disruption of order and legibility. The crossing of different borders in the two Berlins, Chile, and Argentina, and the intertwining of distant histories, was duplicated in the soundtrack's mixing of contemporary Chilean politics and international ones.

The Babylonian jumble appeared too politically incorrect for the Chilean dictatorship. Though the video had been produced for an exhibition in Berlin featuring female artists, Rosenfeld also submitted the work to the Third Encounter of Chilean-French Video Art in November that same year. The work was confiscated by the Consejo de Calificación Cinematográfica de Chile (Counsel of Cinematic Qualification of Chile), after asking in an unprecedented act to see all submissions for that year's encounter and denying its exhibition.<sup>1357</sup> The argument given to the artist as the cause for the video's confiscation was that it embodied "propaganda against the Supreme Government" using "subliminal techniques."<sup>1358</sup> What exactly was considered by the Chilean censorship to be politically subversive in the video remained elusive, "subliminal," yet the act of crossing the border, of connecting nations and their histories, suggesting an equality between the German situation and the Chilean one, added to the symbolism of the cross at the tunnel

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<sup>1356</sup> The Argentinean dictatorship's human rights abuses came to be known worldwide as "la guerra sucia" (the Dirty War). The interactions between the Chilean and Argentinean dictatorship's in "Operación cóndor" (Condor Operation) have been well documented. See, for example, John Dinges, *The Condor Years: How Pinochet and his Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents* (New York: The New Press, 2005). Also participating in the operation were Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, and at some points even Peru. This was a large southern cone patriarchal family, caring for its local integrity, yet supported by other "allied" American powers.

<sup>1357</sup> A similar fate happened to Gloria Camiruaga's video concerning the lives of shantytown dwellers in Santiago, though the latter was returned to the artist and "approved" to be shown. See the article, "La censura otra vez," *Revista Hoy*, March 21-27, 1984, 37, for a reference to another act of censorship in 1984 on videos and films which were shown at Centro Cultural Mapocho, such as "Missing," a film directed by the Brazilian Costa Gavras. The film recounted the story of the American journalist Charles Horman, who disappeared in Chile in 1973 after the coup, the character played by the well known actor Jack Lemmon. The director of the cultural center asked in the article why the censorship was "so worried about works of art that are exhibited in a private location where admission is not charged but only a small entrance fee, while in other places pornographic videos that came with the economy of a free market circulate profusely?" *Ibid.*

<sup>1358</sup> Quoted in, "El video prohibido de Lotty Rosenfeld," *Revista Cauce*, April 24-May 7, 1984, 40.

as a stigma that linked the two neighboring dictatorships, was at least perceived by the Chilean as a cultural infringement. This was an artistic trespass in need of correction.

The Chilean-French Video Art Encounter where Rosenfeld's video could not be shown was one of the few instances solely dedicated to the exhibition of video works in Chile at the time.<sup>1359</sup> Originating in 1981, the festival showcased for several days videos from both France and Chile in a program that also included panel discussions and talks. The latter at first concerned the role of television and the question of video being a new medium, becoming later on a platform for the discussion of the paths taken by Chilean art.<sup>1360</sup> While the selection of the French entries was in charge of the Institute's cultural authorities, among them most prominently Jean Michel Solente, chief of the Service of Cultural Extension in the French Embassy,<sup>1361</sup> the Chilean submissions were instead chosen from the entries submitted to an open call. The technical and thematic differences between the French and Chilean videos were noted by critics at the time, particularly the solidity of formal interests in the French examples, which contrasted with the documentation of art actions, theater productions, and cinematic transpositions of their Chilean counterparts.<sup>1362</sup> Theater companies such as ICTUS presented recordings of their works while cinema and television directors presented documentaries or extensions of earlier preoccupations. C.A.D.A. and Leppe reworked prior documentation of their actions and performances, and other artists such as Mario Fonseca and Virginia Hunneus reinterpreted past installations.<sup>1363</sup> Yet in spite of the apparent technical difficulties and lack of experience evidenced in the Chilean works, there were also several examples of videos that questioned the medium and used its characteristics to develop earlier personal themes.

It was during the first encounter that Eugenio Dittborn presented two works which manifested this dual tendency. "Pietá 1" and "Lo que vimos en la cumbre del Corona"

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<sup>1359</sup> There were other sporadic contests dedicated exclusively to video, as the 1983 video art contest organized at Plaza Mulato Gil. Yet for the most part, the development of video throughout the 1980s remained tied to the efforts of Instituto Chileno-Francés de Cultura.

<sup>1360</sup> A forum took place on the last day of the first encounter, in which the discussions centered on the relationships between video, cinema, and television, as well as the connections between sound and image, video and art, and video with other mediums, from literature to theater. Interestingly, two "theoretical" videos were also presented, one by Richard, titled "Postulación de un margen de escritura" (Proposition about a margin of writing) and another by Carlos Flores titled "El Estado soy yo" (I am the State). For a description see, Ana María Foxley, "¿Futuro abierto?," *Revista Hoy*, November 4-10, 1981, 39.

<sup>1361</sup> Solente at first provided French videos from his own collection to be shown at the Encounter. *Ibid.*

<sup>1362</sup> Sommer noted for example how the French entries were governed by "a great expressive content" and "an intellectual game of surface," while the Chilean examples were evidences of a "language that begins to manifest itself" in the nation. See Waldemar Sommer, "Videoarte, Gracia y José Balmes," *El Mercurio*, November 1, 1981. Two years later, Mariano Silva had a similar impression, as he described the difference between the French and Chilean examples stating that the former "choose the "how," while the nationals are inclined towards the "why." Some are concerned with the aesthetic treatment; others, with the statement of an idea or aesthetic and socio-political commitment." Mariano Silva, "Video. Entre cómo y qué," *Revista Hoy*, November 30-December 6, 1983, 48. The political and social concerns which Silva perceived in the 1983 videos will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

<sup>1363</sup> Examples from the first encounter are the works of Ignacio Aliaga, Orlando Walter Muñoz, and Carlos Flores. In later encounters, other cinematographers would also participate, among them Tatiana Gaviola.



(What we saw at the peak of the Corona) manifested two different approaches to video art. The first work continued utilizing the theme of connecting the Virgin's sorrow produced by the death of her son to a sporting event where extreme physical exertion and pain were visible. "Pietá 1" was a work that Dittborn revised several times from 1982 onwards and could be considered an 'edition' of his earlier prints dealing with the same subject. Yet this time, a book reproduction of Michelangelo's famous sculpture became the 'matrix' of the video, being given motion and life as it was translated into the everyday. Close-ups of the printed image were interspersed with cuts taken from a televised soccer game, as well as video recordings of the birth of the artist's daughter and a press photograph of a beaten man held on the ground by a woman. The latter echoed both the Virginal model and the sequence from the game where a Chilean soccer player rolled on the grass with an agonizing expression after an infraction. The video was like a fluid collage composed of a rapid juxtaposition of repeated moments and fragments where different bodies were involved in painful events. The matrix was the Pietá iconography understood as a reproducible trace, a mold apt for multiple reproductions in different media, from the scratched mold letters that produced the video's title and intertitles, to its varying vernacular, personal, and collective performances.

Instead, "Lo que vimos en la cumbre del Corona" inscribed the question of reproduction and performance within the Chilean landscape and began questioning more directly the medium used (fig. 6.12).<sup>1364</sup> The work was a sentimental evocation of the sublime mountain in its dual terrifying and magnificent aspects, as recounted in three different mediums. The source of the narrative was a story published in *Revista Vea* in April 1965, concerning an aerial tragedy in the Andes Mountains. In the video, the story was told and vocally acted out by a well known actress of theater, television, and radio theater, Maruja Cifuentes, who stood in front of a fixed camera next to a series of old-fashioned microphones in a red painted set. Beginning with the story's title that gave the video its name, the actress proceeded to read the whole article without moving, the camera merely documenting her oral narration. In spite of the static continuous take and the actress' absence of movement, the narrative quickly introduced action into the scene as it announced the crash of a Chilean commercial airplane with the mountain, which "stood in its way like an implacable steely wall carving its giant tomb."<sup>1365</sup> As the actress continued telling the narratives of witnesses and the confirmation by aerial authorities of the missing plane, her voice was inflected with horror, pain, and amazement, giving life and depth to the expressions of the varied voices composing the journalistic account.

The main body of the narrative concerned the perilous trek made by a police reconnaissance patrol and the muleteers, locals, nurses, and press members that followed them in a "crazy race to the site of the tragedy." The narrative reported how this secular pilgrimage surmounted a series of natural obstacles to reach the summit, and was interspersed with graphic descriptions of the tragedy's site provided by the only mule driver who had reached the top, as well as sentimental details about the participants, such

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<sup>1364</sup> There is a copy of the video at Centro de Documentación in Santiago. One of the few published still images from the video can be found in the interview by Richard and Muñoz to Dittborn, "Entrevista a Eugenio Dittborn," *Sexto Festival Franco-Chileno de Video-Arte* (Santiago: Instituto Chileno Francés de Cultura, 1986), no page number.

<sup>1365</sup> All the following quotes are transcriptions done by the author from the video's audio.

as a “tough man, 42 years old, who [even] with his heart steeled by his hard activity, burst into tears like a boy [when seeing the site].” Passing through high cliffs and abysses, while suffering from lack of air due to the heights, the impromptu caravan slowly ascended the mountain road, leaving behind exhausted bodies.

The rocky landscape was floridly described as filled with dangers, each chasm in the endless ascending road accentuating the sense of colossal calamity. When the expedition approached the disaster scene, it was described as looking “like a stain that wounded the whiteness of the Andean mass, rising in front of us as the first sign of the tragedy.” As they arrived at the site of the crash, the narrative returned to a graphic account that vividly recounted the finding of charred and fragmented bodies, dispersed suitcases and personal items, and the single propeller encountered “as the only indication we saw in the summit of the Corona telling us that in this place an airplane had fallen.” A photograph of the site was published in the article as a visual confirmation of the written narration, a witnessing index culminating the story. The narrative ended with the funeral-like descent from the mountain of the reporters and muleteers carrying black plastic bags with the remains of the tragedy. The cortege was met at the bottom by a tourist who asked what it was like at the top, to which the narrator answered: “we prefer to remain silent.” As she read the lines, the actress in the video also remained quiet, keeping her eyes fixed on the magazine from which she had been reading, and then slowly lifting her gaze to meet the camera with a suffering expression.

The video counterpoised several instances of reproduction removed from the space and event represented, producing a patchwork of points of views. The first three evident forms of reproduction were connected to the three mediums present physically in the video: the printed magazine, the theatrical reading of the text, and the video capturing the reenactment. Yet each of these repetitions of the original tragic event was less an exact copy of one another or of the traumatic episode, than a displaced imitation and performance of its effects. Though the printed narrative acted as a ‘source’ for the information, it was also composed of multiple voices and perspectives, complicating its status as documentary evidence. While none of the witnesses interviewed by the reporter had actually seen the crash, they could, like the narrator and the photograph, reproduce its indexical remains. Ironically, the title’s expectation: “What we saw at the summit of the Corona,” pointed to a failed act of witnessing, for what was seen was largely “a desolate” site, even though the graphic reportage made use of its documentary validation to describe in a raw and often emotive manner the sights encountered along the way.

The displacement of the written narrative to the theater produced another temporal and spatial dislocation. As the printed reportage became a script read by the old actress, the document was turned into a drama filled with human feeling of a particularly visceral kind. Playing with the written descriptions, the actress gave the different voices a corresponding emotive sound, stressing by turns the horror of the accident, the urgency of the quest, the exhaustion of the climbers, and the defeat encountered at the end, changing her voice, tone, and pace to produce altering melodramatic effects. The graphic account’s relish for descriptions of tortured and mutilated bodies (of both passengers and plane) went well with the rhetoric of radio theater and creation of stereotypes (as in the nurse who wanted to be part of the survey team because “she might be of help”), all captured in a deadpan manner by the static video camera.

By 1981 the Chilean radio theater industry was in decline. There were fewer radios devoting space to this form of popular theater derived from the radio-novel (radio novella), a dramatized version of literary works,<sup>1366</sup> even though it was still a source of mass entertainment.<sup>1367</sup> The old-fashioned genre with its sentimental rhetoric and artificiality, as suggested by the enhanced and mutating voices of actors with little physical resemblance to the characters they portrayed, was counterpoised by Dittborn to the actuality of video as a form of reproduction. This juxtaposition invoked the technological replacement of the radio for the television studio as a popular means of dissemination and entertainment within the living room setting. Dittborn's use of the variety social magazine as a source for the drama, with its pale aspiration towards the 'literary' by making the trivial artistic, also pointed to a technological transformation and the possible replacement of the printed scabrous report for its screened representation and duplication. Nevertheless, the blunt video reproduction emphasized the mediated and conventional nature of this new medium, as the video went for twenty-seven minutes without cuts or dramatic effects to enhance the reader's pale and withered visage as she characterized the text without moving, her static pose contrasting with the fragmented, fast-paced rhythm of the written narrative. The video gave 'body' to the stereotypes that could only be aurally evoked in radio theater, recreating physical presence where the voice had previously attempted to.

Dittborn's video could be considered as enacting a series of "quotes," from the technological to the narrative. If, as argued by Richard, the video displayed a strategy of "citation" by quoting other genres and television in particular,<sup>1368</sup> this was an infinite play of repetitions adopting different mediums where the notion of a definite 'source' was diluted. Justo Pastor Mellado has argued instead that Dittborn's quoting of television was the least important aspect of his works at the time (especially, I would add, if the quoting gesture is taken as mere postmodern and historicist play of surfaces). Mellado read Dittborn's strategy of quoting as a "re-citing of his own works... within the mutational specificity of each medium,"<sup>1369</sup> a self-citation that would readapt the particularities of the medium used (painting, serigraphy, video) "to the enunciate's displacement."<sup>1370</sup> This argument enabled Mellado to establish a homology between the citation gesture with the

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<sup>1366</sup> Originally, the radio-novel in Chile was dedicated to sentimental melodramas and recreations of famous national historic events.

<sup>1367</sup> Radio-theater had begun in Chile in 1932 as part of the regular programming of several radio stations. Several theater companies specialized in its radio version, developing well known characters that had a public following.

<sup>1368</sup> Nelly Richard, "Segundo Encuentro Franco-Chileno de Video Arte: reencuentros y desencuentros (notas)," *La Separata*, no. 6 (July 1983): 7. According to Richard, Dittborn's work posited "the video scene as a scene of technical inter-references in whose interior a code appears citing another one (video to television, television to radio, for example), making manifest then the respective modes of receptive conditioning and dis-conditioning of the techniques in question: video self-reflects on the television model (...)." Ibid.

<sup>1369</sup> Justo Pastor Mellado, "Lo que podemos ver en la cumbre de la obra Dittborn," *VII Festival Franco-Chileno de Video Arte* (Santiago: Instituto Chileno Francés de Cultura, 1987), 43-44.

<sup>1370</sup> Ibid.

graphic mediums previously used by the artist, even though he did not specify what that enunciate was besides a tautological act of citation. Though I agree with Mellado's interpretation of 'citation' as a form of editing, Dittborn's quoting strategy was not merely a formal concern leading to an endless reconfiguration of prior works,<sup>1371</sup> but a re-edition in a specific medium of a particular view of a landscape and the bodies within it.

In his analysis of the video, Mellado mentioned Dittborn's response to a questionnaire written by Jean-Paul Fargier printed in the exhibition catalogue as exemplifying his arguments. To questions such as: "Do you think you invented something in video?"<sup>1372</sup> Dittborn responded with ironical answers, "I invented the theater and radio-theater actress, Maruja Cifuentes, who reads there [in the video] an old chronicle from *Revista VEA* (...). Maruja Cifuentes permits me to connect the rhetoric of radio-theater with the rhetoric of the police chronicles. The body of Maruja Cifuentes is my invention,"<sup>1373</sup> supporting Mellado's claims of endless self-quotation. Yet, the same answers went beyond a mere denial of origins or an analysis of syntax, stressing instead the corporeal geography giving life to the system. When Dittborn responded to Fargier's question: "What do you reproach of video? Or what do you fear?," with the phrase, "as all seduction, the one exerted by video is lived like a catastrophe,"<sup>1374</sup> he was pointing not only to the growing use of video in Chile (its seduction as a trend),<sup>1375</sup> but to a sense of radical change and loss implied in the medium as the inability to witness through a mechanical register of reality and to know in a certain manner.<sup>1376</sup> Video for Dittborn was a "deception" that seduced by providing the artist the illusion of control,<sup>1377</sup> of being able to record truth and "immobilize" time, passage, borders, and bodies, an illusion (and tragedy) that the medium endlessly repeated.

Dittborn's choice of an aerial tragedy to be reproduced in the video is significant for several reasons. First, it relates to Dittborn's current interests, particularly the series of silkscreen reproductions sent to graphic Salons of the early 1980s involving aviation and its related 'history' of disasters.<sup>1378</sup> Second, the reference to the crashing airplane, only

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<sup>1371</sup> More will be said on the question of the medium in the work analyzed below.

<sup>1372</sup> Dittborn, "Cuestionario Fargier," *VII Festival Franco-Chileno de Video Arte*, 47.

<sup>1373</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1374</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1375</sup> In the same response, Dittborn alluded to the Chilean scene of video art and its practitioners when he mentioned how he had invented, "being a video artist without coming from the failed tradition of the failed Chilean cinema or the successful tradition of publicity in television, but instead coming from the visual arts." Nevertheless, he conceded at least one point to the international art scenes as sources in video's history, when he claimed: "but that had already been invented by others before me in other places." *Ibid.*

<sup>1376</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1377</sup> In response to Fargier's first question: "What seduces you about video?" Dittborn responded: "the possibility of being master." *Ibid.*

<sup>1378</sup> Dittborn won in the category of "prints" at the 1982 Third Salon of Graphic Arts with a silkscreen titled "La historia de la aviación" (The History of Aviation). The work was formally articulated in the same manner as "Nada, nada" of 1980 (another Salon winner), with two repeated images stacked vertically with

sixteen minutes into its flight, recalls the idea of *décollage* proposed by Vostell as an artistic rhetoric and formal syntax emerging from an airplane disaster. This was a formal strategy that was nevertheless aimed in Vostell's case at bringing together art and life, opening up new meanings and experiences through torn realities. But more importantly, the account also dramatized the mountain, which became another character in the story, as "steely" as the rough skin of the muleteers, a "wall" and barrier separating life and death. If Dittborn 'invented' the body of Cifuentes in the video, the actress reinvented the narration of the disaster and its primordial agent, giving temporal life to the mountain and its 'natural' brutality, desolateness, and inevitability.

The exalted sentiment and coarse harshness of the genres chosen by Dittborn to re-present the story were connected to the video's evocation of the mountain as a site of the sublime. As a natural example of a site evoking in the spectator an experience of elation and terror,<sup>1379</sup> the mountain was represented as a terrible and ineludible presence, active and impassive, god-like. The immense peaks and harrowing chasms that had been the airplane's tomb, proved the vulnerability of human endeavors in their attempts to 'master' or trespass its boundaries.<sup>1380</sup> In Dittborn's reenactments, the mountain was also the unrepresentable, an invisible and traumatic turning point in the narrative, described only through displacements. Such shifts disavowed the documentary qualities of video recording and its objective production of visual evidence, just like the magazine article and its theatrical reconstruction moved further away from the original event. Virtually pictured as the site of tragedy and horror, the mountain was denied actual visual representation in the video, the magazine's photographs never shown. In Dittborn's work, the mountain was constructed as the trace of an ineluctable sign embedded in a history of violence, standing ominously as the ultimate limit of human life. This was not the matriarchal peaks of Leppe or the uterine frontier of Rosenfeld, but a masculine, overpowering barrier and shield.

The image of the mountain as a sublime natural limit, terrifying and at the same time exerting a form of seduction, was soon replaced in Dittborn's videos by the desert.

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a repeated and extended text, highlighting in contrasting tones different aspects of each. The 'original' image was a fragment of a 1981 *El Mercurio* article displaying the photograph of a plane crash that occurred in 1913. The title of the work is significant, as will be analyzed in Dittborn's next video which also used the phrase "the history of." The repetition of titles would seemingly support Mellado's claims of self-reference in Dittborn's oeuvre, yet I am more interested in the choice of the aerial catastrophe as a motif and its relation to the national landscape and its identity. In the case of the 1913 crash, it was not a mountain but another natural element that ended the life of the "pioneer" Chilean pilot Luis Acevedo, the crash against the waters of Bío Bío River in the eighth region. History repeatedly ends in tragedy, Dittborn seemed to be saying.

<sup>1379</sup> Terror was, according to Edmund Burke, "the ruling principle of the sublime." For Burke, "the passion caused by the great and sublime in nature (...) is Astonishment; and astonishment is the state of the soul in which all emotions are suspended, with some degree of horror." Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry into the origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, ed. James T. Bolton, (Notre Dam and London: Notre Dam University Press, 1968), 58.

<sup>1380</sup> Describing the sublime mountain landscape and its connection to imperialistic desires, Simon Schama speaks of Turner's 1812 painting *Snowstorm: Hannibal and His Army Crossing the Alps* as, "the culmination of a tradition that made mountains the dreadful judges of human delusions about omnipotence and invincibility." See Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 462.

While the desert had appeared in the photographs used as models for his 1980 exhibition of prints and paintings, it became another matrix in Dittborn's works framing and articulating national identity and its history. Reconceived as surface for an 'informe' inscription, the desert appeared in Dittborn's videos as testing the limits of perception, reality, physical resistance, habitation, and spatial control.

The desert featured most prominently in the series of videos made by Dittborn from 1982 onwards collectively titled "Historia de la física" (The History of Physics).<sup>1381</sup> Each video was an edition of the same visual material arranged in different patterns and durations following the Fibonacci series.<sup>1382</sup> The latter was a mathematical formula developed by Leonardo de Pisa in 1202 based on natural growth in which the summation of the first two numbers, 0 and 1, produces a second one (1), which is then added to the preceding one (2, 3, 5, 8, and so on). The sequences were either taped from television or shot by Dittborn, and included a swimmer entering a pool, swimming laps and then exiting, an old Frankie Laine singing with a band for a televised show, Dittborn shown at the Atacama desert pouring from a tank one hundred and twenty liters of burnt oil lubricant, the recasting in Chilean television of a sports show featuring the end of the fight between the boxers Tommy Hearns and Sugar Ray Leonard, a drummer playing his drums in a small studio gaining intensity as time passed, and the birth of the artist's daughter (fig. 6.13).<sup>1383</sup> These were arranged by Dittborn following two inverted Fibonacci series so that a complete and long sequence would be first interrupted by an extremely short and different passage lasting one second, a pattern of interruption that would grow more constant, with shorter spans of time between the two series, until the amount of time dedicated to each was reverted. At the moment the second series had reached the first's original duration, it was then interrupted by a new one lasting at first one second, then 3, 5, 8 seconds until the duration of the interrupting sequence would be identical to the first one. A new sequence would begin then to interrupt the second series, the latter decreasing as the new one grew in an inverted manner.

The apparent disconnection between the different sequences, their strict ordering, and the title of the work has led most critics and philosophers interpreting the work to try to find an intimate relation between them. Galaz and Ivelic in 1988, and Margarita

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<sup>1381</sup> Dittborn made several versions of the video over the years, numbering his works as a series. The videos vary in terms of time (the duration of the sequences) and order. I will refer to the version of 1990, which is also the edition analyzed by Schultz.

<sup>1382</sup> There are videos that show different material, such as the version of 1990. The change is at the beginning, where a sequence of bodies laid on the beach is distorted, and the audio reproduces a song about the beach sung by the popular 1960s singer Cecilia. The title of the work is also announced by Dittborn in both Spanish and English. Several video artists (such as Rosenfeld) had begun in the mid-1980s to incorporate English subtitles, pointing to the possibilities given by video of exhibiting more easily in international settings.

<sup>1383</sup> A copy of the video "Historia de la física" is located at Centro de Documentación La Moneda. There are still images of the video in *Sexto Festival Franco-Chileno de Video-Arte*, page number, as well as in *Chile Arte Actual* in page 226, *Copiar el Edén* in page 259, *Fugitiva* in pages 204, 206 and 207, and *Atacama Lab*, pages 38 and 39.

Schultz along with Rebeca León in 1990,<sup>1384</sup> emphasized the thematic relationship between the sequences, “all limit-corporal acts,”<sup>1385</sup> forming a material that is a “synonym of forceful experiences.”<sup>1386</sup> These natural acts of physical exertion (swimming, singing, boxing, playing instruments, pouring oil, childbirth) were at times symbolically joined, as Galaz and Ivelic argued, as in the last sequences connecting the birth of Dittborn’s daughter with the swimmer. According to the authors, these two sequences established a parallel between “the amniotic liquid or the liquid’s protective matrix,”<sup>1387</sup> their visual interferences enabling a possible symbolic association between them. For the authors though, what was more important was the mathematical structure connecting the disparate sequences, the “formal structure of the video,” which “appropriates time, taking it away from chronological inexorability which, as such, is irreversible.”<sup>1388</sup> For Galaz and Ivelic, meaning was provided by the video’s mathematical matrix that destabilized a progressive view of time.

Schultz also regarded time as the central aspect of Dittborn’s work, yet gave it a deeper aesthetic and philosophical meaning that she related to video as a new medium.<sup>1389</sup> For Schultz, the Fibonacci series used by Dittborn in a combined and inverted manner not only denied the progressiveness of time as alluded by Galaz and Ivelic, but created a cycle resembling that of life.<sup>1390</sup> According to Schultz, the structure provided by the mathematical sequences “intensified” the material contents of the work as seen in the beginning sequence of the diver, the juxtaposition of birth and swimming, and the end of the video coinciding with the end of the swimmer’s training. But for Schultz, such a cycle emphasized an “aesthetics of reiteration”<sup>1391</sup> that was proper to video and, in more general terms, to art. For Schultz, the repetition implied in the sequences’ cyclical disposition could be read as reiterating the “tautological”<sup>1392</sup> action of

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<sup>1384</sup> Margarita Schultz and Rebeca León, *Sobre ‘Historia de la Física’, video de Eugenio Dittborn* (Santiago: Facultad de Artes Universidad de Chile, 1990).

<sup>1385</sup> Galaz and Ivelic, *Chile Arte Actual*, 226.

<sup>1386</sup> León, “Consideraciones a partir de la forma,” *Sobre ‘Historia de la Física’, video de Eugenio Dittborn*, 11.

<sup>1387</sup> Galaz and Ivelic, 228.

<sup>1388</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1389</sup> León treated the three strands separately, classifying them as title, structure, and form. For her, the dialectical confrontation between the “informative value of the image” and the mathematical order led to “time” as the resulting “content” of the work. See León, 15-17. Schultz also treated the strands separately at first, speaking of “iconography” to deal with the sequences, “formal structure” to refer to the Fibonacci series, and then speaking of “perspective” to bring form and content together.

<sup>1390</sup> Schultz, “Conexión semántica en Historia de la Física,” *Sobre ‘Historia de la Física’, video de Eugenio Dittborn*, 22 and 29.

<sup>1391</sup> Schultz, 29.

<sup>1392</sup> Schultz, 32.

art where what “is inside is outside,”<sup>1393</sup> producing an ‘identity’ between form and content. The ultimate goal of art was to bring “matter and spirit together,”<sup>1394</sup> and if video was to be considered art, it should be able to successfully perform this act of balance.

The definition of video as a new artistic medium was at the center of these discussions. Dittborn’s “Historia de la física” was perceived as somehow exemplary, for it manifested in its structure and formal composition what was perceived to be the main characteristic of the medium: its relation to and manipulation of time. For Schultz, video had three main characteristics. These were the “concept of layout, meaning the formal sequence of images,”<sup>1395</sup> followed by “the reiteration of images (incorporated into the process of editing),” and last the “raw material” of video, which Schultz described as “images susceptible of being recorded.”<sup>1396</sup> The images could be derived from already recorded passages (as in television), or caught directly from life through the artist’s camera. While the first two characteristics could be easily ascribable to cinema, and the second could be in turn related to prints and photography, it was the third element, videos connection with television, which seemed to provide a distinct attribute of the medium. Yet even this characteristic was ambiguous, for cinema could also take as its source televised images and be recorded ‘live’ without editing. The main difference with other mediums appeared to be the question of narrative manipulation, especially when understood as the relation of a story in a progressive manner, dealing with a clear beginning, middle, and end.

For Richard, this was the core of Dittborn’s videos. The manipulation of time allowed the artist to question the rhetoric of television and the ‘reality’ presented by such “an institutional dispositive and ideological apparatus.”<sup>1397</sup> According to the author, Dittborn was probing the transparency of television, reflecting on its mediated nature and by doing so, positing “history as construction.”<sup>1398</sup> The combination of editing with repetition would disturb the logical progression of time, “attempting against the narrative tradition,”<sup>1399</sup> as in the Fibonacci series applied to the ‘raw material.’ Dittborn’s temporal manipulations would deny the narration’s sense of advancement by expanding, shortening, contracting, and reversing time, in order to transform duration and its perception. At this point, it is interesting to return to Mellado’s idea on “editing,” yet give it a different interpretation. If Dittborn was applying to video concepts that emerged from the graphic realm, such as copy and matrix, these were also associated to acts of memory and recording as implied by the work’s title: “The History of Physics.” If video could be characterized by its relation to time, it was also connected to history and remembrance.

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<sup>1393</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1395</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1396</sup> Schultz, 33.

<sup>1397</sup> Richard, “Segundo Encuentro Franco-Chileno de Video Arte: reencuentros y desencuentros (notas),” 6.

<sup>1398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1399</sup> Ibid.



The discussions of the work's title are illustrative of the problems posed by video as a 'new' medium and the related question of form and meaning.<sup>1400</sup> Schultz and León directly addressed the problem of including the word "history" in the video's title, establishing a connection between recording events, the passage of time, and memory.<sup>1401</sup> Yet they resorted to the Fibonacci model for an answer: for León, the title was connected to the successive presentation of six events related to life experiences, and though these were disconnected in subject matter, it was the formal structure that created a cycle binding them. According to Schultz, the linearity of time was simultaneously asserted and denied by the implementation of the mathematical formula in a 'straight' and 'inverted' manner, so that, as stated by the artist, "distant things, different strata of reality"<sup>1402</sup> could be connected.

But the title and its relation to the video's contents were more ambiguous. In the catalogue for the Second Video Art Encounter, Dittborn included on the program notes not a description of the work as the rest of the participants did, but two dictionary quotes. The first described 'history' as the "narration and truthful exposition of past events and memorable things," while the second quote referred to "physics" as a "science which studies the properties of matter and energy, considering only attributes capable of being measured."<sup>1403</sup> The definitions offered little relation to the actual content of the work, insofar as no history (much less the history) of physics was presented in a causal or documentary manner, for example as a demonstration of how physics came into being as a science. If the definitions provided by Dittborn were to be taken seriously, the "memorable" events recorded and repeated were only so in a subjective manner, undermining the video's pretensions of objective truth. The historical narration as an orderly recounting of events was further contradicted by the breaks and repetition of events as noted above, implying an impossibility of explaining past events in a progressive manner and the fiction behind such accounts. This disavowal was tied to the notion of history as providing a firm, faithful knowledge of the past, a theme that as seen in previous chapters was intimately connected in Dittborn's works to Chilean history and

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<sup>1400</sup> This was a problem that not only affected the Chilean art scene but the international one as well. In the Chilean case though, the discussion was produced with a decade of delay. In the United States of America, much of the early discussion on video focused on the concept of feedback and its psychological, physiological, and conceptual implications as seen in the works of Rosalind Krauss, "Video: the Aesthetics of Narcissism," *October* 1 (Spring 1976): 50-64, for example, while most histories of video start with a reference to its relation to television. The medium appeared everywhere as difficult to formally circumscribe, creating its own problems of borders. I will address this point below.

<sup>1401</sup> Richard, instead, disregarded the historical problem. She stated, for example, that through Dittborn's "disassembly of the narrative mechanism, "The History of Physics" prohibits, for example, the illusionism of psychological identifications based on the inorganic-ness of a purely memorial time." Richard, "Segundo Encuentro Franco-Chileno de Video Arte: reencuentros y desencuentros (notas)," 7.

<sup>1402</sup> Dittborn quoted by Schultz, 22. Schultz related Dittborn's union of the disparate to Surrealist techniques, an observation which is interesting for it reflects Dittborn's 1974 and 1976 works, as well as his participation in *El Quebrantahuesos* mentioned in Chapter 3.

<sup>1403</sup> *Segundo Encuentro Franco-Chileno de Video-Arte. Instituto Chileno-Francés de Cultura* (Santiago: Instituto Chileno-Francés de Cultura, 1982), no page number.

its art.<sup>1404</sup> If the video's title resembled those of Freud's and established an analogy with the analysis of a case's "history" developed as a detective story filled with symptoms and repeated events, this was a story that unsettled a strict resolution and closure. This was a history with no cure.

The second part of the title complicated matters further. The inclusion of the word 'physics' has been generally understood as referring to those extreme acts of physical exertion shown in the video. But it also points to the discrepancy between what has been termed a 'science' and history as a practice relying on memory instead of 'measurable' facts. Most of the actions shown in the video's sequences could be quantified in terms of physical effort and could be further classified in a system of performance, from the swimmer to the labor of the artist's pregnant wife, yet their degree of 'memorability' would be harder to specify. The latter's dependency on arbitrary or subjective relations was connected to the non-hierarchical construction of the video which, with its iterations, jumps, and protractions, evoked the workings of memory and its repetition of events. If the video was proposing a model, it was one about the recording of past events in memory, capturing the fugitive moment, recreating and yet altering these events in the act of remembrance. The passage of time and its inscription through history was reproduced by Dittborn as traumatic, a point of rupture and change similar to an act of birth.

Even if on a subjective level the recorded events could be measured with some standard and be subjected to an apparently objective law, there was one action in the video that resisted any logical establishment of its magnitude: the staining of the desert. The artist's efforts in trying to create a large black blob on the desert's surface appeared as futile and disrupted the sense of achievement present in the other passages. For childbirth, entertainment, sports, music all emerged as having specific objectives and leading towards a concrete result. But the nonsensical act of the artist seemed gratuitous, an impossible task when considering the magnitude and aridness of the desert. In this sublime landscape, the artist was reduced to a small, lonely, yet lively actor, producing a small change and impermanent indent in the vast and largely immutable location.

As has been mentioned by Gonzalo Pedraza, the aridity of the desert in Dittborn's video contrasted greatly with earlier painted representations of the Chilean landscape as a fertile space to be conquered or surveyed. Pedraza used as an example the 1853 painting "Vista de Santiago desde Peñalolén" (View of Santiago from Peñalolén) by the Italian artist Alejandro Cicarelli, who became director of the Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Chile. The artist is represented in the painting's foreground seated in front of easel and canvas reproducing the panorama that overlooks from the slopes of a hill (or mountain) the agricultural fields of eastern Santiago bathed in a golden sunset light. According to Pedraza, while in Cicarelli's work the actual painting "anticipates an intervention on behalf of the colonizers due to the suitable conditions that it [the land] offers,"<sup>1405</sup> in Dittborn the opposite would be at work insofar as the desert's "physical difficulties are not attractive to the domineering eye."<sup>1406</sup> For Pedraza, the desert as landscape became

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<sup>1404</sup> Something seen especially in Dittborn's exhibition "delachilenapintura,historia," where already in the title a reversal of word order was made.

<sup>1405</sup> Gonzalo Pedraza, "Landscape and Visuality in Contemporary Chilean Art," *Atacama Lab* (Chile: Incubo, 2008), 38.

<sup>1406</sup> *Ibid.*

the “non-representable,” because of its resistance to human domination. The black “perforation” created by Dittborn with the burnt oil would perform two roles: it would stand as the negative sign of the landscape ‘tradition’ in Chile, “the blackened track of landscape painting,”<sup>1407</sup> while appearing as a “blind spot” over which the domineering gaze would not stop in its search for more spaces to conquer.

Pedraza has been one of the few critics to deal with the question of the Chilean landscape in contemporary art, positing some interesting points in relation to Dittborn’s works.<sup>1408</sup> Yet he has avoided several aspects related to the specific landscape used by Dittborn, the action performed in it, and their relation to tradition, history, and technology. The role of photography in Dittborn’s interpretation of the landscape and Kay’s own theories on the participation of the medium in the colonization of the landscape are not mentioned by Pedraza, who instead refers only to painting as forming the background of landscape art tied to imperial endeavors. Even within this pictorial tradition, there is no mention in Pedraza to the picturesque component of Cicarelli’s work, how the ordered fields in the landscape seem to respond to their ‘artistically’ painted version, and how nature has already been ‘staged’ for the artist to paint (twice). But more importantly, Pedraza does not consider the problem of the desert as a site to be exploited, a theme with a long history in Chile that was revived in the early 1980s through the dictatorship’s efforts of regional economic development. Instead, Pedraza posited a strict binary where the evidently green plains of Cicarelli and the Central valley area of Chile (which as seen in Chapter Five, was a hotly disputed territory for urban and economic progress) were opposed to the white aridness of the desert, making of the latter the ultimate space of emptiness and non-representability.<sup>1409</sup>

Though I agree with Pedraza’s idea of the desert as a place that has been imagined as embodying nothingness, the very presence of the artist in the plains, the use of burnt oil, and the recording of the action through video point to a different vision of the desert as representation and location. The electronic images produced by Dittborn were as much a reproduction of the landscape (and an insistently repeated one) as the painting-within-the-painting of Cicarelli, though in the video a new technology had supplanted that of the painter (easel and brush) and even of the photographer. If in Cicarelli’s painting the portrayed artist sat and ‘took in’ with his gaze and painting instruments the landscape and its richness, Dittborn’s surveying eye was supplanted by its technological proxy, the video camera, as he proceeded to actually transform the landscape. It is these relationships between acts of framing, looking, and marking that need to be considered further, particularly in view of the process and action performed by Dittborn on the land and its temporal development in the video.

The repeated scene, which has the longest duration in the video, began with a static image of Dittborn standing in the desert next to an upright barrel close to the

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<sup>1407</sup> Ibid. In the Spanish original published alongside its English translation, the word used is “rastros” which can be equally translated as “track” and “trace” (the blackened trace of landscape painting). The latter is a meaning that I believe is closer to the spirit of Pedraza’s text and to Dittborn’s works.

<sup>1408</sup> Among them, the “dramatization of the body of the artist” present in the video.

<sup>1409</sup> The video manifested this opposition insofar as the desert’s stain was the inversion of the “amniotic liquid” present in childbirth. While both are viscous, the desert was presented as an unreceptive matrix.

foreground of the frame (fig. 6.14).<sup>1410</sup> The fixed and slightly tilted camera placed at a distance of several feet from the action's location created a high horizon line, which turned the desert plains into a vast cream-colored mantle stopped at the most distant edge by a diffuse blue mountain range, confusing the relationship of scale and distance. After the first image got repeated (1,1,2) following the Fibonacci series, Dittborn appeared tilting the barrel from the right side of the frame, bending and pulling it upwards with difficulty. Only by the third repetition of the sequence he was able to finally knock the barrel on its side. In the following repeated and extending sequences, a black liquid began pouring from the barrel that, as could be told from its spasmodic blurbs, was of a heavy and viscous nature. Dittborn further needed to tilt the barrel to help with the flow of the oil, which slowly extended over the desert's surface in a small puddle. In the rest of the sequences the artist appeared moving around the extremely slowly expanding stain, bending down to scatter the oil with his hands. The whole event was captured in a still manner, with the exception of a small camera movement towards the end making a close-up of the artist on all fours extending the stain. Only the sound of the wind passing rapidly through the desert's planes could be heard in the audio, though this utter silence was contrasted with the sounds of the sequence that the staining action had interrupted. The previous sequence showcased Frankie Laine singing "Jezebel" in a small television studio set up like a ballroom, the fast paced "Western" inspired love song of a man "possessed" by a woman who torments and taunts him, like a demonic siren, being one of the singer's best known works.

Dittborn's framing of the desert landscape through video posited a particular vision of the relationship between man and a remote and arid wilderness. The desert as a sublime presence and ultimate boundary was juxtaposed to the 'heroic' act of the artist, maculating its plain surface in solitude. Dittborn recast himself as a pioneer treading and challenging the desert's barrenness and impenetrability by not only being present in the image, but changing its appearance. As the desert images disrupted the continuity of the love song, a connection was created between the song's male desire for a treacherous woman and the conqueror's adventurous act of marking the desolate landscape. The distance of the camera from the action at first seemed to confirm this heroic and masculine effect, framing the landscape so that Dittborn's body was sufficiently visible (to the point of revealing the artist's reflection on the oil pool's surface), while the desert was reduced in scale and framed at the back by a mountain, the stain magnified in size.

Yet that same frame suggested the artist's incapacity of overriding its limits or the desert's. Dittborn's tracks were invisible in the craggy expanse, the roughness and impermeability of the desert's surface requiring the involvement of the artist's body scattering the oil for the stain to have a larger impact. The act of staining as a form of appropriation and dominion was not only shown as futile, in need of repetition and exterior help, but as artificial and fleeting, a seductive delusion. The desert emerged as a place of impermanent images where perspective and distance were constantly

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<sup>1410</sup> The passage can be seen in Youtube, "Derrame de Aceite, Eugenio Dittborn," posted May 12, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8JzjRcQ5OA&feature=related> (last accessed May 14, 2010). The importance given by the artist to this act can be seen in the numerous times he has re-edited the image, as in his series of videos generally titled "The History of Music," made from 1985 onwards. In "Sixth Preparatory Sketch for The History of Music," of 1989, the title also alludes to a pictorial practice translated into a different technology.

confounded, the hold of the senses loosened by its spatial distortions. The representation of the desert as a mirror and mirage further recalled the passages from Zurita's *Purgatorio* included in Dittborn's 1980 book *Estrategias y proyecciones de la plástica chilena*. Zurita's text was overlaid on an article featuring an image of a northern mummy, an excavated desert ruin and the only trace of earlier human habitation in it. In the poem, Zurita described the landscapes of the Atacama Desert as "convergent and divergent," similar to the nation in its production of a hallucinatory, spectral space. The desert surfaced as a place where landscape and nation were turned inside out, the two constructs joining and diverging in improbable ways. Both were "chimerical" spaces, empty and full, ambiguously closed and open, challenging time and occupation.

As Zurita suggested and Dittborn made visible, the desert was hardly 'empty' or lacking social marks. In the video's confrontation between landscape and body, the oily stain acted as a mediator with a history of its own, connecting the contemporary mark to a darker past. The material evoked the man made world of machinery, industry, and transportation, as well as their excesses in the form of pollution. Useless when burnt, oil can pass from fuel to a degraded lubricant with little economic worth and high ecological impact. Its pouring in the desert installed an industrial ruin in the landscape, left to slowly decay and seep below the arid surface. The black stain invoked an invisible landscape of industrial companies making possible the oil's presence in the first place, and was joined by Dittborn to the human body as another foreign excrescence in nature.<sup>1411</sup> Man and machine were linked in their attempts to change the landscape, a relationship endlessly repeated in history as the video asserted by means of its own structure.<sup>1412</sup> The pioneering gesture of Dittborn was a copy of past and present domineering efforts, a representation of an abortive disruption in the landscape recalling the blackened ruins of the closed nitrate mines and towns in the midst of the desert.<sup>1413</sup> If the desert's staining in "Historia

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<sup>1411</sup> Ana María Foxley described the stains of Dittborn's 1980 works as playing a "protagonist role," insofar they "mark the passage of time, decay, they allude to human secretions –tears, sweat, semen, blood- and the liquids produced by man-made machines –oils, lubricants." In Ana María Foxley, "Tras las huellas del hombre," *Revista Hoy*, November 19-25, 1980, 51-52.

<sup>1412</sup> In his 1980 book, Dittborn quoted a paragraph from Bertolt Brecht, in which the playwright described human industrial and technical progress in terms of a growing rationalization and exploitation of what had previously simply been home. In the quote, Brecht stated: "It was as if humanity had suddenly decided, in a conscious and unanimous way, to start the task of making the planet that embraced them habitable. Many of the planet's elements, like coal, water, petroleum, became treasures. The water's steam received the mission of moving vehicles; a few sparks and the contractions of a frog's leg revealed the existence of a natural force that did not take long in producing light, in conducting sound across the continents, etc. Man began looking at his surroundings with different eyes, looking to use for his own benefit things that he had always seen, but that he had never exploited." In *Estrategias y proyecciones de la plástica nacional sobre la década del 80* (Santiago: no publisher, 1980), n.p. In the page where the paragraph is reproduced, Dittborn included the cover of *Life* magazine showing three astronauts before the flight. Perhaps not so curiously, on the next page Dittborn included his list of Chilean "pioneers" in the visual arts of the 1970s.

<sup>1413</sup> The Chilean nitrate mines were developed in territories taken from Peru and Bolivia during the Pacific Wars of 1879-1883. After more than thirty years of being one of the fundamental revenue sources for the Chilean nation, many mines were closed due to the development of synthetic nitrate by German scientists during World War I. The large towns built on the desert plains were abandoned and some have been slightly maintained as 'ghost' towns as tourist attractions of the area.

de la física” could be read as a reenactment of the photograph used by Dittborn for “Lágrimas nonatas” of 1980, in both cases technology had already invaded the sublime landscape, first through the photograph and the invisible eye of the pioneer behind it, then through video and its electronic gaze.

Dittborn’s act of staining the desert recalls Robert Smithson’s series of works during the early 1970s involving pouring a viscous material on the landscape, from tar to glue.<sup>1414</sup> The emphasis of Smithson’s works on concepts of space and site, as well as the limits of the landscape and even of painting, all resonate with Dittborn’s works, as does the tendency to break down barriers between mediums and the imagery related to ruins and archeological or geological excavations found in both artist’s works.<sup>1415</sup> But if Smithson was responding in part to the formalism of Michael Fried, the modernist tradition behind it, and the Pollockian model of pouring and staining canvases, Dittborn’s stain had different models in its horizons.<sup>1416</sup>

If one reads the stain on the desert as an expressionistic and painterly blob, a gestural and oily mark left on a rough, parched natural ‘canvas,’ a connection can be made between Dittborn’s action and painting. Such has been the position of Mellado, who has argued that Dittborn’s trauma, or what gets endlessly repeated (or ‘edited’) in his works, was located in painting and its tradition, particularly as exemplified by Balmes

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<sup>1414</sup> Pedraza mentioned Smithson and his work “Asphalt Rundown” of 1969 in a footnote as an important referent for understanding Dittborn’s work. He also referred to the spilling (dripping) processes of Jackson Pollock, yet he did not develop further the precise connection between Dittborn and these artists. Mellado has spoken on several occasions of the Pollockian element in Dittborn, associating it with Balmes, though he has not delved into the landscape and spatial component of such stains. According to Pedraza, Dittborn’s intervention in the landscape recalled, yet differed from, Land Art practices, which became the norm in (Western) landscape art from the 1960s onwards, providing an alternative to painting. These practices were imported to other locations without undergoing any transformation, ending up disconnected from their new contexts and their landscapes, as occurred in the case of Chile. Though Pedraza acknowledged exterior artistic trends such as Smithson, he diminished their impact in the national scene, stating that Chilean artists were “guided by the manners and operations that this stream established in the 60’s, but articulated [them] from the policies of representation of the Chilean landscape.” In his view, it was as if Chilean artists were consciously attempting an act of appropriation and denying any form of ‘colonization’ implied by the import of foreign forms. I will return to the problem of influence in the Conclusion, insofar as it has affected Chilean art and art history.

<sup>1415</sup> See for example, Dittborn’s references to the concept of the everyday “common places” (lugares comunes) and their relation to fossils. He described the former as: “working in the human social space through which they move incessantly, in the manner of fossils, we say in the manner of fetishes eroded by use, we say common places are dead matter, dead and mobile like turned off stars in transit.” Dittborn, *Estrategias y proyecciones de la plástica nacional sobre la década del 80*, no page number. In spite of the formal similarities, in all of his interviews Dittborn has not mentioned Smithson as a reference, even though he rarely mentions any possible artistic forefathers.

<sup>1416</sup> The idea of Smithson marking a turning point from modernism to postmodernism can be traced in several critical writings starting with Craig Owens’ “Earthworks” and “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism,” in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 40-51 and 52-87, passing through Ron Graziani’s reading of the artist’s work in the context of the picturesque in “Robert Smithson’s Picturable Situation: Blasted Landscapes from the 1960s,” *Critical Inquiry*, no. 20 (Spring 1994): 419-451.

and his Informalist stains.<sup>1417</sup> The fact that in the video Dittborn utilized similar means to his “impinturas” (unpaintings) of 1980, which consisted of burnt oil on canvas or cardboard, seems to support the pictorial connection, as well as Dittborn’s comments regarding the older painter in the 1995 catalogue for Balmes’ retrospective at the Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago. In his text, Dittborn reminisced of seeing Balmes’ works of 1960 at the University, which he described as “fossilized extensions, or opaque and moving beaches, or white geological layers (...) a denseness sustained in territories traversed by marks,”<sup>1418</sup> commenting that the works’ between 1960 and 1965 “were a prolonged exploration of the desert’s attributes, in painting.”<sup>1419</sup> If Balmes made the desert surface corporeal in his works by means of crusts and layered marks, Dittborn was inverting the process, taking the humidity and splashing loquacity out of Balmes stains while congealing its gestures through mechanical reproductions.<sup>1420</sup>

Though reading Dittborn’s works under the shadow of Balmes is useful and gives a local context and direct genealogy to his interpretation of painting, there is still an underlying question about frontiers, graphic marks, and bodies that gets repeatedly pushed to the surface in the former’s works and that the theories of Mellado and even Pedraza avoid. The question of origins and fathers can be related to Dittborn’s reflections on the trauma of ‘time’ during the dictatorship,<sup>1421</sup> which he described in 1985 as “congealed,” a “prison-like social time” that created a memory-less place. This oblivious environment also affected the arts, insofar as earlier art works were “buried” and forgotten, thus animating a desire to break down artistic conventions and challenge artistic figures of authority.<sup>1422</sup> But this traumatic experience was also connected by the artist to a problem of re-inscribing presence and memory in a larger national context. The

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<sup>1417</sup> This is what Mellado has called “the archeology of the stain,” as seen in the catalogue *El fantasma de la sequía* (Santiago: Francisco Zegers editor, 1988) and multiple other texts of the 1990s.

<sup>1418</sup> Eugenio Dittborn, in *Balmes: viaje a la pintura*, ed. Gonzalo Badal (Santiago de Chile: Ocho Libros Editores, 1995), 95.

<sup>1419</sup> Ibid. The description continues: “All the consequences coming from the lack of water appear during this time: petrification, fossilization, calcinations. Balmes avoided the representation of the desert so as to paint desert-like. He displaced the desert’s attributes condensing them with the attributes of a marbled and wounded body: splintering and scars without a body.” This could well be a description of Dittborn’s own oeuvre, particularly the translation of desert qualities into painting and the body, though Dittborn did not merely reproduce images of the desert, but acted upon it.

<sup>1420</sup> In a last paragraph, Dittborn connected Balmes’ techniques of painting in crusts to the earlier work of Pablo Burchard, stating that this was a paradigmatic duo in Chilean painting, implicitly creating a trinity that also related to his own pictorial stains. Burchard was given a retrospective in 1979, and Enrique Lihn wrote a text in *Revista CAL* commenting on the relationship between Balmes and Burchard while citing Dittborn’s 1976 exhibition title, thus implicitly creating a connection between the three artists. See, Enrique Lihn, “Apostilla a de la chilena pintura historia/e. lihn,” *Revista CAL*, no. 4 (October, 1979): 20-21.

<sup>1421</sup> Dittborn spoke on several occasions of trauma and its relation to the present. In 1980, he stated that “to understand the present, you have to probe and assume the moments collectively repressed and forgotten, as in psychoanalysis.” Foxley, “Tras las huellas del hombre,” 51.

<sup>1422</sup> Dittborn interviewed in “Arte en Chile,” video by Juan Enrique Forch and Nelly Richard, 1985. Color. 21’24.

association constantly sought by the Dittborn between surface and mark, body and trace, space and corporeality, and ultimately memory and history, played not only a central role in the 1981 video, but in Dittborn's overall relationship to the Chilean landscape as a site where national identity was contested.

In his book *Estrategias y proyecciones de la plástica nacional sobre la década del 80*, Dittborn included his own Surrealist inspired analysis of Zurita's desert poem.<sup>1423</sup> Dittborn's text was overlaid on top of a reproduced image of *Purgatorio's* book cover featuring Zurita's burnt cheek, establishing a visual connection between these two forms of 'writing.' The artist's text began by referring to Zurita's action as a form of "self-aggression, self-eroticism," playing with the verb "atacar" (to attack) by altering its composition until it was transformed into "Atacama," thus enhancing the relation between body and desert. The Atacama Desert was then described by Dittborn as a "precipice in surface/fossil lake/tomb will be of the free/grey cardboard," apparently disconnected phrases that nevertheless underlined the desert's flatness and extension through a series of inversions. The fall and vertical depth of the mountain's precipice was reoriented horizontally and read as a surface similar to the lake's waters congealed in layers of rock, the desert's aridity, or the roughness and lack of color of the flat cardboard. Dittborn's desert descriptions were mixed with passages referring to another Chilean "common place," a fragment from the national anthem's chorus, "the tomb of the free." The desert was not only the inverted reflection of the steely mountain, but was formally connected to the image of the mummy found in the previous page, accentuating its limit condition and the notion of the corporeal ruin as a reminder of past life in the area.

The desert's material corporeality was further explored in the rest of the text. The desert was compared to a large stain, a blot in the geographical map, which could be interpreted as a natural secretion expanding beyond the borders of cartographic efforts. The stain itself was then connected by Dittborn to the human body through a series of disparate somatic images: a cerebral stroke, an executed body, ejaculation, a martyred eye. As the text progressed, the desert's aridity was simultaneously opposed and related to the humidity of the stain and the carnality of the body, so that when the two last phrases were reached the beginning and ending images' met like inverted reflections: "Atacama desert/our scar/abandoned erogenous zone." The concluding passages conjured the image of Zurita's scalded cheek, his concrete body marred with a cutaneous crust resulting from a specific corporeal act of self-execution, joining the flesh with the landscape and a concrete territory.

Dittborn's text turned the land corporeal and the body into a site. Both were imagined as representations, surfaces for inscriptions, pages bearing traces, maps "for getting lost" in chimerical regions, each being like the desert, a "wasteland in a state of siege." Dittborn's landscape works in video were intimately tied to the body, acting as reflections on memory, their editions and repetitions resembling the performance of remembrance. Even the desert and its remoteness could not escape its reproduction, even the desert had a memory and a history that was expressed through bodies and their absence, the traces and markings they left. Just like desert was given a body, the nation was envisioned as corporeal, lost in its landscapes, emerging through them as material

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<sup>1423</sup> All the following quotes are from the same book and have been translated by the author.



elements, revealing a history of gaps, fissures, tombs, mummies, scars, marks in a surface of death and oblivion.

### 6.3. Corporeal Landscapes: The Margins and Limits of Juan Castillo and Ximena Prieto

The relationships between a wounded body, the Chilean landscape, and its marginal spaces were at the center of the video works made by Juan Castillo and his collaborations since 1982 with Ximena Prieto in the group called “Al Margen” (On the Margin). The group’s name was in itself an act of location. The artists were assuming a position regarding art and society that evidenced the importance acquired by marginality in current artistic discourses. The choice of the border as a place from which to speak suggested being at the edge of a social formation (whether this was the art world or other cultural spaces), gaining an oblique vantage point on it. This position favored the marginal over the “hegemonic” (a term that was beginning to gain currency in the Chilean intellectual scene), manifesting an interest in displacing the gaze from the center, and the triumphant discourses reproduced by it, and exchange it for a peripheral type of vision. Such a position was indebted to C.A.D.A.’s discourses and the emphasis they had placed on marginality, a group to which Castillo had until recently belonged.<sup>1424</sup> Castillo’s defection from the collective literally positioned him on the margins of artistic discourse at the time, a scion left without an artistic avant-garde family.

But “Al Margen” was more than an offshoot of C.A.D.A. The group’s name suggested a positioning in between inside and outside, forming part of the conceptual artistic scene, but also touching its exterior. The group’s actions were further connected to Castillo’s works done independently from the collective from 1979 onwards,<sup>1425</sup> which had focused on the changing history of specific sites. Titled “Investigaciones sobre el eriazo” (Investigations on empty sites),<sup>1426</sup> the works took as their subject the abandoned lots and undeveloped spaces within different centric cities such as Santiago and Valparaíso (fig. 6.15).<sup>1427</sup> These empty badlands were often demarcated by walls and wire fences, standing as blank spaces against the new highways, yet according to Castillo they were also “transformed into soccer fields each Sunday”<sup>1428</sup> by the shantytown

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<sup>1424</sup> To this day, Castillo’s reasons for withdrawing from C.A.D.A. have been the subject of controversy. According to Castillo, there were already in the early eighties internal disputes among C.A.D.A.’s members and his departure was based on his impression that the group had by 1982 “lost the perspective which gave the collective its reason of being.” Juan Castillo interviewed by Robert Neustadt in, “Entrevista con Juan Castillo,” *CADA DIA: la creación de un arte social* (Santiago: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2001), 60. In the same book, Diamela Eltit denies the existence of such internal polemics, even though Fernando Balcells also left the group the following year.

<sup>1425</sup> Some of Castillo’s actions were done in conjunction with Lotty Rosenfeld’s crosses, creating a parallel between two forms of marking.

<sup>1426</sup> The Spanish Word “sobre” can be translated as both “on and “about,” which suggests that the artists were making an investigation about the marginal and literally working on it.

<sup>1427</sup> Documentation of “Investigaciones sobre el eriazo” appears in *Chile Arte Actual*, pages 209 and 216.

<sup>1428</sup> Juan Castillo, quoted in Galaz and Ivelic, *La pintura en Chile* (Valparaíso: Editoriales Universitarias, 1982), no page number, plaque VIII.

dwellers living next to their borders. In his actions, Castillo painted a part of the sites' walls with a large rectangular white field, pasting and adding in the newly cleared areas texts referring to the marginality and abandonment of the site. Texts such as: "signaling our margins," acted like a second layer of graffiti-like marks on the walls, partly effacing and mingling with the earlier imprints or "spontaneous graphics"<sup>1429</sup> of soccer balls, diffused political messages, and romantic scribbles. Like the graffiti preceding them, Castillo's marks were ephemeral, subject to degradation and abjection, open to the process of their own erasure and oblivion similar to that of the chosen sites.

When transplanted to the context of the gallery through documents and video installations, the marks left by the artist became more permanent maps describing other views of the cities, pointing to their internal divisions and uneven development. The wastelands were also "serial," subject to repetition, as seen in the commonplace deserted lots within the growing cities, normalized by the government as awaiting a future, seemingly controlled through their demarcation from other spaces and turned into 'blind' urban spots. They formed a different type of "matrix"<sup>1430</sup> in the national landscape, one characterized by its barrenness and social dejection. But while the dictatorship was attempting to convert those desolate 'deserted' urban areas into "lush" green places,<sup>1431</sup> economically useful, Castillo's painted walls evinced a different map where the center was shown as filled with voids, containing its margins and lacks. The margins were signaled by Castillo as internal, contained and woven into the national fabric. Furthermore, the sites were transformed into inscriptive surfaces for other 'unplanned' forms of social interaction, their emptiness challenged through collective or individual acts.

The connection between the bleak urban lots and the desert became apparent in Castillo's works of 1981 titled "Te devuelvo tu imagen" (I return you your image). The first stage and central portion of the work consisted of altering the "animitas,"<sup>1432</sup> small altar-like structures found on roadsides commemorating people who died in them, which the artist found along the Pan-American Highway leading from the capital to Antofagasta, a northern city in the second region where Castillo was born. The intervention included placing on the memorial structures a series of texts repeating the title of the work along with the words: "mi tumba" (my grave) and serigraphic reproductions of Castillo's family photographs showing him and his two brothers as

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<sup>1429</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1430</sup> In *Chile. Arte Actual*, Galaz and Ivelic described Castillo's work as "transforming the wall into the matrix for a video-recording that documented all the action and permitted its later exhibition in museum and galleries, or –as done by the artist- in commercial shop windows." Galaz and Ivelic, *Chile Arte Actual*, 216.

<sup>1431</sup> The construction of the waterway channel San Carlos in 1821 was described in an *El Mercurio* article as changing the aspect of the commune of Puente Alto, from a "desolate desert to the agricultural provider of Santiago," a project that was extended to more centric areas during the dictatorship. See "El llano del Maipo: desierto que es ahora vergel," *El Mercurio*, December 19, 1982.

<sup>1432</sup> The word "animita" is a diminutive of "anima."

young boys.<sup>1433</sup> On a wall at the start of the highway in the Metropolitan region, Castillo painted the text: “Eriazos- Desiertos- Eriales- Panamericana Norte- Chile” (Wastelands- Deserts- Deserted Lands- Northern Pan- American Highway- Chile), establishing a chain of connections linking different spaces of desolation. The recorded action of the wall painting became part of the later portion of the work, which included the distribution in the capital of silkscreen images related to the actions and a small video installation within the artist’s home reproducing the whole process.

The interventions along the highway created a small route of remembrance and oblivion, joining the nation’s center and the Northern province through traffic, death, and memory. The artist’s body and his personal recollections were associated with those lost on the highway by joining two forms of marking as well as two types of commemorative graves: the makeshift, popular “animita” and the photographic record as a visual death certificate of the past. Though the highway was envisioned by the government as a vital man-made artery joining the nation’s center and its peripheral regions in a route towards progress, Castillo’s precarious marks signaled other forms of connection among different types of emptiness. The urban vacant lots were related by Castillo to the bareness of the northern desert plains, their lack of life and forlorn development, forming two different kinds of marginal spaces. The closeness between city and desert was perceived by Sommer when he described the collection of Castillo’s works presented at Galería Espacio Siglo XX as, “showing us how the northern desert tries to grip with its claws the capital, in an attempt to compare immensities.”<sup>1434</sup> For Sommer, “the emptiness of the metropolis” was similar to that produced by nature, since the urban was also subject to processes of decomposition, destruction, and desolation. Center and periphery as exemplified by the capital and the northern city were thus not as distant as they might seem, but rather they formed part of a longer chain of associations linking the wasteland to the concept of the nation as a whole. Chile was envisioned by Castillo as a long space of marginality, a space including and characterized by otherness.

It is interesting to note that Castillo traveled to Antofagasta with Rosenfeld. Along the way Rosenfeld worked on her own project tracing crosses on the highway while Castillo took photographs of her actions.<sup>1435</sup> Rosenfeld’s 1982 video “Una herida Americana” (An American Wound) opened with a still image of the Pan-American highway framed by mountains in the background and by flat yellow plains on the sides (fig. 6.16).<sup>1436</sup> As the video progressed, the emptiness of the road was finally interrupted by the solitary passage of a single truck, a sign of communication and economic interchange. The continuity and impassiveness of the desert scene was suddenly broken

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<sup>1433</sup> The only sources where the works are described are Neustadt’s interview with Castillo and the online text by Guadalupe Alvarez de Araya Cid, “Ocupación y resistencia. A propósito de la muestra “TE DEVUELVO TU IMAGEN” de Juan Castillo,” in <http://www.monografias.com/trabajos903/ocupacion-resistencia/ocupacion-resistencia2.shtml> (last accessed April 30, 2010).

<sup>1434</sup> Waldemar Sommer, “Acciones de arte, la vanguardia de hoy,” *El Mercurio*, 19 July, 1981.

<sup>1435</sup> The cinematographers Ignacio Agüero and Tatiana Gaviola participated in the later edition and camera work of the scenes taking place in Santiago.

<sup>1436</sup> A copy of Rosenfeld’s “Una herida Americana” is found in *Antología Digital*. Still images of the video are reproduced in *Desacato*, pages 42, 44, 70, and 73. The desert cross in the video also appears documented in *Chile Arte Actual*, in page 229, and a scene from the Stock Exchange in page 230.

by the sounds of men shouting, changing the rhythm of the video and its apparent content, as sequences taken at the Chilean Stock Exchange in Santiago followed. As the men shouted and vociferated their numbers and single words while gathered around monitors in a circle, creating a small masculine ritual of sorts, different cuts showing aspects of their surroundings revealed that several television monitors had been installed in the room displaying Rosenfeld's earlier street interventions. The first shown corresponded to Rosenfeld's cross done in front of the White House in Washington D.C., followed by crosses in Chile and ending with the cross on the Pan-American Highway, this time shot from a moving car.

The American "wound" alluded to in the title had multiple connotations. The wound could be related to the highway's image as a graphic mark, a stark line crossing the desert, breaking its unity and rupturing the 'natural' landscape. Translated into maps as a longitudinal line, the highway could be read as a sign of progress and communication. This was evinced in the truck's passage, an effective medium for commercial exchange with the 'center' of trade and the symbolic economic heart giving life and value to objects and enterprises. But this patriarchal center was intercepted by Rosenfeld as the exchange center's technological display of numbers and abstract ciphers was disrupted with the videos' reproductions of crosses made on the roads. The latter became reminders of other marks, presences, and absences in this economically and profit-run site, acting as 'wound' on the social body.

The connection between the cross in Washington and those in Chile further resonated with the current worldwide economic recession. This was a crisis felt particularly hard in Chile through a decline in exports, one of the primary sources of the state's wealth. The economic dilemma was downplayed at first by the regime, as exemplified by Pinochet's statements that anticipated a "short and surmountable"<sup>1437</sup> recession. By the end of the year, when even Pinochet began asking for "faith and confidence"<sup>1438</sup> in overcoming the crisis, the comforting words coming from the guru of Chilean economic model, Milton Friedman, such as "there is no economic recession,"<sup>1439</sup> were felt by the growing opposition as proof of the failure and "blindness"<sup>1440</sup> of the imported liberal model. By 1983, *Revista Apsi* concluded: "the roads do not lead to Chicago,"<sup>1441</sup> mocking the sacredness acquired by Friedman's theories and pointing to the limits of its deeply rooted and intertwined ideas about progress and capitalism.

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<sup>1437</sup> "Presidente Pinochet: "La recesión económica será corta y superable,"" *El Mercurio*, July 15, 1981. Even though Pinochet stated in 1981 that the crisis would be "short" and that the Chilean "economic system will enable us to confront it, because our economy is solid," as the Chilean peso was increasingly devaluated, the government had to eventually take control of the banks. See "Los fantasmas del invierno: violencia y recesión," *Revista Apsi*, July 28-August 10, 1981, 2-3.

<sup>1438</sup> "S.E. instó a tener confianza y fé para superar recesión," *El Mercurio*, November 6, 1981.

<sup>1439</sup> "Milton Friedman: "No hay recesión en el mundo," *El Mercurio*, November 16, 1981.

<sup>1440</sup> According to *Revista Apsi*, the government's economists were suggesting in 1982 of "leaving the invisible hand of the market" perform its work in order to solve the crisis. "Los fantasmas del invierno: violencia y recesión," 2-3.

<sup>1441</sup> María Ester Aliaga, "En medio de la crisis: los caminos no conducen a Chicago," *Revista Apsi*, October 4-17, 1983, 11.

The discrepancy between the images of internal solidity, bright futures, and development advanced by the regime, the press, and national television, and the critical socio-economic reality of the nation were at the basis of Castillo's 1983 collaboration with Ximena Prieto and the creation of the group "Al Margen." In the series of actions performed between 1982 and 1983 titled "Interacciones sobre el paisaje chileno" (Interactions on the Chilean landscape),<sup>1442</sup> the notion of a national landscape as an image and sign took center stage in a work that questioned its existence, looking into the conventions supporting different discourses on the representation of land and identity.

The works were based on a single action and structure repeated at specific locations. A transparent acrylic module of rectangular shape was installed by the artists at a natural site associated with a national border or limit: desert, coastline, and mountain.<sup>1443</sup> Each module bore a large phrase in one of its faces in pale molded letters: "te prometo mi vida" (I promise you my life) at the seaside, "montaje eterno" (eternal montage) at the mountains, and "la agonía de la imagen" (the agony of the image) at the desert (fig. 6.17).<sup>1444</sup> One end of each module was partially buried in the midst or in front of the natural landmark and then the top was set aflame, the slow burning of the modules videotaped and photographed.<sup>1445</sup> The fire consumed the letters and frames, leaving little trace of the panels' presence in the landscape.

The use of the transparent panels established a relationship to the landscape tradition in the arts. As 'windows' demarcating a place, framing a view of nature, and opening up into a space beyond, the minimalist modules acted like transparent canvases, perfectly re-presenting a fragment of a found 'natural' scene. Yet by their very act of editing that picture of nature, the modules put in tension the notion of 'found' nature, the artifice involved in its translation to another medium, and the values given to those natural elements. While the modules' translucency alluded to the idea of capturing nature objectively and of the landscape genre as a candid record of a land tract, evoking an 'untainted' eye observing a natural scene opening up and displaying itself, the panels' artificial condition was underlined through several elements. The modules' rectilinear edges not only contrasted at first with the ridged and curved forms of the landscapes, but their borders produced a gap with the natural scene beyond and around them. This break with the natural scenery was reinforced by the words included on the modules' surfaces,

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<sup>1442</sup> The ambiguity of the Spanish word "sobre" relates to how the group's works have been generally interpreted by critics and how the title has been distorted by them, changing it from "interactions" to "interventions." I will discuss the difference I see in the two concepts below, and how it related to the group's works.

<sup>1443</sup> The last portion of the work included showing the previous recordings at Villa Frei, a shantytown in Santiago, and the only 'non-natural' site.

<sup>1444</sup> The panels and the variety of sites where they were placed and burned are documented in *Copiar el Edén*, in page 347, and *Atacama Lab*, pages 42 and 43. There is documentation of the process involved in the making of one of the videos in the article "Campos de Luz," Apsi-Creación, *Revista Apsi*, July 20-August 2, 1982, no page number.

<sup>1445</sup> The burning could last up to eight hours, and several of the recordings show the changing light in the background.

the process of degradation to which they were submitted, and even the multiple forms of recording used to frame the scene.

The idea of landscape as a fixed image of nature was challenged as the modules framed nature in a state of constant change. For this was a landscape in permanent movement, with birds flying, clouds moving, and light changing as captured by the camera and the burning plastics. Even the camera movements, zooming in and out of the scenes, emphasized the idea of an active eye looking, framing, and editing. As stated by Mariano Silva in relation to the video “Montaje eterno” shown at the 1983 video-art contest organized by the Plaza Mulato Gil in Santiago, the artists were “painting with fire, clouds, hours and wind,”<sup>1446</sup> incorporating duration and change into the landscape. For Silva, nevertheless, the video was a painting in movement that allowed the natural elements to ‘speak’ for themselves, reinforcing the idea of a ‘natural’ or original landscape representing itself and only observed by the artists or their surrogate technological eyes.

Yet the inclusion of words in the frames suggested a landscape in need of explanation, a site overlaid by discourse. The phrases acted like captions to the recording, commenting on the landscape’s image and altering its experience. The landscape was not devoid of human value, but was shown as subject to acts of framing and signification. In this sense, the choice of the word “interactions” in the works’ title, instead of “interventions,” is significant for two reasons. Interactions suggest the creation of a field of relationships and mutual influence among different elements, establishing reciprocity of actions. Instead, the concept of “intervention” implies a foreign interference and the alteration of a given situation. Critics like Pedraza have used the term “intervention” to describe not only the works of “Grupo Al Margen,” but also those of Rosenfeld and Dittborn, in an attempt to relate their works to an international art movement that physically transformed given spaces, as in Land Art. But the works of Castillo and Prieto were less about transforming a space than marking areas of influence and interchange, dealing with the landscape as a medium similar to video, an in-between means of creating and expressing ideas and values.

Nature and vision were exposed in the videos as subject to construction and implicated in a play of meaning. As the phrase in the module located in the mountains suggested, landscape was an “eternal montage” bringing together contradictory terms, the immutable and the impermanent, the natural and the fabricated. The use of the phrase in the context of the mountain was of relevance insofar as it pointed to the production of nature and its representation. If, as stated earlier, the mountain had come to represent in the Chilean imaginary a stable landmark, a natural border, and a limit to experience that was ‘eternal’ and unchanging, the module’s phrase marked it as part of a visual and symbolic field, filled with value as an identity marker and capable of being re-edited.

The persistence of certain conventions in the perception and interpretation of the Chilean landscape is manifested in the absence of discussion regarding the specific phrases used in the group’s videos and the locations chosen. This is the case of Pedraza in

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<sup>1446</sup> Mariano Silva, “El cine sucedáneo...,” *Revista Pluma y Pincel*, no.5 (May 1983): 43. For Silva, what was revealed to be permanent in the video was “time,” while the materials were consumed.

particular,<sup>1447</sup> who touches upon the subject of mediation and coding in the landscape tradition, yet reveals in his own reading the tenacity of those same viewing assumptions. According to Pedraza, the works of “Grupo Al Margen” were based on “detecting the myths that condition the ways in which the spectator deals with the landscape,”<sup>1448</sup> as revealed in the vertical arrangement of the modules, which echoed “the same position of the canvas to be painted.”<sup>1449</sup> Yet for Pedraza, the modules differed from painted landscapes insofar as they “did not absorb the subject position of the artist,”<sup>1450</sup> but instead allowed for the “spectator’s gaze to pass with no obstacles, dissolving –though burning– the structures of sense that are placed before our ways of perceiving reality.”<sup>1451</sup> For Pedraza this was a “non-mediated landscape,” with no conditioning, just a natural ‘form’ understood within the “binomial relationship spectator/landscape.”<sup>1452</sup> According to the author, in the videos there were no references to history regarding the site, the author, or the viewer, regardless of the specific choice of location and the inclusion of text. Because of the burning act, vision was somehow purified, left transparent, its social underpinnings transcended, just like the landscape was rendered a-historical and objective.

But Castillo and Prieto’s works derived a great part of their conceptual strength from questioning the location and conventions associated with natural elements and spaces, pointing to the impossibility of an unmediated vision regarding the landscape. The different sites and the related phrases offered a more complicated reading of the nation’s limits and its natural landmarks. The panel bearing the words “eternal montage” counterpoised the natural to its fabricated set up, as the bluish ridges and cliffs forming an apparently unending canyon at the center of the image converted the mountain into an abysmal space and impenetrable frontier. On the other hand, the module bearing the phrase “the agony of the image” had the desert and its horizontal extension as a visual, physical, and conceptual limit that posited a specific and different history in its margins.

The module was installed in the sandy plains bordering the dunes close to the Pedro de Valdivia nitrate mines in the Atacama Desert. Though not seen in the recorded images, the mine and “office” or company town were still active in the 1980s. The mines had a long history beginning with the Chilean acquisition of the northern territories after the Pacific Wars, passing through the mine’s foundation by the American Guggenheim family in 1931, followed by its passage in 1965 to the state-owned Sociedad Química y Minera de Chile (Chemical and Mining Society of Chile).<sup>1453</sup> If Castillo’s biographical closeness to the site marked the space as one of personal memory, the arid landscape had

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<sup>1447</sup> The same disregard of place can be seen though in Catalina Valdés’ brief analysis of the works in *Copiar el Edén*, 346, and in Guadalupe Alvarez de Araya Cid’s text.

<sup>1448</sup> Pedraza, 42.

<sup>1449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1450</sup> Pedraza, 43.

<sup>1451</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1452</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1453</sup> The society was privatized in 1988 and the town finally closed in 1996.

more public national resonance. The creation from the nothingness of the desert of a whole town and lifestyle echoed the name given to the mines, Pedro de Valdivia, the Spaniard who had ‘conquered’ Chile and founded its first European modeled cities, literally bringing a new life to an otherwise god-forsaken territory. The act of populating the historically “empty” desert planes, whose harsh climate made difficult any form of habitation, and exploring its latent possibilities of revenue, was a re-edition of the colonial endeavor.<sup>1454</sup> Such an act of conquest was reenacted in 1983 when both the mines of Pedro de Valdivia and María Elena located close by were enlarged by the government,<sup>1455</sup> following a program of growing privatization in the mining industry and the consolidation of foreign investment in their development. The ‘image’ of the desert was one where personal, national, and international history were joined, as the landscape could variously represent a site of prosperity, tourism, social inequality, or remoteness for different people. In this sense, the desert could be considered both a quotidian, loved and hated place for those families who had gone to live and work in the northern pampas (the “pampinos,” who created their own desert culture), and at the same time represent a sign of personal wealth for the foreign companies investing in the site.

Yet if the revival of an industry that had been in decay since the 1930s was connected to the regime’s new act of framing and envisioning the desert as a productive site, this progressive endeavor was tainted by failure. In Castillo’s work, though the desert dunes and plains were covered with footsteps, possibly the artists’ own, suggesting human intervention, they were also in a state of disappearance, like the burning module. The “agony of the image” evoked in the title was also an agony of the site, echoing the slow death of the mining town in a state of gradual abandonment, the desert dunes evoking the decaying contours of the cream colored buildings, the sand eroding the man-made endeavors of controlling and exploiting nature.<sup>1456</sup> The desert’s emptiness contrasted with the vitality presented in the seascape juxtaposed to the module with the phrase “te prometo mi vida” (I promise you my life), where the movement of seagulls, ships, boats, and an occasional stroller echoed the dynamism and sense of life emanating from the waters.

The group referred to their works of 1982 as dealing with elements belonging to “us,” even though these identity markers and origins could provoke a sense of

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<sup>1454</sup> There were nevertheless in the early 1980s a few archeological projects that aimed at providing a history for the region, particularly of mining. See for example the works of G. Alcaide and J.A. Gonzalez.

<sup>1455</sup> “Ampliación de oficina salitrera,” *El Mercurio*, 22 November, 1983.

<sup>1456</sup> A different vision of the desert was presented by Max Donoso on occasion of the 1983 video contest supported by Plaza Mulato Gil in Santiago. In Donoso’s “De la vida de...” (Regarding the life of...), the desert landscape was treated as a romantic backdrop for a narrative story that focused on the abandoned mining towns as a man searched for others. Donoso referred to the video as a “spiritual and sentimental search,” and its oneiric qualities won the artist the contest’s second prize. See “El video o la revolución de la imagen,” *Revista Cauce*, June 26-July 9, 1984, 32-33. But even though in Donoso’s video the landscape could be read as a site of “desolation and death,” as described by Foxley, it exacerbated the beauty and “textures” of the site. See Ana María Foxley, “Video Arte. Búsquedas y visiones,” *Revista Hoy*, May 4-10, 1983, 45. In *Revista Pluma y Pincel*, the work was characterized as combining “cinema and poetry, testimony and image.” Silva, “El cine sucedáneo,” 42-44. Donoso later turned to photography as his main medium, his work dealing mostly with the landscape.



dislocation. The landscapes framed by the artists were connected with sites that had been used to create a discourse on the “fatherland,” a “fiction” that the collective described as composed of “so much postcard so much sea so much desert so much city repeated in its failure so much garbage dump of dreams.”<sup>1457</sup> The mountain, sea, desert, and eventually the city, formed part of a repertoire of images and sites appropriated by different social agents, from the government to particular enterprises and individuals, to compose a picture of the nation, its identity, and its future. But the same familiar and endlessly repeated images could be distanced from their representations, their transparent frames burnt like heretical idolaters, their magic and eternal aura momentarily contrasted with the transformation of the actual site. If “Grupo al Margen” meant to create through the burning modules a “neutral field” and “empty space”<sup>1458</sup> within the landscape, they also defined this field as a space of “interaction” where the imagined and lived spaces of others could be projected. As their works made evident, the “Chilean” landscape was a construction, its ‘natural’ parts traversed by history, rearranged and altered to compose different meanings, and the number of actors moving and endowing the pieces and resulting images with value could be expanded and changed.

The use of fire presented a natural form of destruction and creation, combining endings and beginnings. Fire was directly related to a painful corporeal experience, which the artists re-inscribed in a textual manner on the desert module: “the agony of the image.” If the module and the image of the desert, or by extension any other landscape as presented in the series, was in a state of “agony” as it burnt, a body slowly dying and reduced to an uneven charred line, fire was envisioned as a source of renovation and an alchemical rebirth. When the artists mentioned that “a landscape lies in agony, reediting the gaze on it,”<sup>1459</sup> not only was the landscape associated with a form of corpo-reality, the “image” as immaterial sign given density and depth, but its tormented state was turned into a starting point allowing for a new act of framing. Each installation of the module in the landscape acted as an edition or copy of it, the site understood as a (national) matrix subject to destruction and potential reproduction. If some features of the national territory such as the mountain range, desert, and coast were read by the artists as postcard images, picturesque originals endlessly reiterated to define a national being, these editions could be also manipulated in a different context and symbolically contested.

The relationship between burning the landscape’s image and the agony of the body politic was further explored in the video installation “Movimientos en falso” (False Movements) presented at the Third Graphic Salon of 1982, winning the first prize in the category of Multiple Mediums (fig. 6.18).<sup>1460</sup> The work brought together the overarching

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<sup>1457</sup> Juan Castillo and Ximena Prieto, “Campos de luz,” Apsi-Creación, *Revista Apsi*, July 20-August 2, 1982, no page number.

<sup>1458</sup> Castillo and Prieto, quoted in Pamela Jiles, “Interactuando con los paisajes de Chile,” *Revista Apsi*, 23.

<sup>1459</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1460</sup> The work appears documented in the exhibition catalogue *Tercer Salón Nacional de Gráfica* (no page number), and *Chile Arte Actual* in page 209. It should be noted that these reproductions of the installation feature only one of the two modules, the burnt one. Nevertheless, there is a photograph of the installation at the Salon displaying both modules published in the article by Gregorio Goldenberg, “¿Qué diablos pasa con los Salones?” in *Revista Pluma y Pincel*, no.1 (December 1982):14.

theme of reproduction, seriality, and editing coming from the graphic arts with video and its technical possibilities as discussed at the time among Chilean artists. These problems were joined to a conception of the landscape as a matrix and a sign, “eternal” and subject to changing meanings, a landscape that was corporeal, inhabited, and experienced by specific subjects.

The installation consisted of two rectangular modules made of transparent acrylic, each set vertically on a rectangular patch of grass and earth. One of the modules had its top burnt, the charred upper border distorting part of a newspaper article that had been printed on one of its faces, while the other bore the printed words “paisaje natural” (natural landscape) below a neon light. The fragmented article dealt with the June 1982 triumph of the Chilean boxer Benedicto Villablanca over the Puerto Rican Samuel Serrano, which briefly gave the former the world champion title in the lightweight category. Only twenty days later, the World Association of Boxing took away Villablanca’s title when they discovered by playing video reproductions of the fight that Serrano had been illegally hit in the head during the match. Villablanca would never recuperate from the loss of the world title, in spite of continuing fighting until 1985. The printed version of the article featured a photograph of Villablanca after winning the fight, one gloved hand and arm held high in a sign of victory. The installation also contained two television monitors and a video player, with each monitor installed in front of a module playing a video of the same title.

The video “Movimientos en falso” was organized in “rounds” instead of chapters, evoking the boxer’s story and the structure of the fights.<sup>1461</sup> Each round presented an ‘edition’ and an ‘encounter’ with the modules in two distinct locations. The video opened with a close-up of one of the acrylic plates and the newspaper article, interspersing cuts showing an irregular fluorescent light to the sound of birds chirping and details of the boxer’s victory. A series of zoom-outs revealed that the module was standing the midst of a green hill surrounded by hawthorn trees in the early morning, while the light was revealed as that of the structure’s burning upper border that left thin wisps of smoke.

The landscape scene was then interrupted by a black screen bearing the title “first round.” The next sequence showed a similar module, bearing the same article reproduction, yet this time at a setting filled with undistinguishable sounds and blurred movement. The sudden appearance of a hanging cow carcass soon revealed the location to be Santiago’s main slaughterhouse, the dead animals hoisted with chains by men in aprons. Countering the close-ups of the module, which evinced blood stains on its surface, were takes of its double burning in the landscape, with a close-up of its burning border revealing a different printed phrase: “paisaje natural” (Natural landscape).

The next series of “rounds,” from the second to the fifth, altered the scenes recorded at the slaughterhouse with those of the burning ‘natural’ module. The slow yet inevitable process of burning and disappearance of the boxer’s image was opposed to the monotonous mechanical actions performed by the butchers. As they raised and lowered chains repeatedly, the animals hanged limp in groups or alone, their skins tight and stained, just like the module whose surface was increasingly covered with red blotches. By the fourth round a parallel was created between the tranquil green landscape and the slaughterhouse, as sheep suddenly appeared along the frame’s border, quietly grazing the

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<sup>1461</sup> A copy of the video “Movimientos en falso” is found in the library of Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes Santiago, Chile.

green pastures behind the burning module. The video concluded with two legends, the first stating “the sterility of successive stains will not relieve you,” the last ending with, “Chilean graphics.” A last take of the landscape scene appeared in distorted reddish and pink colors changing the quality of the image, zooming in on the grazing sheep.

The video established a series of homologies between different material situations, emplacements, and bodies. The first was the linking thread provided by boxing as a martial art, which connected Villablanca’s personal story of success and fall and his field of action to the video’s structure and contents. On a formal level, the square ring where two bodies confront each other in a battle where violence is controlled, could be read as demarcating a field for a fight, separating the realm of sport from the street. The idea of the boundary was echoed in the installation’s ‘natural’ turfs and industrial modules, each translated from an ‘original’ location (in nature, in a factory) into the gallery, a dislocation further enhanced by the virtual space of the television sets. On the other hand, the video’s structure in rounds suggested both that the fight was an edition of movements, and that its serial organization was comparable with the modules’ industrial origins. The video’s editing process, with its partitioning of time and sequences into intervals, its juxtaposition of disparate imagery, and the making of its own rules, could also offer points of comparison with the overall theme of repetition, cuts, and encounters of the fight. But if video as a medium was interpreted by some critics at the time as a “game” filled with “effects and tricks,”<sup>1462</sup> exhibiting “virtuosity” and “exploits” that threatened to let it become “an energetic circus,”<sup>1463</sup> this could be a bloody and harsh entertainment.

The serial structure of the fight and the sport’s violence found their double in the slaughterhouse. The accumulation of identical dead animals and the repeated actions of lifting and hanging their inert and heavy bodies, one after the other, suggested an indifferent process of fragmentation, distribution, and consumption. The general sense of detachment from life and death in the shambles was countered by the presence of blood staining the module and tiled rooms, a reminder of the animal’s corporeal nature and the violence needed to consume them.

If the slaughterhouse was compared in the video to the boxing ring’s specialized form of violence, the ‘encounter’ taking place in this contemporary arena involved a long-standing ritual relationship between man and animal mediated by sacrifice. Behind the death of the cows was their future conversion into edible pieces of meat, becoming a source of energy and life for the community performing this offering. In this ritual, a life was ended in order to sustain the life of others and the sacrificed body becoming the symbolic stand-in for all others, allying life and death. But unlike sacrificial rites of the past, in the modern slaughterhouse the sacred element was missing, leaving behind a secular ring of socially accepted violence performed against animals for the sake of contemporary human diets.

The inclusion of sheep in the video installed an Christological reference within the slaughterhouse. Unawares of the burning module and their possible future in a similar animal facility, the sheep recalled the “agnus dei,” the sacrificial lamb of God with Christ as the perfect sacrifice that redeems humanity’s sins. The sheep’s presence suggested a

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<sup>1462</sup> Silva, 44.

<sup>1463</sup> Ibid.

state of innocence and purity homologous to the pastoral setting where they were found grazing. But, though the Chilean green Arcadia filled with animals waking up with the rising sun seemed opposed to the slaughterhouse's anonymous coldness, this idyllic space evinced forms of disruption. In this paradise lost, the intruder was a burning module that, unlike the burning bush, was not performing miracles and offered no transcendental meaning.

The use of animal imagery evoking human bodies and endowed with religious connotations has long roots in art history. From 17<sup>th</sup> century Netherlandish flayed pigs to Rembrandt, passing through Soutine and Bacon, these depictions of stretched animal carcasses have recalled in particular Christ's crucified body. But in the Chilean context the dead cow and meat carcass motifs had received a particular and recent interpretation connecting sacrifice to daily acts of violence and murder. This was first manifested at the end of 1979 when Carlos Gallardo, a student of Vilches at Universidad Católica, began a series of graphic works and actions based on animal carcasses, which he continued through 1982. The basis of his work was shown at the Contest of the Catholic University in November 1979 and then at the 5<sup>th</sup> Contest of Plastic Arts of the Colocadora Nacional de Valores when Gallardo presented part of the series of intervened silkscreened prints titled "A la carne de Chile" (To the Meat of Chile).<sup>1464</sup> The series consisted of photographic reproductions of a hanging piece of meat, the severed animal's thighs still dripping blood and the tendons and grease layers displayed in a close-up manner (fig. 6.19).<sup>1465</sup> The brutality suggested by the animal's butchered corporeality and its skinless apparition of pure flesh diffused its identity, confusing it with the human body. Yet this uncomfortable ambiguity was countered by the objective and impassive printed text describing the work's procedure, "silkscreened intervention," suggesting an analytical, almost clinical repetitious procedure now performed by the butcher/artist.

The work was followed in 1980 by the documented action titled "Desplazamiento del grabado. Edición es: 10 muertes con igual procedimiento" (Displacement of printing. An edition is: ten deaths under the same procedure) and more animal-related prints.<sup>1466</sup> The action took place at Santiago's slaughterhouse, where the artist proceeded to paint a

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<sup>1464</sup> Gallardo won first prize at the Catholic University's contest and then a scholarship to study abroad in the 5<sup>th</sup> Contest of Plastic Arts. In the same event, the most important prize went to Eduardo Echeverría, who had presented a series of sculptures resembling body parts made of stretched nylon panty hoses filled with shredded wood. These had been laid out on the floor in two symmetrical rows, enhancing the corporeal reference by associating the stretched leggings with anonymous corpses. Earlier that year, Echeverría had presented at CAL a series of filled up panty hoses in a show titled "Stretch," publishing in the gallery's magazine a text that made the corporeal association clearer. It is interesting to note that the non-specialized commentaries in the press focused more on deriding the banal and non-traditional materials used than the works' possible associations. For one of the slightly contemptuous comments on the exhibition and particularly the panty hoses, see "Medias rellenas ganan concurso de escultura," *El Mercurio*, November 19, 1979.

<sup>1465</sup> One example from the series "A la carne de Chile" is reproduced in the article by Eduardo Vilches, "Trayectoria del grabado en la Escuela de Arte," *Revista Arte UC*, no. 3 (1988): 35-38, and is used in the article by Justo Pastor Mellado, "Notas sobre polémicas pictóricas del último período," *Revista de Arte UC*, no. 7 (1994): 44-51.

<sup>1466</sup> A photograph of Gallardo painting the numbers on the dead cows' skin appears in *Margins and Institutions*, page 80, and in *Chile Arte Actual*, page 330.

sequence of numbers on the skins of ten dead cows, aligning the process of killing animals to that of making an edition. In 1986 Richard described Gallardo's action as forming part of a larger movement in Chilean graphics which attempted to "extend" and "displace" concepts associated with printing to other mediums or "supports," so that "the ritual of the cows' killing was defined [by Gallardo] as an edition in which each cow executed by the matrix-death was edited and serialized as an animal print."<sup>1467</sup> Instead of making animal prints, the cows became their own dead copies. The conceptual methodology underlining this expansion from one medium to another was celebrated as 'liberating' by Richard and then by Galaz and Ivelic in 1988, as the former related this expansive gesture with avant-garde breakdown of artistic barriers and the latter with certain postmodern trends.<sup>1468</sup>

But Gallardo's prints went beyond a conceptual translation of mediums. At the 1981 Biennial of Graphic Arts in Cali, Colombia,<sup>1469</sup> Gallardo presented a series of photo-silkscreens and works with ink on paper featuring close-ups of hanging pieces of meat combined with smaller reproductions of photographs taken by the artist at the slaughterhouse (fig. 6.20).<sup>1470</sup> In some cases, the individual carcasses were only traced with black lines, the flesh disappearing under the curved contours to form a different kind of corporeal map, a two-dimensional topographical layout of the flesh. But though the flat representations of flayed bodies recalled the 1977 "Imbunches" of Catalina Parra, Gallardo's prints centered on the gruesome aspect of these fleshy masses, providing

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<sup>1467</sup> Richard, *Márgenes e Instituciones*, 91. In the same section, Richard noted that Leppe's happening "Prueba de artista" (Artist's Proof) at the TAV workshop had occurred in 1981, yet the action took place in 1982, making him a 'pioneer' of these translations.

<sup>1468</sup> In *Chile, Arte Actual's* chapter titled, "Las Nuevas generaciones" (The New Promotions), Galaz and Ivelic associated this conceptual graphic expansion with the trends started by the "escena de avanzada" in the 1970s. Though establishing a genealogy, the text evinced the problem faced by critics like Richard at the time: the rise in Chile of a generation of painters who seemed to be displacing or at least disputing the supremacy of conceptual trends on one hand, and the problem of explaining the Chilean 'conceptual' practices' importance to an international audience on the other. While the painters were quickly associated by all authors with the Italian Transvanguard and American Neo-Expressionism, the problem of where to historically locate the "escena" was left unresolved. One of the biggest problems perceived was the prevalence of "postmodernism" in the international scene, a term briefly alluded to in Galaz and Ivelic's text in order to point out the non-participation of Chilean art in its construction (and a question that the authors derived from a 1983 text published by Richard). The location of the avant-garde is a problem to which I will go back to in the conclusion, where I will deal with the "exportation" of Chilean art from 1982 onwards, beginning with the Paris Biennial.

<sup>1469</sup> To this day, the relation between Chilean artists participating in graphic contests in Colombia and other international encounters has not been dealt with in national criticism. Several relations could be established between the meaty bodies of Gallardo and the interests of the Colombian artist José Alejandro Restrepo, who has recently published a whole book on the topic of body, graphic art, and national violence. See, José Alejandro Restrepo, *Cuerpo Gramatical. Cuerpo, arte y violencia* (Bogotá, Colombia: Universidad de los Andes, Departamento de Arte, 2006). There are many resonances as well between Restrepo and the works of Dittborn as well, since both artists have shown since the 1980s an interest in graphic imagery concerning European representations of America, particularly its "cannibals."

<sup>1470</sup> One of the works from the series also titled "A la carne de Chile" is documented in the exhibition catalogue *IV Bienal Americana de Artes Gráficas=IV American Biennial of Graphic Arts* (Cali, Colombia: Museo de Arte Moderno La Tertulia, 1981), no page numbers.

close-ups of the gore and lumps of fat and the inhuman treatment they suggested.<sup>1471</sup> If Gallardo's earlier 1980 work established an homology between the slaughterhouse's procedures and printing, death being merely another matrix to be repeated, the series of prints focusing on the results of such a deadly edition joined the concept of iteration and the violence implied in graphic art to a concrete corporeality and its death. In this renewed crime scene, what returned was the body and its multiple iterations, the body's interiority revealed in black and white traces with no original, a mass of flesh and blood.

It is the connection between editing, violence, and the body that makes these works more than formal exercises in extending the concept of printing to other "supports." The corporeal dimension and their ties to the animal was present in the collages in Dittborn's artist book titled *Estrategias y proyecciones de la plástica nacional sobre la década del ochenta*, where the animal's flesh was joined to the tortured human body. In one of Dittborn's interpretations of the Surrealist exquisite corpse, the quotidian expression for goosebumps, "carne de gallina" (chicken's meat or flesh), was transformed through the addition of more apparently unrelated words: "flesh/chicken's flesh/chicken's flesh is also frequently observed in other violent deaths." The commonplace was recast in a different light with each repetition, acquiring darker connotations supported by the accompanying images. The first phrase was juxtaposed to a fragmented photograph of a woman's bikini-clad body reclining in the beach, followed by an advertisement of the raw body of an entire chicken ready for sale, and ending with two reproductions of a possibly dead woman laid out in a recliner, her mouth gaping open and eyes closed, face blistered, bloodied, and bruised. While the first image could be related to the 'flesh' as an object for sexual consumption and male visual delectation, making it similar to the chicken as a piece of meat ready to be cooked and eaten, the parallel between the animal's death and the death of the female body transformed the erotic object. The goosebumps produced at the beach through the contact with cold water were reconfigured as signs of a particularly violent death, turning the commonplace into the macabre.

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<sup>1471</sup> I mention Parra in particular, for in October 1979, she presented at the Segundo Encuentro de Arte Joven (Second Encounter of Young Art) a sculpture consisting of an acrylic box containing a mass shaped like a brain within a wire mesh forming a mock cage and womb. Gallardo also participated in the encounter with a cow-related silkscreen, and there was an overall turn to corporeal imagery and concrete bodily references in the works exhibited. This emphasis on the flesh and its relation to sexual limits in particular could be seen in Juan Domingo Dávila's pictorial entry for the Encounter and the paintings he exhibited at CAL during the same month. These were the paintings which led the poet Raúl Zurita to cut his face and masturbate as an act of 'release.' For some reviews and descriptions of the works shown at the Encounter, see, Ascanio Cavallo, "Las Condes, "Zona franca"," *Revista Hoy*, October 17-23, 1979, 41-43; Waldemar Sommer, "Encuentro de Arte Joven," *El Mercurio*, October 14, 1979; "Con gusto a poco," *Revista Hoy*, October 31-November 6, 1979, 41-43. The polemics regarding Davila's evidently homoerotic paintings and Zurita's response to them were tied by the conservative press to other corporeal related artistic issues. These revolved mostly around the works presented by the sculptor Humberto Nilo at the 5<sup>th</sup> Contest of Plastic Arts, which included real pieces of meat and larva sealed in plastic containers resembling paintings, some of which were rejected by the jury while the others were removed from the exhibition once they began decomposing and exhuming bad odors. For a comment on the polemics surrounding the art being shown in 1979, particularly the corporeal references considered "pornographic" and the emphasis on decay as in the works of Humberto Nilo, see, Ascanio Cavallo, "Un "arte extremo"," *Revista Hoy*, December 5-11, 1979, 38-39; "Polémicas origina arte que incluye carne decompuesta," *El Mercurio*, November 24, 1979.

Such violent graphic lineage was also part of Castillo and Prieto's video. Towards its end, the emergence of the legends, "the sterility of successive stains will not alleviate you," and the final one stating "Chilean Graphics," brought together the body, its location, and the role of graphic art in what amounted to a manifesto of sorts. The rituals of violence and death represented provided barren stains, emptied of their life-giving qualities and offering no atonement. The epithet, Chilean graphics, not only acted as a signature representing the larger interests of conceptual artists, but suggested a social practice of inscribing meaning on a corporeal surface. Sterility also spoke of a human landscape, which was evoked in the video's contrasts between the pastoral pastures of the green central valley filled with future prosperity and a dehumanized space of sterile repetition where bodies were dispatched and harmed. If this was a reflection on the social body, it was rendered as a desolate space marked by death, Arcadia gone wrong.

In the works of Dittborn, Gallardo, and "Grupo al Margen" the distance produced by an iterated procedure and the anonymity of the bodies displayed evoked torture as a corporeal technique of power, recasting the question of reproduction in a context of violence. In the video "Movimientos en falso," the assimilation of violence in the everyday as a routine was probed by the artists, using the rise and fall of the boxer as a patriotic metaphor for other representations of a national body in pain. If the normalization of this exceptional state was carried through the repetition of its procedures and the transformation of the body into an object, artists were reinserting into the social landscape the fragmented materiality of different corporealities. Repetition as the main element in the construction of identity laid at the center of these works, a noun and verb that could be expanded from the printed page to an actual performance or to its video reconstruction.

#### 6.4. Cross-overs: Gonzalo Mezza's Southern Cross, Lotty Rosenfeld, and the Limits of Video

The sacrificial imagery was given a different conceptual turn in the video works that Gonzalo Mezza began producing since his return to Chile in 1980. In Mezza's installations, the body, territory, landscape, and history crossed over, their borders blurred in the intersection and displacement of different means of mechanical reproduction, from photocopies to Polaroid photographs and video.

Mezza's return from Europe was marked by his participation in the Sixth Contest of the Colocadora de Valores at the Museum of Fine Arts.<sup>1472</sup> "Cruz del Sur" (Southern Cross) was a large scale video installation that was placed on the floor of the museum's main hall, receiving the natural light of the nineteenth century iron and glass ceiling above it (fig. 6.21).<sup>1473</sup> The work consisted of five enlarged photographic reproductions laid out in the shape of a Greek cross. Each image corresponded to a moment of an action whose video recording was shown on a small monitor at the 'foot' of the photographic

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<sup>1472</sup> Mezza left Chile to study in Spain in 1972, returning in 1979.

<sup>1473</sup> "Cruz del sur" is documented in Gonzalo Mezza's webpage, <http://www.mezza.cl>, under the category "installations." The work also appears documented in the article by Ana María Foxley, "Arte y energía," *Revista Hoy*, December 3-9, 1980, 41. There is a copy of the video used in the installation (also titled "cruz del sur") at Centro de Documentación La Moneda.

cross. Flanking the video was a small square sandbox containing five Polaroid photographs taken of the action displayed in a cross-like shape. At the other side of the larger cross was a square photograph of an empty beach on top of which stood a sound recorder reproducing the sound of rolling waves.

The video opened with a view of a grey sea filling the frame, followed by a zoom-out that left three horizontal bands in the horizon: sky, sea, and sand. After one minute the seascape was interrupted by the appearance of a hand in front of the camera, which lifted a black and white Polaroid with a similar image as that recorded by the camera featuring sand, sea, and sky, followed by another Polaroid of the same scene, this time bearing a compass sign with the letters “N-S-E-W.” More photographs were displayed in front of the camera, beginning with one of Mezza standing in the same location and alternatively looking towards the left, right, front and back with stretched out arms, thus facing the four cardinal points. The artist then emerged in the frame, walking on the beach from left to right of the camera, carrying five photographs that he proceeded to ceremoniously lay on the sand in a cross shape.

The cross was altered in the following sequence, as the artist took the central photograph and, walking to the water’s edge, threw it into the sea. Returning to the empty space left at center of the laid-out cross, Mezza extended his arms to the sides and began slowly rotating every few moments, facing each cardinal point in the order that had been first shown in the photographs as the camera zoomed in and out of his body with each rotation. At the end of the action, Mezza buried each of the photographs with sand, smoothing the surface, and then marking a line linking the funeral mounds with his hand first and then with his feet, leaving another precarious cross on the landscape. The artist then returned to center of the cross and left the scene walking in the direction he had entered, leaving only a view of the sea, sand, and sky beyond.

Every element of the installation and video acted as a form of mediation between the ‘original’ action and its reproduction. While the most evident mediators were technological and seemed linked in a game of mirrors and reciprocity, the video reflecting the photographs, which in turn supplanted the sand drawings, they all replaced the action of the body as a mediator in space. The human body acted as a medium between location and its experience, self and place as it became a compass offering direction. In Mezza’s “Cruz del Sur,” the body of the artist became a ‘natural’ compass, the extended arms imitating those of the magnetic finder, his visage literally ‘facing’ a particular direction. The placement of the photographs in the sand and museum (and the position of the artist’s body in them) further displaced and imitated the four cardinal points, creating multiple material constellations in the form of a cross.

The experience of space was further mediated by other geographical and historical elements as exemplified by the title of the work. Southern Cross referred to a group of four stars south of the Equator that do not seem to “descend” below the horizon (and disappear from sight) in the southern latitudes, and whose extended lines mark the southern cardinal point at all times. Mentioned by Plotemy and used as a navigational aid by European explorers from Marco Polo to Americo Vespucci, the Southern Cross was a “natural” constellation that was given a directional meaning by both travelers in the area and natives, forming a basic marker to find oneself in space.<sup>1474</sup>

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<sup>1474</sup> Though Mezza did not specifically refer to Mapuche cosmology, the Southern Cross formed an important part of it. The interactions between Western and Mapuche cosmologies, and its effects in the



The natural world acted as a mediator in more than one way. The choice of the Pacific Ocean as a natural landmark was also involved in the construction of identity. Looked in a general manner, and with a mental image of the Mercator map and Chile's location within it, the Pacific Ocean marks a specific direction in Chile, the West, the ocean bordering most of the territory on a single side (except for islands, archipelagos, fjords, and curved peninsular areas or coves). Opposite the ocean, and unseen in the video, would be the Andes Mountains, standing in place like another natural compass on the eastern cardinal point. The two act as not only as geographic borders echoing the limits of the national territory, but are also used in Chile on an everyday basis as a natural and stable form of orientation. Just like the Southern Cross' stars, seemingly immobile in the night skies, the mountain and sea could be considered fixed points of orientation in the Chilean geography, constant aspects of the landscape and determining features of the territory.

Though the repetition of the cross shape seemed to suggest at first a ineludible form of orientation, which human hands and geometry had given a linear arrangement in maps, its multiple forms of reproduction pointed to a deceptive image of naturalness and to the act of re-presentation as one of arbitrary and historically determined construction. The natural elements' connection to certain meanings in terms of location and identity were shown to be like figures on a chess board, waiting allocation and function. In a context different from the Chilean, the ocean could mark another direction, while its very relation with a cardinal point was subject to convention, its meaning dependent on the cultures and specific location of the subjects regarding it. Mezza stated at the time that he was interested in: "the human being and its geographic and cultural environment and the continental dimension that determines and frames him,"<sup>1475</sup> and the specific natural elements chosen by the artist further reflected the interconnections and multiple meanings of a site. The video's seascape corresponded to the beach of Isla Negra, the last home of the Nobel winning poet Pablo Neruda who was one of the national poets most concerned with finding a pan-American identity. Mezza's body was not only framed by the national meaning given to certain natural formations, but also by the continental and historical significance given to them.

The cross itself had other connotations. Its shape not only alluded to the constellation implied in the title, but it suggested an encounter between cultures occurring at a physical and symbolic level. The very cartographic placement and name of the constellation suggested a view from the 'north,' alluding to those first explorers who had 'discovered' the continent. The constellation's shape could further be read as the mark of the Christian cross spreading over the continent along with the conquest, joining mapping and orientation with spatial and spiritual dominion. Moreover, the crucifixion theme implied in the works of Gallardo and "Grupo al Margen" was also present in Mezza's

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founding of the nation, were traced in 1985 by the scholar Gaston Soublette in his book titled *La estrella de Chile*. Soublette argued that the "lonely" star of the Chilean flag was the Araucanian star (corresponding to Venus), which the Mapuches called Guñelfe and symbolized illumination and knowledge. Soublette interpreted the star's inclusion in the national emblem as denoting "the father of the nation's will to make a synthesis of two sapiential traditions: the Mapuche and the occidental." See "Estrella con historia," *Revista Hoy*, January 7-13, 1983, 52.

<sup>1475</sup> The phrase ends: "in a hope and possibility." Gonzalo Mezza, quoted in Foxley, "Arte y energía," 41.

reincarnations of the cross, creating a mock crucifixion that the bearded artist reproduced in all directions. According to Mezza, the Southern Cross had “an archaic meaning, of religious connotation, pain, suffering,”<sup>1476</sup> which the artist’s gestures re-inscribed in the Chilean landscape, fleetingly marking death in it.

In the 1976 project titled “Cruz y paisaje” (Cross and Landscape), Mezza had made the connection between landscape and death even more evident.<sup>1477</sup> The work projected a road linking the Atacama Desert with the cemetery of the northern highland town of Chuquicamata through the cross shape. The highway passing through the desert would be intervened with a series of blue and red crosses similar to the cemetery’s colorful and precarious wooden and metal crosses framed by the arid planes and distant mountain of the Altiplano. Though the work was never actually made, it proposed tracing a memorial highway of death, a flat processional map of memory. Like in Rosenfeld’s 1979 “mile” and Castillo’s “animitas,” this would be a trajectory joining the territory’s extremities by means of a different kind of trajectory, asserting death as another matrix of meaning.

Though Mezza’s works offered many points of comparison with European examples of Land Art and had been influenced by conceptual art abroad, they were connected to the local discussions surrounding graphic arts, their expansion into everyday concrete actions, and their relation to identity.<sup>1478</sup> In “Deshielo Venus 1,2,3” (Defrosting Venus 1,2,3) presented in 1980 at the Second Encounter of Young Art at Instituto Cultural de las Condes,<sup>1479</sup> the histories of Europe and Chile were joined through a series of displaced reproductions of the Roman copy of the Greek sculpture known as Venus of Milo, which acted as a cultural matrix (fig. 6.22).<sup>1480</sup> Mezza replicated the verticality and totemic aspect of the sculpture in three rectangular blocks of ice made from local water that had been tainted in the three colors of the Chilean flag: red, blue, and white,

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<sup>1476</sup> Gonzalo Mezza, quoted in “Gonzalo Mezza: Ecuador: Latitud Xerox,” *La Tercera*, December 6, 1981.

<sup>1477</sup> All works by Mezza are documented in his webpage, mentioned above.

<sup>1478</sup> Before leaving Chile and during his stay in Spain and Denmark, Mezza was engaged in a series of Land Art and video projects consisting of interventions in the landscape. These ranged from temporal sculptural installations of plastic and rocks along highways, to projected changes of coastal coves with Antoni Muntadas, as well as intercepting Santiago’s subway underground constructions with water and other elements. In a conceptual bent, most of Mezza’s projects were done in a similar type of gridded paper, stating the name of the project, its description, location and date in the uppermost area of the page followed below by a large projected image of the intervention, and more specific details with concise texts in the quadrants at the bottom.

<sup>1479</sup> The work had been planned in 1972 and was meant to be exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts, yet had not been carried out because as a group of unknown men had stormed the workshops of the Art Faculty of Universidad de Chile at night and destroyed the work. The story is recounted by Justo Pastor Mellado in the online text “Congelar, Focalizar... La Trama de la Historia,” in Gonzalo Mezza website, [http://www.mezza.cl/html/textos\\_text.html](http://www.mezza.cl/html/textos_text.html) (last accessed April 30, 2010).

<sup>1480</sup> The installation “Deshielo Venus 1,2,3” is documented in *Chile Arte Actual*, in page 239, and in *Revista Vanidades*, March 1, 1983.

connecting the frozen Venus reproductions to the nation.<sup>1481</sup> These were located on a low pedestal at the center of the installation and were surrounded by multiple photocopies of the image on the walls. The video presented the process of collecting the ice cubes from the ice factory's warehouse, transporting them to the exhibition space, their difficult and slippery installation, and the process of melting, the ice blocks slowly changing their form as they dripped color.

The work established parallels and contrasts between two cultural products subject to decay and cultural appreciation. The ice monoliths, serially produced in the factory, contrasted in their mechanical molds with the apparent uniqueness of the Greek marble sculpture, even though the iconic image was subject to endless duplications. The image of Venus used by the artist came from a plaster cast used at the university during academic drawing exercises, invoking the serial reproduction of Western masterpieces in a distant, poorer context for both commercial and educational purposes. While the reproduced Venus(es) suggested the resilience of the sculpture as an object of aesthetic contemplation (in spite of its broken arms), setting a Western standard of beauty in both its symbolism and art historical evaluation, its frozen monolithic and abstracted 'copies' began a parallel process of decomposition and thawing. The latter acted as 'living' sculptures subject to change in front of viewers, making their disappearance tangible. The video in turn produced yet another copy of the whole process, making even temporality an element subject to repetition. To the eternal aura of the original matrix, the monoliths and their duplicates opposed their destruction and drooling borders bleeding the colors of the Chilean flag, a low-tech third-world appropriation of a European "masterpiece."

The question of the matrix understood in conceptual and physical terms was at the center of the growing discussions surrounding video in the local art scene. Video was interpreted by artists and critics alike as a form of reproduction linked to the graphic arts, as demonstrated when Mezza's "Cruz del Sur" video installation won the first prize in the "Graphic arts" category of the Colocadora contest. While it would still take another year for the first French-Chilean Video Art Encounter to provide a distinct space for video art in the Chilean scene, it is significant that in 1980 there was still confusion regarding the medium's classification and a lack of infrastructure to institutionally support its practice in the country.<sup>1482</sup> Though the lack of technologies contributed to the late coming of video in the national scene, this was also a problem involving the role assigned to different mediums in the definition of the local avant-gardes. Mechanical reproduction was the main concept behind this demarcation of artistic borders, and video was interpreted as a continuation of a serial way of reproducing reality by other 'electronic' means.

The emphasis placed on mechanical reproduction was manifested in the series of delayed discussions revolving around graphic mediums that took place at the Taller de

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<sup>1481</sup> Originally, the water was meant to be taken from the Mapocho River in Santiago and thus indirectly from the mountain.

<sup>1482</sup> At the time Ana María Foxley mentioned how the award given to Mezza had been a surprise for many, since it was the first time that a work "whose main element is constituted by the television technology was given a prize." Foxley, "Arte y energía," 41.

Artes Visuales (TAV) from 1981 onwards.<sup>1483</sup> I use the term “delay” insofar as there had been multiple examples of continuity between the conceptual artists and earlier graphic practices that were not noticed by critics on one hand, and a re-conceptualization of mechanical reproduction from 1975 onwards on the other, at first theoretically supported only by catalogues and individual exhibitions. The situation changed in 1979 when CAL gallery began a series of talks in its premises centering on photography and the local conceptual practices, which were bolstered by the gallery’s eponymous publication, giving the subject an institutional support.<sup>1484</sup> After the gallery’s demise, it was TAV as a collectivity of printers, which continued propagating the role of reproduction, inviting artists to make performances or present talks and books related to the subject.<sup>1485</sup> In 1981,

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<sup>1483</sup> This theoretical “delay” in reflecting on the importance acquired by mechanical reproduction was not only a characteristic of TAV. In Galaz and Ivelic’s 1982 book on Chilean painting, the last section presented in a material form the problem of the evident break that the arts of the late 1970s had created in the Chilean scene. The works’ reproductions appeared largely disconnected from the rest of the text in terms of their non-pictorial appearance and because they were printed in a different section as plates. The authors formulated the problem as a question: “How to understand the interest of artists for new mediums of communication and mechanical reproduction, and the other instruments that permit the simple and rapid register of an action?,” a question they left unanswered at the time. See “En la vida y en la historia,” *Revista Hoy*, January 13-19, 1982, 34-35. This problem was taken up by Richard in an article that severely attacked the incorporation of the avant-gardes into official art history as exemplified by Galaz and Ivelic’s book. According to Richard, the conceptual artists were clearly something different from what Galaz and Ivelic were dealing with, insofar as they established a break with known artistic practices and thus refused to be incorporated into history and domesticated by earlier conventions. See Nelly Richard, ““La pintura en Chile” de Galaz e Ivelic: una instancia redefinitoria para el arte chileno,” *La Separata*, no.1 (April 1981): no page number. According to Mellado, Richard was expressing her frustration at not being “first” in publishing an (extra)official account of the movements she had helped foster, a situation she would counter with the self publication of *Una mirada sobre el arte en Chile* in 1981. Mellado also relates this event to Richard’s “imperious necessity” to create “her own apparatus of international inscription” from then on (as would happen in the 1982 Paris Biennial discussed in the Conclusion and her appearance in *Domus* a year earlier), and thus to seek international spaces where to showcase these groups. See Justo Pastor Mellado, “Pintura Plebeya y Pintura Oligarca,” in Justo Pastor Mellado webpage, <http://www.justopastormellado.cl/edicion/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=219&Itemid=28>, posted March 3, 2005 (last accessed April 30, 2010).

<sup>1484</sup> *Revista CAL* published, for example, passages from Susan Sontag’s *On Photography* translated by Adriana Valdés, who also provided a brief introduction to the problems addressed in Sontag’s text. Fragments of Benjamin’s works on reproduction and photography were also published in different numbers. From 1982 to 1983, it would be *La Separata* (associated with Galería Sur) that would continue publishing articles on photography and referring to foreign authors. Its third number was dedicated to two Chilean photographers, Jaime Goycolea (who worked with derelict urban landscapes) and Paz Errázuriz (whose works focused on portraits of marginal subjects), and included texts by Leppe, Lihn, Valdés, and Richard which made constant use of Roland Barthes’ theories on photography.

<sup>1485</sup> TAV features in Galaz and Ivelic’s 1988 *Chile Arte Actual* and is briefly mentioned by Richard in *Margins and Institutions*, yet the group received little emphasis in art historical analysis as they seemed opposed to the more rigorous conceptual trends advocated by Richard (who tended to classify the works produced by TAV artists as politically “illustrative,” the latter term given a full pejorative connotation). This was another instance of territorial demarcation within the Chilean scene, which is to this day evident in the individual artists and critics’ comments on their relationships at the time. Even in the efforts of historians to “recover” these histories can be seen the traces of this division, though the groups were more related than the artists and critics like to recognize. See for example, the series of interviews conducted by Federico Galende in *Filtraciones, Conversaciones sobre arte en Chile (de los 60s a los 80s)*.

the workshop began issuing bulletins, small publications on printing and graphic practices accompanied by talks that aimed at creating “a critical instance on a theoretical and practical level and to promote and bring together the discussion on art that exists in Chile.”<sup>1486</sup> That year TAV held a seminar on printing practices, which included the participation of Roser Bru, Gaspar Galaz, Eduardo Garreaud, and Eduardo Vilches, and was followed by Brugnoli’s talk on the last decade of plastic arts in Chile.<sup>1487</sup> These conferences were succeeded by a discussion on video centering on the recent work made by the printer Eugenio Téllez titled “La memoria” (Memory), Leppe’s performance “Prueba de artista” (Artist’s Proof), which ‘displaced’ graphic concepts onto the body of two performers who acted as matrix and copy, and a talk on photography titled “La incorporación de la fotografía en el arte chileno” (The Incorporation of Photography into Chilean Art) during which Dittborn presented his newest artist’s book titled “Fallo Fotográfico” (Photographic Ruling).

Though the passage from graphic works on paper to video and performance and back to photography might seem arbitrary, the local discussions linked these different mediums through concepts stemming directly from printing practices. The fact that the talk on video art at TAV focused on the work of a well-known printer only furthered this connection.<sup>1488</sup> As noted by Brugnoli, in Téllez’ video on memory, television had been used as “a matrix on which to work,” one that resembled “the ‘informatics’ of life itself – memory.”<sup>1489</sup> From this perspective, video art could be assimilated into the discourse of printing by reading the medium as a matrix capable of reproduction and visual inscription as it enabled the recording of everyday events and experiences that could then be multiplied or edited. Video could be used as an expanded mnemonic device, withholding information in an electronic manner, thus acting as a technologically advanced “Wunderblock.”

Such translations between printing concepts and other forms of reproduction were echoed in Dittborn’s *Fallo Fotográfico*. The book was conceived as a printing edition that centered on the relationships between photography and graphic practices, from traditional printing techniques to expanded instances of reproduction. The book was structured as a Surrealist inspired collage of associations in which texts were juxtaposed

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<sup>1486</sup> Pedro Millar, quoted in “Discutir y difundir,” *Revista Hoy*, August 5-11, 1981, 46.

<sup>1487</sup> Brugnoli became the self-appointed spokesperson of TAV and continued promoting its relevance in the scene through his writings. The increased importance of the workshop can be seen in the series of articles in which it was featured in 1981, such as “Los brotes de la plástica,” *Revista Hoy*, September 23-29, 1981, 41-42.

<sup>1488</sup> Zurita and the writer Jorge Edwards collaborated in Téllez’ 1981 video. The first twelve minutes displayed the beach, where the words “la memoria” (memory) had been traced in the sand and were slowly erased by waves. Afterwards, Zurita appeared talking of his encephalogram and the connection of his poetry to Dante and the Divine Comedy, focusing in particular on Purgatory. Edwards, who had written in 1973 a book titled *Persona Non Grata. A Memoir of Disenchantment with the Cuban Revolution* after his stay in Cuba as an ambassador of Chile during Allende’s government, was the filmed reminiscing of the past and reflecting on time. A copy of Téllez’ video is found at the library of Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago.

<sup>1489</sup> Brugnoli, quoted in “Los brotes de la plástica,” 42.

to disparate images often taken from the press. The title itself and the accompanying reproductions in the first pages set the tone of the book's quest by first associating photography with an objective record of reality. Photography was interpreted as providing evidence and a sense of truth, as in the photographic ruling that determines the winner in a horse race. Yet Dittborn then quoted Heraclitus' famous dictum about change to counter such a position of neutrality, suggesting that even in mechanical repetition (entering the same river twice) there was an alteration and distance from the 'original.' As in earlier publications by the artist, there were a series of dedications, most notably one to Kay, an influence that was asserted in the multiple passages from *Del espacio de acá* quoted in Dittborn's book.<sup>1490</sup> Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, and Susan Sontag's works on photography were also cited, particularly the passages dealing with questions of authenticity, mass reproduction, the copy and loss of artistic "aura" (Benjamin), the relationship between life, death, the past and mortality (Sontag), and the relationship between referent and copy, representation, and the photographic "punctum" (Barthes).

These passages were interspersed with Dittborn's own comments and a series of dictionary quotes. The latter brought together the words "graph" with "impression" under the repeated notions of "registering" and "fixing." The definitions came from the *Diccionario de la Real Academia* (Dictionary of the Royal Academy) and *Larousse Encyclopedia*, endowing the quotes with a sense of authority. Yet, within each definition there were multiple interpretations, opening up the words' meanings according to their context. In the case of "graph," the three definitions provided pointed to the ideas of signaling with an incision, registering sounds, and fixing a particular feeling in the 'disposition' of a person. The word "impression" was in turn related to fixing another person's state through persuasion, exposing a surface to the action of physical vibrations that left a mark, and deeply stirring a person's disposition.<sup>1491</sup> A sense of circularity, repetition and variation was created as the final meaning of the words was delayed in the process of quoting. Yet, though referring to another source and another sign, the words' meaning was not completely diffused, but rather opened up as an ambiguous passage between different ways of imprinting something onto another surface. This idea was further developed in the text's multiple references to Veronica's veil and the translation of a corporeal image through bodily fluids to a canvas, as if the Christian image was a prototype and early graphic model of reproduction.

Also published in the book were several responses by different Chilean artists and writers to the question: "What is photography?" The choice of artists and variety of replies pointed to the direction in which Dittborn was laying out the relationships

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<sup>1490</sup> The book was dedicated to four persons or instances related with photography: the "Polaroid of an echogram" of Dittborn's pregnant wife reproducing the body of his son, the publication "Quebrantahuesos" to which Kay and Dittborn had been associated and the "tradition" it had begun in the 1950s (a tradition of tampering with the printed media and producing 'news' through Surrealist means), a dedication to José Muga, a graphic photographer of *Revista VEA* (from where many of Dittborn's images were derived, along with the narrative for the video "Lo que vemos en la cumbre del Corona"), and finally, Ronald Kay.

<sup>1491</sup> Dittborn also associated the two words with two different patriarchal sources of photography. Daguerre was tied to "impression," while Niépce was linked to "graph," possibly since the former had started out as a painter of dioramas, while the latter was a draughtsman attempting to find an easier way of making engravings.

between graphic arts and mechanical reproduction in the Chilean avant-garde scene, and the artists whom he believed were working in a similar manner.<sup>1492</sup> Leppe, Altamirano, Gallardo, and Mezza all participated, as did the critics and theorists Valdés, Richard, and Lihn.<sup>1493</sup> Altamirano presented the photograph of a man with a caption identifying him as “Juan Francisco González, de carne y hueso, tramado” (Juan Francisco González, of flesh and bones, woven), and juxtaposed his own signature with the statement of his profession: “Carlos Altamirano. Landscape artist,” establishing as in 1978 a discursive relationship between the two authors. At the time, Altamirano was working in his series of “histories” of Chilean art and related actions, which were re-edited in the few video works he produced during those years.<sup>1494</sup> These included “Altamirano artista chileno” (Altamirano Chilean Artist), a run taken by the artist in downtown Santiago ending at the steps of the Museum of Fine Arts. The whole trajectory was recorded by the running artist with a handheld camera, and the video presented a jumbled map of the urban landscape as the continuity of the images was upset by the gasping movements of the artist’s body. Throughout the run, Altamirano repeated the title’s words as if reciting a mantra and convincing himself of his own status as he attempted to reach the physical apex of artistic official recognition.

Most artists presented as an answer aspects of their current work that dealt with reproduction and the varied expanded concepts of printing practices. Leppe’s entry posited a displaced quote consisting of a text handwritten by his mother, which recalled an “unhappy childhood, a marvelous childhood; unforgettable moments that I spent with my son in those years that will not return.”<sup>1495</sup> These moments were fixed and “perpetuated” on photographs that had been, nevertheless, “violently taken away by the father of my son.”<sup>1496</sup> The enlarged phrase “we do not have an album,”<sup>1497</sup> was reaffirmed by Leppe’s mother last phrase, “he took them and left me without you,” memory being tied to a physical object, to the series of past traces embodied in the photographic record. If Leppe was quoting not only his mother but his own works, Gallardo’s response was in turn based on photographs taken at the slaughterhouse with a series of cow’s bodies laid on the floor, while Mezza’s contribution focused on a Polaroid of the artist and his

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<sup>1492</sup> If in 1980 Dittborn had laid out a first list of “pioneers,” this was enlarged and edited in 1982.

<sup>1493</sup> By 1985, Leppe had distanced himself from Dittborn, critiquing the latter’s approach to the interpretation of his own work as manifested in Dittborn’s books. In a later interview, Leppe stated that Dittborn’s “brutal attempt to make conscious mechanisms of the work’s structure, in other words, the forcing us to innocently believe in what he, as artist, considers to be the key when confronting his works, kills, as the main door of access to observe it, the pleasure of a happy, surprising encounter. [Dittborn] (...) shuts down [desire] with theoretical impositions and an obsessive strategy of control.” Carlos Leppe, quoted in Matías Silva, “Carlos Leppe: el regreso de un transgresor,” *Revista Capital*, April-May 1998, 98-101.

<sup>1494</sup> The painting by González which Altamirano had used in his 1980 Graphic Salon awarded series was also the subject of a video that is discussed in the Conclusion.

<sup>1495</sup> Text by Catalina Arroyo in Eugenio Dittborn, *Fallo Fotográfico* (Santiago: no publisher, 1981), 72.

<sup>1496</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1497</sup> *Ibid.*

daughter taken in another country and marked by the signs N-S-E-W, the southern letter accompanied by the words “Chile” and “earth.”

A different kind of response came from the cinematographer Carlos Flores, with whom Dittborn had begun working in a series of video projects.<sup>1498</sup> His answer deviated from a specific reference to the photographic medium, insofar as it pointed instead to the production of images coming from telecommunications and a personal perspective. Speaking of photography as “an image that invents a body for us” and “an image that allows us to share the past,”<sup>1499</sup> Flores’ answer joined the medium to a larger notion of image production that interfaced with a wider range of media and systems of communication. His response was echoed in Richard’s suggestion that photography was both “a fraction of the real ciphered in a look” and “the objectification of a gaze turned body or landscape.”<sup>1500</sup> In both cases, the problem of medium specificity implied in Dittborn’s question was supplanted by the general problem of ‘recording’ in a visual form a particular aspect of reality, making of the photographic act less the question of a specific technology and material procedure than a fluid action for visually capturing reality. The limits of graphic procedures and the final “photographic ruling” were thus also deferred in Dittborn’s book, suggesting instead the expansion and multiple interpretations of these concepts.

This graphic extension and its connection to video were made explicit in a co-authored text published by *La Separata* in 1982. Reflecting Dittborn’s Surrealist strategies of image and text construction, the text titled “Fernando Balcells, Eugenio Dittborn, Carlos Flores, Antonio Gil, Nelly Richard, Adriana Valdés: 45 módulos a propósito de HABEAS CORPUS de Mario Fonseca V,”<sup>1501</sup> dealt with Mario Fonseca’s work titled “Habeas Corpus” exhibited at Galería Sur in May that year. The designer<sup>1502</sup> and artist has presented a series of photographic interventions in which his face was half-hidden by portraits of others such as Andy Warhol, Samuel Beckett, Francis Bacon, as well as anonymous people (fig. 6.23).<sup>1503</sup> The surrogate portraits were replaced at times with black rectangular frames, mud or broken pieces of glass, all veiling the artist’s face. The theme of disappearance was repeated in three videos where the artist denied or

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<sup>1498</sup> One of the projects involved a video resembling an exquisite corpse literally sent back and forth between Flores, Dittborn, and Juan Downey, who was living in New York at the time. The work was aptly titled “Satelitenis.”

<sup>1499</sup> Carlos Flores quoted in Dittborn, *Fallo Fotográfico*, 87.

<sup>1500</sup> Richard quoted in Dittborn, 88.

<sup>1501</sup> The title’s translation is, “Fernando Balcells, Eugenio Dittborn, Carlos Flores, Antonio Gil, Nelly Richard, Adriana Valdés: 45 modules regarding Mario Fonseca V.’s HABEAS CORPUS.”

<sup>1502</sup> Fonseca had designed Ronald Kay’s *Del espacio de acá* and was working at the time on Zurita’s second book of poems titled *Anteparaiso*. Zurita wrote a text regarding Fonseca’s exhibition and some passages were published in *Revista Apsi*. See Raúl Zurita, “Habeas corpus,” *Revista Apsi*, May 20-31, 1982, 15.

<sup>1503</sup> Several works from the exhibition “Habeas corpus” are documented in magazines of the time, as in the brief section on culture in *Revista Hoy*, February 24-March 2, 1982, in page 54, where Fonseca poses next to two “blacked out” portraits, or in the article “El yo: ¿meta o punta de partida?,” *Revista Hoy*, May 26-June 1, 1982, 41. There is a special section in *Revista Apsi*’s article mentioned above with more portraits.



effaced his identity, by either being shown only from the back, hiding behind his hand, or in “Canto de la ballena jorobada” (Song of the Humpback Whale) “assuming the terrified scream of this mammal,”<sup>1504</sup> while having the animal’s image infinitely delayed through the repetition of multiple Polaroid portraits as in a game of endless mirrors.

Fonseca’s use of the Latin phrase “you shall have the body” installed a cruel irony in the dictatorial context. The notion of securing an individual’s freedom from unlawful and arbitrary detention through a legal petition to ‘appear’ in court was hardly respected in Chile, with people regularly going amiss, being secluded without rights to defense or release, their bodies denied presence and even the right to exist. The insistent appearance and disappearance of the artist’s body in the videos and photographs exacerbated these acts of corporeal denial, his double presence and absence pointing to what several writers described as “censorship.”<sup>1505</sup> According to Zurita, the irony in Fonseca’s work extended to the mediums used, insofar as the multiple forms of recording were unable to “make present (...) a face that finally does not make itself present.”<sup>1506</sup> While video, cinema, and photography were linked through their ability to momentarily impress and inscribe an image, for the poet these different forms of registering reality only revealed their conventions and the precariousness of their repetition. They could not produce bodies or evidence of their identity, but only generate displaced and incomplete visual traces.

The technological connections made among different modes of mechanical reproduction were also present in *La Separata*’s collaborative text. In the series of fragmentary notes and quotes from other authors, photography and video were joined through the notions of displacement and an ambiguous identity, which Fonseca’s work made evident. These mediums of reproduction produced doubles, disguises, and dislocated repetitions, as seen in Fonseca’s multiple personalities and his adoption of different “personas” like masks and make-up. Concepts like photographic revelation and its related delay in making the portrait emerge (as in a Polaroid) were associated by some of the authors with video’s displacement of the television’s image, which in turn could be considered another transformation of an original scene. Two of the most significant fragments established a hierarchy of mediums and its immediate inversion by asserting that, “The Polaroid is the cardiac pacemaker of video,” and “The Polaroid is to photography what video is to cinema: its sketch pad, its next step.” The Polaroid’s “instantaneous” rendition of an image was compared to a last technological breath now supplanted by the immediacy of video, its form of offering a “testimony” being reduced to a “cheap” option. Video was both a preliminary study and an advance over cinema and other forms of recording, insofar as its hybrid form of mediation and connections to television made it less pure than film, reduced to the margins of art. Yet this rapid outline also presented an apparently more direct form of documentation than cinema, exceeding its boundaries and surpassing it.

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<sup>1504</sup> “El yo: ¿meta o punta de partida?,” *Revista Hoy*, May 26-June 1, 1982, 41.

<sup>1505</sup> The phrase was used in both *La Separata* and in *Revista Apsi*, 14, while “self-censorship” was also used in the former and in *Revista Hoy*.

<sup>1506</sup> Zurita, 15.

These reflections on the medium were given local characteristics connected to the body. For Fonseca, his face was an analogy of the “social face,”<sup>1507</sup> his corporeality a stand-in for the social body, and its disappearance in the reproductions related to those of others. Though Fonseca’s works could be compared to the videos of Peter Campus where the author appears and disappears in multiple guises, the body technologically attacked, destroyed, or transformed in these processes, Fonseca’s work went beyond these subjective reflections on personal (or a universally human) identity. If Chilean video art could be considered “narcissistic,”<sup>1508</sup> as it took the individual subject as its object (as in Leppe and Fonseca) and at the same time revealed in local self-references, this form of identification was tied to the notions of inscription and the social body as frames of identity.<sup>1509</sup> Loosing oneself in the mirror’s repetitions was less about exploring feedback possibilities on one hand, or finding self-satisfaction or one-self as a whole entity on the other, than about recognizing the distance from such reflections and implicating another’s gaze in the act of looking and seeing. These self-reflecting videos solicited other witnesses for these acts of disappearances and violence, graphing those gazes into the body and reflecting them back. The body and its reproductions were not produced in a void, but received their social markings in concrete contexts.

If video could be considered a prolongation of graphic procedures in its own forms of editing, this fluid form of reproduction also presented differences from them. Though there was a growing local discussion spurred by the French-Chilean Encounter regarding how video was related to other mediums, there was little interest at the time in how it formally and technically differed from modern photography and cinema, and even from “art” and its experience. Thus, most critics and artists saw continuity among these mechanical mediums, with video being hyphenated to “art” when it reflected an “expressive prolongation of poets or plastic artists,”<sup>1510</sup> or seen as an extension of the previous graphic-derived, social critique of the conceptual artists (as in Richard’s view). Little was said of how video’s surface of inscription was electronic rather than photographic.<sup>1511</sup> In early video, both the process of inscription of the moving image and its

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<sup>1507</sup> Mario Fonseca, quoted in “El yo: ¿meta o punto de partida?,” 41.

<sup>1508</sup> Zurita, for example, used the myth of Narcissus to refer to Fonseca’s work. Narcissism though, could also apply to the fact that most of these works dealt with Chilean subject matter.

<sup>1509</sup> It is interesting to note here that Downey, who participated in the Chilean-French Video Art Encounters by sending several video works each year, had established in the early 1970s a relationship between the electronic system of video and the human body, particularly its nervous system. See, Juan Downey, “Technology and Beyond,” *Radical Software* II, no. 5 Video and Environment, (Winter 1973): 2-3.

<sup>1510</sup> Silva, 43.

<sup>1511</sup> One of the few articles that dealt with the electronic basis of video was in part the result of an interview with the French artist Patrick Prado, who showcased some works in the Third Encounter. The article’s author, Marco Antonio Moreno, noted that “video is an *electronic* medium of image reproduction which is shown, whether one likes it or not, through a monitor or television set,” and argued that even though video was used around the world, there was still international confusion about it as an artistic medium. According to Moreno, in Chile this situation of “artistic anarchy” was aggravated by the fact that national video makers had “a total lack of knowledge of the medium (because of lack of information and dialogue); and because of the indifference it awakens in art criticism.” See Marco Antonio Moreno, “...Entre el sonido y la furia...,” *Revista Pluma y Pincel*, no. 11 (December, 1983): 21-24.

reproduction were subject to a circuit of electric signals, the image being unstable and subject to magnetic and electronic alteration. Though the tape or “master” could still in the 1980s be considered a matrix,<sup>1512</sup> to pinpoint the existence of an original in video was more complicated, not to mention its dependence on multiple mechanical apparatuses for the images’ appearance, making it site-less and sited at the same time. Authorship could also be fragile in a video work, as Dittborn’s appropriated television images suggested, as much as the establishment of a concrete genre used. Though not fully theorized, it was this fluid and ambiguous aspect of video, combined with its reproductive qualities (both in the sense of reproducing the surface of an image and the video’s own reproducibility through tape copies), which attracted many conceptual artists in Chile to the medium. Whether the subject was the artist’s body, a television program, or landscapes, video was regarded as a form of mediation with fluid borders, an electronic margin within art.

The question of boundaries, the matrix, and repetition in video and in life was part of Mezza’s 1981 installation “N-S-E-O de Chile” (N-S-E-W if Chile), presented at the Segundo Concurso Arte-Industria (Second Art-Industry Contest). The contest paired artists with a particular industrial manufacturer that provided plastic, tiles, cement, steel, wood and other products in order to produce an art work. Mezza joined the printing enterprise Xerox de Chile S.A., which had brought the first color printing machines to South America. Using the Xerox color machines found in Ecuador, Mezza had printed four hundred photocopies of four different intervened Chilean landscapes (fig. 6.24).<sup>1513</sup> Each photograph contained a smaller reproduction of a white-clad Mezza posing with his arms extended in a cross-sign, facing different directions, which he related with the four cardinal points. North was connected to the Atacama desert’s vast expanse of plains framed by the mountains and sky, while South was related to the white empty plains of the Antarctic, East joined to the ridges and snow of the Andes mountains, and West to the Pacific Ocean framed by the beach.

Each reproduction was further connected to a specific color and a natural element. Red and fire stood for the desert, white and air for the frozen Antarctic landscape, green and earth for the mountain, and finally blue and water for the sea. In the installation, a photocopying machine was presented next to rows of reproductions hanging in single columns from the top of the ceiling, spilling down the floor. More copies were provided by Mezza in stacks below the photocopying machine to be distributed among the museum goers,<sup>1514</sup> while a television monitor nearby showcased a video recording the making of the work.

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<sup>1512</sup> Several works by Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider used the term “matrix” in their early video installations, yet the original was always altered through varying temporal duration or visual interruptions.

<sup>1513</sup> The four images used by Mezza in his installation “N-S-E-O de Chile” appear in the article in *Revista Vanidades*, and still images from the video are shown in *Chile Arte Actual* in page 240.

<sup>1514</sup> The exhibition catalogue’s text called this a ‘way to integrate the public in a participative action (...) breaking with the idea of a single work.’ *Segundo Encuentro Arte/Industria 1981* (Santiago: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1981), n o page number. The action could be seen as anticipating Félix Gonzalez Torres’ stacks of repeated images for the viewers to take, though Mezza’s reproduction only suggested their infinite reproduction.

While the association of the four cardinal points with specific natural formations in the Chilean territory that seemed to resemble the four natural elements had a mystic content to it<sup>1515</sup> and oversimplified the national landscape, the connection between the images and the notion of matrix complicated those relations. Each physical element of the work provided its own matrix and instance of mechanical reproduction, whether it was the original collaged photographs that then became the source of the installation, the video detailing the process of printing and thus of the art work's production, the machine allowing the factual reproduction of such images, or even Mezza's repeated gestures. If each component suggested an act of mediation and deferred the notion of a preexisting model, the landmarks could also be read as mediated "matrixes" when they were connected "to the limits of Chile."<sup>1516</sup> Though they might appear as original sources of national identity, natural wombs defining the bodies and sites within it as an authentic mother-land, the very act of receiving names and directional tags changed the landscapes' contours. To be named and distinguished as a cardinal point, to be given direction, and to be considered a frame for identity, mountains and desert and ice and ocean required a series of subjects constructing their meaning, repeating and re-inscribing their borders.

The persistent need to 'fix' unstable limits in order to provide a mould for identity literally received a re-edition in 1980 when Guillermo Lagos published a second expanded edition of his book *Historia de las Fronteras de Chile* (History of Chile's Frontiers). While the 'original' edition of 1966 had recounted the changing limits of the nation from a historical perspective and focused on the disputes with Peru, the second edition had expanded the subject by including the changing form of the nation through the recent clashes with Argentina. Aiming to "divulge how the limits of our Republic have been formed and consolidated,"<sup>1517</sup> the book revealed how even frontiers had histories and acted like bodies growing and developing, aging and dying with the passage of time. Like Mezza's landscapes, geographic borders were less natural than socially produced as frontiers, its elements subject to transformation.

In Mezza's works the body acted as a medium through which notions of space, location, and placement became actual and concrete. The body was shown as inscribing meaning in space, articulating its relations as a compass, but also as being produced by these concepts and forms. In this intertwined relation, the cross-shape pose adopted by the artist, and that his installations constantly reiterated, was not only connected to the compass' directions or even to a specific Christological content. Though the pose actualized in a deferred form the suffering of Jesus in Calvary, and inserted pain into the images of the Chilean landscape, there was another matrix producing such Passion imagery that connected the home and the motherland to the mother of Christ. The Catholic Church acted as the fundamental matrix guiding the concept of a national family as an imagined community of individuals joined through their faith. United under the sign of the cross, the territory was identified with a Christian body with Christ at its head and

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<sup>1515</sup> Mezza's own interpretation of "water, earth, air, not as static ambiances but as living forces in contact with the human being," supported that alchemic and ecological relation. Mezza, quoted in Foxley, 42.

<sup>1516</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1517</sup> Guillermo Lagos, quoted in Enrique Gajardo Villarroel, "Guillermo Lagos: fronteras de Chile," *El Mercurio*, December 14, 1980.

protected by the Virgin and her army of valiant sons. Though this could be a suffering body, it was a unified one, like the holy family.

These Christian bodies were also mediated bodies, visualized through biblical and historical narratives that had been given corporeal form through art and the media. The Christian family as matrix, whose worldly translation was the body of the church understood as an assembly led by its contemporary father, the pope, was alluded to in Mezza's installation for the 1981 International Biennial of Valparaíso titled "A Juan Pablo II" (To John Paul II).<sup>1518</sup> Mezza hung from the ceiling of one gallery a cross made up of a series of photocopies reproducing the cover of *Time* magazine of May 25, 1981, featuring the Pope John Paul II leaning over a bodyguard after receiving a gunshot. The artist also placed candles next to the cross and included a video with related images of the event coming from the media (fig. 6.25).<sup>1519</sup> While Mezza's cross could be read as an impermanent memorial to the Pope, whose actual corporeal suffering was associated with that of Christ's crucifixion, the installation also played with the sensationalism of the *Times*' cover and the relationship between document and the effects of its reproduction. The cover had directly associated the attack with an act of terrorism, stressing its arbitrariness and augmenting its impact through the documentary photographs provided as evidence of the crime scene. But the image of the Pope selected for the *Times*' cover was also iconic, not only in its display of human suffering, but in its particular arrangement recalling the Pietá iconography, as if life was imitating art. In its contemporary version, the shepherd of the Christian flock laid in the arms of his bodyguards, recalling the limp body of Christ in his mother's arms, creating a translation of symbols and archetypes that could recall in the Chilean context the Pietá images of Dittborn. But if Dittborn had turned the model of the Christian family into the deadly result of a contemporary boxing fight, making the religious prototype banal, Mezza's appropriation of the image returned it to its environmental matrix in terms of its Vatican surroundings.

The intersection of Christian martyrology and the body politic in the Chilean context had deeper implications touching upon the question of torture and disappearance. In 1982, the northern poet Carlos Amador Marchant crucified himself for two hours on a beach in Arica in the first region, in an action meant to critique the censorship on artists in the nation.<sup>1520</sup> While families of disappeared people had tied themselves with chains to public buildings and done hunger strikes, Marchant's act of self-torment pushed the Christian symbol of pain even further. Yet it would be an event in 1983 that captured the attention not only of the media but of artists alike, and demonstrated the desperate condition of the human rights situation in the nation, pointing to the limits of the conceptual artists' extension of graphic concepts into everyday life.

On November 11, 1983, Sebastián Acevedo Becerra immolated himself in front of Concepción Cathedral shouting that his children be returned to him by the CNI (Central Nacional de Informaciones, "National Center of Information," a secret police).

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<sup>1518</sup> Many other installations and projects by Mezza during the 1980s worked on the connection between the Christian suffering body and the Chilean nation using maps and crosses.

<sup>1519</sup> The installation "A Juan Pablo II" is documented in *Revista Vanidades*.

<sup>1520</sup> According to *El Mercurio*, the poet was promoting with this action his new book of poems *Después de mi Casa*. See "Carlos Marchant: poeta se ató a un madero," *El Mercurio*, November 14, 1982.

Two days before, the fifty-year old man's daughter and son had been taken by a group of unidentified men under the charge of "terrorists" after beating up their father. The day before his immolation, Acevedo had written a letter that he handed to the Superintendent of Concepción asking for information regarding the whereabouts of his children for whose lives he feared, since it was known that the CNI had secret outposts for detention and torture in the city. After receiving a stamped receipt of the letter and no information, Acevedo went to the offices of *Revista Hoy* to request help from them and threatened to burn himself. The lack of response from the city's authorities and the media took him to the archbishop's office by the cathedral where, standing next to a white cross that had been placed in the area as a sign of peaceful reconciliation, Acevedo proceeded to cover himself in a mixture of gasoline. Acevedo then drew with a piece of chalk a line on the ground, menacing others not to cross that boundary. After a crowd had gathered at the site and a policeman tried to approach Acevedo, he lighted his body, being quickly consumed in flames. Acevedo managed to cross the street and collapse in front of the cathedral, where he continued burning until he was taken to the hospital, dying eight hours later. His children were released by the secret police later that day.

The event prompted the creation of a human rights and anti-torture movement supported by the church bearing Acevedo's name, which became known for the motto "never again," as well as a video produced by Lotty Rosenfeld in 1985. Titled "Paz para Sebastián Acevedo" (Peace for Sebastián Acevedo), the video began by juxtaposing images of white crosses against dark backgrounds with shots of the first page in *Revista Hoy*'s article on the immolation (fig. 6.26).<sup>1521</sup> Alerted by Acevedo, the magazine had been the only media to capture the event as it occurred, and the photograph of Acevedo's prone body, engulfed in large flames, only one leg visible, surrounded by men looking at the scene and a lone man approaching with an fire extinguisher, became the event's iconic image. Shifting between the distanced photographic views of Acevedo's burning body, close-ups of the grainy image showing a dark flaming mass, and the title and subtitles of the article ("Concepción. A father's immolation. Worker from Concepción sacrifices himself asking the CNI to liberate his children"), the video created a contrast between the desires to see embedded in the photographic document and the negation of vision as exemplified in the authorities' responses to the case and the constant violation of human rights in Chile. The photograph's close-ups in Rosenfeld's video denied the viewer the invitation to become a witness of Acevedo's self-sacrifice, his flaming body becoming a stain in the image, the document's evidence retreating in the closeness of death.

But as Acevedo's body was lost and diffused in the blown-up version of its photographic reproduction, it became not only a sign of death, but took over the place of other tortured bodies hidden from view in Chile. The repetition of the image and the video's title, the latter appearing eight times in white letters against a dark field in both Spanish and English,<sup>1522</sup> not only opposed the corporeal torment and physical sacrifice of

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<sup>1521</sup> The video "Paz para Sebastián Acevedo" can be found in Antología Digital. A copy of the work can be found at Centro de Documentación La Moneda. The video is also documented in Rosenfeld's *Desacato*, in pages 41 and 74.

<sup>1522</sup> The inclusion of English titles also suggests that by 1985, artistic production in Chile was no longer merely looking at a local audience, or even Spanish-speaking, but at a more ample international one. This theme of how the vanguard got exported will be treated in the Conclusion.

Acevedo with the distance of the media recording the event, but invoked Acevedo's name like that of a martyr. His own sacrifice by fire recalled the origins of the word martyr: a witness, bringing light to what has remained in darkness.

Rosenfeld appeared briefly towards the video's end making a white cross on the pavement of a highway leading to the ocean. Standing over the cross for some seconds and then disappearing, the artist's body became a precarious funerary marker, a witness to death. Her presence was like that of a ghost, a vertical sign of mortality stopping traffic, joining symbolically the living and the dead, while the cross remained a solitary mark on the road. The video reiterated the formal motif found in Rosenfeld's works and crosses of 1979, even quoting the Manquehue Avenue intervention, thus linking these two acts of spatial transgression within the urban everyday setting as attempts to merge art and life. But the border crossed by Acevedo was a frontier separating life and death for concrete bodies with specific names living and dying in particular places. While the Chilean vanguards had sought the confusion of artistic and symbolic borders trying to identify with the margins of the body politic as a site of political contestation, other bodies were also performing acts of transgression and sacrifice in their everyday lives. For Acevedo, an actual limit had been reached and a real line had been crossed, a limit of physical, emotional, psychological and political resistance.

Acevedo's image as recuperated by Rosenfeld and the human rights movements that became even more vocal after 1983 in Chile, presented a changed national landscape. This was no longer a metaphorical Calvary, an urban way of the Cross, or even a deserted and arid Purgatory, but an image of Hell, filled with flames and real tortured bodies. This was also a land- and body-scape that diverged from the visions of plenty and prosperity, peace and reconciliation promoted not only by the government but even opposition groups, where memory was a blank surface ready to be filled with fleeting inscriptions. Instead, Acevedo's burning image inverted this situation by giving body to memory, materializing the hidden, and using the media to present it over and over again.

## 6.5. The Limits of the Medium

The question of memory and its relation to the notion of inscription is important in understanding the Chilean conceptual trends for several reasons. On one hand, it is related to what has been generally described by historians in Chile as one of their most remarkable characteristics: the "displacement of supports and erasure of frontiers between limits"<sup>1523</sup> in the words of Richard, or as more bluntly phrased by Mellado, the "displacement of traditional printing techniques."<sup>1524</sup> Yet this blurring of limits and the

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<sup>1523</sup> This is the title of one of *Margins and Institutions*' chapters, which is accompanied by a photograph of Carlos Leppe's "Prueba de artista" (Artist's Proof), using the photograph of the 'edited' artist's body as evidence of the translation occurring between printing concepts and corporeal supports.

<sup>1524</sup> The importance assigned by Mellado to the displacement of printing concepts, which he has elaborated in multiple texts beginning in 1984 and then more articulately during the 1990s and 2000s, has influenced later historians, including myself. Though Mellado has made of this displacement a central point of his characterization of the period's art, emphasizing its psychoanalytic origin and thus distancing himself from Richard, while constantly questioning her arguments, he was also influenced by Richard's categorizations and Kay's writings. Thus in 2003, and quoting a text written by him ten years earlier, Mellado stated that

emphasis given from 1974 onwards in the Chilean artistic scene to graphic representation and later on to video was intimately connected to the contestation of the images and histories regarding national identity repeatedly expounded by the official media and the government. As the dictatorship was defining its borders by using stark oppositions, from the ideological ‘us’ versus foreign Communism to the territorial ‘us’ versus the neighbors beyond the mountain, it defined clear frontiers and marked out its symbolic and spatial territory. These messages were continuously expounded through multiple mediums, from the contours of the new and ever changing geopolitical maps to the articles and photographs featuring a progressive nation in the printed media, and were given spatial form through the tracing of highways and new urban developments. The borders of national identity were also reasserted through public displays that went from exhibitions<sup>1525</sup> to televised advertisements, as well as in the overt and disguised physical forms of disappearance, torture, and murder. In these acts of marking, the body politic was identified by the regime with a concrete location and specific bodies, each inscription and erasure signaling who belonged where, whether it was in the realms of life and death, within or without the nation’s territory, or at its center or on its margins.

A similar transposition of concepts and corpo-realities was performed in the art scene. The nation was envisioned by artists like Leppe, Dittborn, Altamirano, Rosenfeld, and Mezza as a morphing body and space manifesting the breaks, limits, and violence of current and past history. These marks could appear as physical scars and symbolic cuts or, if these acts of inscription were repressed and hidden from view, as displaced signs of trauma. For Chilean conceptual artists, to inscribe was to remember, an act that as the government well knew needed to be constantly iterated, the lines of identity and of the nation continuously redrawn in order to resemble a stable entity. But that very repetition could also speak of a lack, a missing element, or of disorder within order, just like the contour line in a map could be read as being both within and without the space it created, generating ambiguity about its placement. To remember and to inscribe was associated in the works of Chilean conceptual artists with the reconstitution of a crime scene, tracing the contours of missing bodies, going back to a moment already gone and delayed again and again. These inscriptions were ways to mark the graves of the dead and to delimit another veiled social landscape.

On the other hand, marking and memory were related aspects in the creation of the new avant-garde. Just like the dictatorship was marking borders, the Chilean conceptual artists were inscribing their own. The graphic model was appropriated by

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besides the graphic displacement, Chilean art in the late 1970s was distinguished by the “irruption of photography in artistic supports” and “the extension of representative supports to the (...) the social body as a creative support.” In this way, Mellado was perhaps unconsciously replicating some of the main characteristics that Richard had already developed in her 1981 text *Una mirada sobre el arte en Chile, octubre 1981*. See Justo Pastor Mellado, “Notas sobre Omaha (III),” in Justo Pastor Mellado webpage, <http://www.justopastormellado.cl/edicion/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=168&Itemid=28>, posted January 15, 2005 (last accessed April 30, 2010).

<sup>1525</sup> These were not merely exhibitions restricted to a high cultural context, but as demonstrated by the photograph used by Dittborn in *La Separata*’s first number, they could be also found on the streets. The photograph displayed a downtown building housing the “Almacenes Paris” department store which had on all sides and windows large advertisements of the different brands sold there. The advertisements were displayed as if on a grid, neatly displaying its contents.



artists and a few critics, particularly Richard, to distinguish past artistic models from the new, demarcating the boundaries of a different approach to the image, art making, and political commitment.<sup>1526</sup> These efforts were envisioned during the 1970s and early 1980s as being eminently Chilean, tied to national identity and its re-definition. Such identity was in turn determined by the dictatorship and the break it had generated on all aspects of life, including art and its association with traditional forms. This tradition was characterized as dependent on foreign artistic models, importing European (and after the 1950s, North American) examples that were replicated in the local context. To be truly avant-garde not only meant to be political and anti-dictatorial, but to seek an ‘original’ artistic identity that revolved around national problems and local history.<sup>1527</sup>

Graphic arts, particularly printing and photography, were reconceived by these artists as a model for action and the inscription of different versions of national identity, belonging, and memory. The inscriptive gesture implied in the word “graphic” was at first associated with framing, editing, and parceling reality by positing stark limits and establishing a presence (of violence, of life, of a nation) through lines, stains, or punctures in a surface. The graphic model was further related to reproduction and the concept of edition was associated with the production of copies stemming from an original source formed by a matrix. But just like an edition could be understood as a series of repeated gestures, the matrix found its parallel in other expanded images of origins. These symbolic matrixes could include the mother-land and mountains as sites of identity, or pass through the city, its grid, and traffic signs, and even extend towards other mediums’ characteristics such as video’s feedback and circular possibilities. In the context of identity and memory, the matrix was questioned by artists in its apparent wholeness and immutability, the repeated copies derived from it being less mirror-like duplicates than alterations or deviations from the assumed original. The idea of matrix was turned more into the act of repetition needed to confirm and disavow a certain order.

These conceptual translations took an expanded physical form from 1979 onwards, when graphic inscriptions were given three dimensions. “To mark” was understood as an intervention in a certain space, whether this was a flat surface or the everyday world. Unlike Allan Kaprow’s extension of painting into the quotidian through the Happening’s action, in Chile such expansion took place through graphic conceptions. To mark and to edit were conceptually reinterpreted as the series of interventions performed in the surrounding world and on the body, exerting a change on its surface. Leaving a mark on the landscape, affecting others, intersecting diverse signs of order, and trespassing limits were all actions stemming from this model of the graphic inscription on a matrix, the source from which all editions or repeated images/actions would emerge. The mark left its two-dimensional, gallery-tied space to act in real time and specific

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<sup>1526</sup> This locational strategy can be seen in the first number of *La Separata*, where Balcells asserted that the publication would be “the place in which many works of art, worked with difficulty, hardly exhibited, badly kept, will access public life here and maybe memory, edited by offset.” He continued, “that they will access is perhaps too much to say, they will be presented, in certain way *situated*, subjected to a reading, in any case [they will be] problematized.” (My emphasis) Fernando Balcells, “Sobre esto o aquello cualquiera,” *La Separata*, no.1 (April 1981): 1.

<sup>1527</sup> This idea came under attack after the Paris Biennial of 1982, which will be discussed in the Conclusion along with the contradictions presented by such a nationalistic art model.

places so as to intersect and open up its apparent homogeneous surface, stepping over the boundaries between art, life, and politics through these new markings.

Video could continue this expansion into the quotidian in both concrete and virtual terms, even though its electronic substance and fluid form seemed the opposite of the blunt physical intervention of graphic arts and its expanded actions. As a medium, video appeared to be closer to the virtual worlds of television and cinema, generating effects similar to the illusions recreated in the screens of the television sets sold in department stores. But that very connection to commerce, entertainment, and capitalism made of video a next technological development of mechanical reproduction, particularly when seen under the lens of Benjamin.<sup>1528</sup> For video shared with printing, photography, and cinema a relation to the popular world of mass production and its dissemination of ideas, images, and objects, and to the mechanical means employed to do so. If video formed a more advanced and faster technology to spread messages than printed matter, and could reach further into the intimacy of the home than cinema and deeper into the public realm, it could too infiltrate the everyday and challenge its representations.<sup>1529</sup>

This occurred in 1983 when two television shows concerning Chilean art and video practices were aired by UCV Televisión, the television channel of the Catholic University in Valparaíso. The first to appear was “Demoliendo el muro” (Demolishing the wall), a program created by Galaz and Ivelic which centered on the history of Chilean painting, even though it incorporated new mediums and graphic arts towards its last chapters.<sup>1530</sup> The show’s title suggested that a border separating art from daily life would be crossed and torn down by bringing the former into the space of commercial television. Though the show repeated the premises and structure of the authors’ recently published book on painting, it included interviews with contemporary artists from a wide variety of disciplines, offering viewers a closer look into current artistic practices and the reasons behind their production. The wall demolished was also one of art and its traditional forms as the show mixed more conservative art with the proposals of the conceptual trends.

But more significant was the 1984 program “En torno al video” (Regarding Video) conducted by Carlos Flores, which focused solely on video works and their makers.<sup>1531</sup> Though low-budget, the program was able to showcase video works by

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<sup>1528</sup> It is interesting that while video gained importance in Chile after 1981, and theoretical discussions on the arts focused solely on printing and photography, it was Kay who maintained alive the question of mechanical reproduction by lecturing at Goethe Institute in 1981 on Benjamin’s well known essay. Kay would nevertheless leave Chile after separating from Parra and partnering with Pina Bausch, his influence waning in the local scene.

<sup>1529</sup> In 1983, Ana María Foxley summarized the situation stating that, “the production of artistic videos in Chile is a phenomenon that has become more massive, insofar individual artists or independent groups have been working for the past four years in this language as a way to overcome the limitations of cinema and as way to express themselves in a different language and content than those offered by the television stations of the State and the universities.” See Ana María Foxley, “Video Arte. Búsquedas y visiones,” *Revista Hoy*, May 4-10, 1983, 45.

<sup>1530</sup> There are copies of the different chapters of “Demoliendo el muro” at the library of Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago.

<sup>1531</sup> Flores was also preparing at the time another program based on visual education. See “Televisión. Con refrescante audacia,” *Revista Hoy*, April 18-24, 1984, 45. There are copies of “En torno al video” at Centro de Documentación La Moneda.

Chilean and international artists to a large audience, supplying a brief history of video art and interviews with the authors, while explaining and demonstrating in a simple manner the illusions behind video editing and other audiovisual effects. Blending the didactic with the 'artistic,' the show was able to teach about image manipulation and visual techniques, pointing to how videos and television (and by extension the media at large) altered and edited reality. The show was an example of how video could infiltrate the very scene of contemporary mass reproduction, offering non-artistic avenues for video's reception while inserting in everyday television programming other forms of understanding and critiquing reality and its representations. Because of its ambivalent 'origins,' video could be effectively used to intercept institutions (such as television) and cross cultural frontiers.

Video provided an increasing number of artists and cultural producers in Chile different means for the inscription and dispute of national memory.<sup>1532</sup> From Richard's own 1981 video dealing discursively with the new art and its association with the margins,<sup>1533</sup> to works that directly took memory as their subject matter as in Téllez and indirectly as in Dittborn,<sup>1534</sup> or acted as documents of the past, there was a tendency in the first years of video in Chile to associate the medium with a surface capable of reproducing inscriptions and a different form of recording personal and collective histories.<sup>1535</sup> By 1983, the subject of national and personal memory seemed to be the

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<sup>1532</sup> Many videos presented at the 1980s festivals were made by a wide variety of cultural agents, evincing their theatrical and cinematic origins in their stress on narrative, as in the case of Tatiana Gaviola's 1984 "Yo no tengo miedo a nada" (I do not fear anything). Gaviola considered video art to be related with "aesthetic concerns," though she identified with "an argumentative or documentary video." See "El video o la revolución de la imagen," 32. Even as late as 1986, there were few visual artists dedicated completely to video as their choice medium of expression, a situation that Dittborn summarized by declaring that he had only recently become a "part-time" video artist and that the only "full time" Chilean video artist was Juan Downey (without adding, nevertheless, that Downey's video production had been done mostly out of Chile and anteceded local production by almost ten years). See Eugenio Dittborn, quoted in Nelly Richard and Gonzalo Muñoz, "Entrevista a Eugenio Dittborn," *Sexto Festival Franco-Chileno de Video-Arte* (Santiago: Instituto Chileno Francés de Cultura, 1986), no page number.

<sup>1533</sup> Richard's 1981 video presented at the First French-Chilean Encounter of Video Art was titled "Una productividad llamada margen" (A Productivity Called Margin). In 1985, Richard co-directed with Juan Enrique Forch another video-graphic history of the recent conceptual art's situation in the nation. Titled "Arte en Chile" (Art in Chile), the video was structured in three chapters, reflecting the themes in her own books: Landscapes, Cultural Supports, and The Social Body. Though most of the images came from current Chilean videos, these were mixed with artists commenting on their work and the artistic situation while their works were shown in galleries.

<sup>1534</sup> In the interview with Richard and Muñoz, Dittborn described "montage" in relation to video as "the possibility of constructing a memory that will not accumulate information in depth (volumetric deposit) but in extension (superficial deposit)." Dittborn, "Entrevista a Eugenio Dittborn."

<sup>1535</sup> Jaar's video "Obra abierta y de registro continuo" (Open work of continuous register), shown at the Second French-Chilean Video Art Encounter, was a selection of interviews made at the Museum in 1981 of people responding to the question: "Are you happy?" The work formed part of a larger project started in 1980, which involved interrupting the urban landscape with signs and makeshift booths where the same question was asked to passersby, being exhibited later on in a graphic manner similar to a sociological experiment. This was one of the few works by Jaar dealing with the Chilean context. Instead, the rest of his early video production was based largely on international conflicts, as in "Opus" of 1981, a video in which

overriding theme in the local presentations at the French-Chilean Video Art Encounter, as manifested in Juan Enrique Forch's "Papá te habla desde lejos" (Dad speaks to you from the distance). The video featured the changing urban landscape as seen from a public transportation bus' window traveling from Santiago's marginal zones to the city's downtown General Cemetery while in the audio a monologue taped by the a father in exile sent to his son could be heard.<sup>1536</sup> Another example was Magaly Meneses' "Topología I" (Topology I), in which the female body was treated as a geography where its natural elements were subject to erasure and "censorship"<sup>1537</sup> through an act of shaving her underarms.<sup>1538</sup>

In 1983, Richard became extremely critical of the videos that had only documentary qualities.<sup>1539</sup> The critic attacked the "naturalistic fidelity" of videos that did not question their medium or the languages they used, believing them instead to be transparent. Richard argued that in these works there continued to exist an "(idealist) negation to think about art as a signifying operation, as a production of discourses in which the form itself –meaning, the group of material resolutions that articulates the transformation into language of the original material- necessarily participates in an ideology or counter-ideology when it remains or not subscribed to the dominant system of representation."<sup>1540</sup> For Richard no form was "neutral" or "innocent," since every formal resource used was "necessarily marked by its belonging within a determined socio-cultural rhetoric that connotes its use and ideologizes it."<sup>1541</sup> Video works had to make formally evident their connections to the means used (from techniques to genres) and their ideological sources, which the critic ascribed to television in particular.<sup>1542</sup>

Richard's position seemed to be a response to the more conservative point of view manifested in an unsigned article in *Revista Pluma y Pincel* earlier that year. The text

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the artist blow a trumpet until he goes out of breath inspired by a photograph in Nicaragua of a soldier with a trumpet.

<sup>1536</sup> Forch explained in *Revista Cauce* that the audio came from a tape sent by an exiled man to his wife and son living in Chile, which had been confiscated by the dictatorship and that reached the artist through a friend. See "El video o la revolución de la imagen," 32. Forch had also worked on a video dealing with the popular "animitas" as a sign of death through which "the people (...) have created a spontaneous religion, a popular and artistic event, where people go to express themselves freely and in a plastic manner." Ibid. There is a copy of the video at the library of Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes.

<sup>1537</sup> Silva, "El cine sucedáneo," 42-44.

<sup>1538</sup> In that year's Encounter, Mezza presented a video titled "Hiroshima" that, though deeply connected to memory, was one of the first manifestations of his move towards more global subjects concerning remembrance and identity.

<sup>1539</sup> Or those associated to theater, as in the cases of the theater company ICTUS, or Góngora and Aliaga.

<sup>1540</sup> Nelly Richard, "Segundo Encuentro Franco-Chileno de Video Arte: encuentro y desencuentros (notas)," 6.

<sup>1541</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1542</sup> Richard discussed Dittborn's works as primary examples of this, particularly the artist's "Historia de la física."

stated that most Chilean artists used “video as a prolongation of their expressive instrumental, unlinking it from its habitual functions of communication.”<sup>1543</sup> Ironically, the text stated that because such a non-communicative aim was fully achieved, these kinds of video required “being explained to the auditorium by its authors or exegetes through a generous and distorted theoretic river.”<sup>1544</sup> Such a negative view of the discussions formed after the video presentations at the Encounters and the role of theory as particularly advocated by the Chilean conceptual artists was replicated by other authors, such as Moreno. The latter felt that the central problem in Chilean video art emerged when “the artist begins to explain to his auditorium the art work.”<sup>1545</sup> While Moreno at first implied that art and video should be spontaneous reflections of reality, or at least reflect the impulsiveness of the creative act instead of dwelling in discourse, a point proving Richard’s argument against artistic ‘idealism,’ he recognized that in the French works presented at the Encounter there was either a concern with television and a critique of its “bureaucratic” language, or the production abstract, aesthetic images. This led Moreno to state that, “the frontiers between cinema, television, and video are imprecise and unstable,”<sup>1546</sup> and that the new tendencies in video art demonstrated that the artist had to go beyond “experimenting with the toy’s electronic scraps” and instead “assimilate all electronic resources to abolish the barriers between the three worlds of the electronic image.”<sup>1547</sup> For Moreno, the French works exemplified this and, curiously enough, pointed to the “possibility of an original and autonomous language”<sup>1548</sup> leading to the exploration of uncharted creative lands. Though video represented a confusion of boundaries, in order for it to become “art” it had to be harnessed back to a modern search for novelty and autonomy.

The ambiguous territory of video still left room to be explored though. By the mid-1980s, there were arguments that brokered an agreement between video’s formal qualities and its capability of formulating a social critique, recognizing how the medium offered a different form of recording and transmitting images. In these arguments, coming mostly from video artists rather than critics, video enabled the visual and temporal manipulation of the recorded image in movement, while its electronic ‘surface’ rendered it capable of treating images as bits of information to be rearranged at will in works unfolding over time.<sup>1549</sup> The video artist Néstor Olhagaray stated in 1985 that the

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<sup>1543</sup> “Video Arte: alternativa en gestación,” *Revista Pluma y Pincel*, no.3 (March 1983): 29.

<sup>1544</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1545</sup> Moreno, 23. According to Moreno, these theoretical reflections represented “noise” that intercepted the works’ proper understanding, the debates sometimes leading nowhere, especially when artists retorted “impertinently” to the questions of the audience or deflected answering. *Ibid.*

<sup>1546</sup> Moreno, 24.

<sup>1547</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1548</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1549</sup> According to Dittborn, video’s unfolding in time was literally an act of extension in space, a “spatialization of time.” Dittborn, “Entrevista a Eugenio Dittborn.” This in turn made it easy for him to translate the practices of editing from graphic art to video.

disappearance of the image and its almost magical appearance on the screen revealed it as “de-realizing,”<sup>1550</sup> unable to contradict its “expressive substance” and quality as an image. For Olhagaray, video was a privileged site to analyze the image, its language and syntax, since it could not hide its condition as such.<sup>1551</sup> Thus, the image could be de-naturalized through imagistic alterations, disrupting the ‘natural’ flow of time, cutting into its illusion of resemblance with the real. As the reality portrayed by video could be destabilized, what was being recorded, what would enter into public memory and the annals of history, could also be questioned.

The manipulation of temporal images in video suggested to other artists and filmmakers the possibility of opening up and challenging the media’s representations of national reality. Throughout the early eighties, the latter continued to portray the nation as moving in a straight road towards economic, social, and political progress, or at least, solving the problems posed by external sources, from the continued menace of Marxist influence now reincarnated in terrorism, or the ‘imported’ economic recession. But these images were contested in the multiple videos shown at the series of contests in the capital from 1982 onwards. Several works took as their subject contemporary shantytowns, the abysmal differences between neighborhoods in the capital, the impact of advertisement on daily life, the coupling of liberal economic policies in the market with repressive social measures, and the damage exerted by disappearance and violence in the midst of the Chilean family.

Many were video essays, combining the documentary and straightforward evidence of poverty with more poetic and personal turns. This was the case of Forch’s “La merienda de locos” (The Mad Tea Party) of 1984, which revealed the persistence of shantytowns in the capital and their harsh living conditions.<sup>1552</sup> In the video, voice-overs of children could be heard reciting passages from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* describing the Mad Hatter’s tea party, as a series of juxtaposed takes from a precarious “toma” (an illegal appropriation of terrains) called “Raúl Silva Henríquez” showed fragile homes made out of tents, wooden barriers, and collective kitchens mounted by its inhabitants. To the strange account of a party where Alice is reminded she has not been invited and guests fall asleep or are forced to wash the dishes, Forch opposed images of the families and children eating and sleeping in their squalid dwellings. Ironically enough, as the national anthem supplanted the Alice story at the end of the video, a panoramic shot of the illegally taken lands revealed a flaming Chilean flag marking the site’s constitution as a marginal territory proudly belonging to the nation.

Other videos appropriated the fast pace, perceptive saturation, and repetition found in television spots used to sell consumer products so as to critique their veiled ideological messages. “Popsicles” by Gloria Camiruaga of 1984, presented rapidly

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<sup>1550</sup> Néstor Olhagaray, “¿Arte Video o Video Arte?,” *Quinto Encuentro Franco Chileno de Video Arte* (Santiago: Instituto Chileno Francés de Cultura, 1985), no page number.

<sup>1551</sup> Olhagaray’s video works were some of the few Chilean examples at the time that dealt with more formal concerns, as in the 1985 “Desfaces” (Desfaces), where color and black and white images along with rapid cuts altered the straightforward recording of a subway trajectory.

<sup>1552</sup> In the 1983 Encounter, Gloria Camiruaga had presented a documentary on the same topic titled “Tomas” (Take-overs). There is a copy of Forch’s video at the library of Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, along with other video works by the same author.

altering takes of children licking brightly colored popsicles as they tried to simultaneously recite the Christian “Hail Mary.”<sup>1553</sup> The image of innocence evoked by children eating colored ice and the mechanically naïve repetition of their prayer to the Virgin Mary were literally tainted by the perverse sensuality evoked by the phallic popsicles and the close-ups of their licking mouths, which were quickly stained by the ice’s artificial coloring. Increasing the mixture of the erotic and perverse was the revelation that the popsicles’ sticks were composed of plastic miniatures of soldiers squatting, kneeling, and firing machine guns. By the time a woman left a small toy soldier at the foot of a Chilean flag, while other children continued to lick, recite, ‘win’ a figure and play, the different repeated actions generated a masturbatory, self-satisfactory state connecting masculinity, nationalism, religion, capitalism, and innocence.

In the Chilean dictatorial context and especially in later editions of the French-Chilean Encounter, video became an alternative way of framing reality in its changing and splintered multiplicity. It was the connection between video’s constant state of flux, its sense of recording processes rather than fixed events, and its hybrid nature that made of it a medium close to the critical stance adopted by conceptually oriented Chilean artists. Video’s ‘impure’ origins in television, its dependency on other mediums’ languages, and its transitional appearance reflected the notion of in-betweenness associated with the margins that had been favored by groups like C.A.D.A. or artists like Altamirano.<sup>1554</sup> Against the rigidity of borders posited in the national context of the time, video offered a metamorphosing avenue, capable of repetition, submission to ideological parameters, distortion and illusion, but also suggesting transformation, difference, and the presence of opposites in one another. If at first video appeared as a trend in the Chilean art scene or an alternative form of documenting the present, it was soon envisioned by artists as another inscriptive surface for the contestation of representation, one whose depthless surface could reflect a changed social and material context and where the borders between high and low culture, popular and unique, right and left, inside and outside were not pristinely and irrevocably settled.

Mezza’s comments in 1981 on the position of video as a new technology pointed to the perception of its mixed origins as a valuable asset in art. According to Mezza, video could not “compete” with other mediums and replace them,<sup>1555</sup> but rather it offered a different type of art form, one based on “energy and not matter.”<sup>1556</sup> Since this was an energy that reflected life itself, it enabled the creation of an art that was “alive, actual,

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<sup>1553</sup> There is a copy of Camiruaga’s video “Popsicles” at the library of Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes.

<sup>1554</sup> Olhagaray, for example, used similar arguments to those of Hernán Parada’s “obrabierta” in 1980 to define art and support the inclusion of video in its ranks. For Olhagaray, art was as a series of relationships established between enunciates made by the artist and different situations of enunciation, the work being only the “materialization” of these relations. For the artist, art was a process, open-ended, questioning its own codes, thus allowing for multiple readings and opening itself for viewer participation. *Ibid.*

<sup>1555</sup> Mezza’s statement was related to the recent reappraisal of painting in Chile, which according to the artist pointed to its continued existence and renovation. Interestingly though, Mezza quoted a Conceptual painter such as Gonzalo Díaz and the gender-provoking works of Dávila, without any reference to the growing “expressionistic” mode of Bororo, Benmayor, Tacla, and others.

<sup>1556</sup> Mezza, quoted in Foxley, 43.

submitted to change and not only re-settable among different galleries through rigid classifications.”<sup>1557</sup> Video, according to Mezza, was an in-between medium, not merely documenting reality but transforming it. Like memory.

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<sup>1557</sup> Ibid.



## Conclusion: The vanguard for export

By the time Robert Rauschenberg visited Chile in 1985 and a large exhibition of his new works were being shown at the Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago, receiving euphoric critical acclaim and coverage, the local artistic scene had radically changed.<sup>1558</sup> Not only had video displaced graphic proposals, acquiring a more prominent status as a medium through which to critique society and exhibit easily on an international scale, but the conceptual practices that came to be known as the “escena de avanzada” (advanced scene) seemed to be on the retreat. Younger generations of painters and artists making installations were dotting the artistic landscape and the discussions regarding art seemed to revolve less around the creation of truly national art than on embracing international models. Painting stood in the foreground of this movement,<sup>1559</sup> as a particular form of expressionistic figuration took hold of the gallery and institutional art system.<sup>1560</sup>

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<sup>1558</sup> *El Mercurio*, which partially funded the exhibition, celebrated the artist as a “master –a propeller of Pop, conceptual art and paintings with mixed mediums, an avant-garde artist from the 50s decade.” The Museum’s director, Nena Ossa, claimed that this was the “most notable plastic event” occurring in Chile since the exhibition “De Cézanne a Miró” (From Cézanne to Miró), which had taken place in the 1950s. In other words, the master had come to revolutionize the artistic scene. See “Llega R. Rauschenberg,” *El Mercurio*, July 14, 1985.

<sup>1559</sup> Painting had never disappeared from the scene and a few conceptually rigorous examples were even advocated by Richard, such as the works of Bru and Dávila in the late 1970s and early 80s, and the paintings of Arturo Duclos and Gonzalo Díaz in the mid 1980s. Yet, there were other pictorial confluences and influences beginning with the return of Balmes and Barrios to Chile (whose first important exhibition of paintings coincided with the first festival of video art) and the continuity and strengthening of figuration with symbolical content (as in Rojo, who had attacked in 1979 the insularity of the vanguards). To this was added the emergence of a relatively younger generation of artists who began presenting works that crossed all boundaries and which had received training at Universidad de Chile, whose school of art was known for its “informal” past and where many painters had entrenched during the dictatorship (as opposed to the graphic experiments of Vilches’ workshops at Universidad Católica), which further confirmed the continued presence of the medium in the Chilean context. The prominence acquired by a younger generation of painters has shadowed the emergence of other young artists whose installations were derived from graphic models.

<sup>1560</sup> This pictorial comeback was first heralded by a new kind of humanistic painting with an expressionistic character and conceptual underpinnings associated at first with Gonzalo Díaz, who in 1980 had won the first prize of the Sixth Contest of the Colocadora Nacional de Valores with a painting titled “Los hijos de la dicha o introducción al paisaje chileno” (The Sons of Joy or Introduction to the Chilean Landscape). Díaz quickly abandoned the alchemic, transformational, and anthroposophist characteristics of his discourse in favor of less expressionistic subjects and hard-core conceptual forms after his return to Chile from Italy in 1982, yet his earlier win cemented the newly acquired importance of painting on a public scale. In an interview of 1980, Díaz attacked the trendiness of conceptual art in Chile, speaking of those who had “jumped on the [conceptual] trains for its comfort. The same happened with abstract art.” Curiously enough, he was to become one of the most important examples of Conceptual art in Chile after the mid 1980s. See “Un catálogo de miedo,” *Revista Hoy*, November 5-11, 1980, 44-45.

Comparisons with the Italian Transvanguard and North American Neo-expressionism abounded in the critical appraisal of these works, leading to discussions about the currency of the conceptual models as opposed to the trendiness of a spontaneous pictorialism and less cerebral looking art.<sup>1561</sup> Rauschenberg's silkscreened works on canvas and bits of copper that featured fragments of the Chilean landscape alongside Classical caryatids seemed only to close the lid on the "avanzada's" tomb and its representations of the social landscape.

But the demise of the conceptual practices in Chile had started earlier. Though there had always been discrepancies between artists and the critics who had supported the conceptual models, the most important challenge to the avant-garde model they believed to be presenting came in 1982 when fifteen artists selected by Richard participated in the 12<sup>th</sup> Paris Biennial.<sup>1562</sup> This was a momentous event in the Chilean art scene, not only because it meant participating in the Biennial for the first time after nine years of absence, even though it was out of the competition, but because it involved showcasing the self-proclaimed avant-garde practices on an international scene. The occasion would be the Chilean avant-gardes' international presentation, its coming out of the cultural shell. Yet the encounter would prove disastrous for the egos of the Chileans, as captured in the local discussions which followed in 1983,<sup>1563</sup> insofar as the practices of the self-acclaimed 'advanced' arts in Chile were considered obsolete and provincial on an international level. The event pointed to the main contradiction within these conceptual trends: how to create an independent form of art, non-derivative and actual, politically and spatially committed, that was nevertheless not artistically naïve.

The Paris Biennial invitation had come through thanks to Richard's own contacts and cultural promotion, leaving her in the position of curator.<sup>1564</sup> Recent scholarship has

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<sup>1561</sup> Claudia Donoso stated the problem clearly when she titled a 1985 article in *Revista Apsi*, "El match de la vanguardia" (The Match of the Avant-Garde). Donoso interviewed Leppe and Sammy Benmayor, the latter described by the journalist as part of group of young painters who "violently reject what they feel as an excess of reflection in the other vanguard. They have been qualified as "hedonists" of painting." Claudia Donoso, "El match de la vanguardia," *Revista Apsi*, November 18-December 1, 1985, 49. In the interview, Leppe not only mocked the painters when he described them as guided by "the Benito Oliva made at home" (a possible reference to Galaz), or when he stated that these painters did not understand or cared about "the problem of dominant culture and dominated culture," and instead simply dreamt of "a studio in New York or Firenze," but he also questioned their apolitical stance. Leppe argued that the new generation of painters denied "the social and political context as what determines the practices of language. This leads to the Mongolic fallacy of believing themselves to be citizens of the world. They are not conscious of the peripheral situation, which for me is crucial." Carlos Leppe, quoted in Claudia Donoso, 50.

<sup>1562</sup> The artists included were: Carlos Leppe, Carlos Altamirano, Eugenio Dittborn, Marcela Serrano, Elías Adasme, Gonzalo Mezza, Víctor Hugo Codocedo, Juan Dávila, Gonzalo Díaz, Mario Fonseca, Virginia Errázuriz, Arturo Duclos, Mario Soro, Eduardo Vilches, and the group C.A.D.A.

<sup>1563</sup> The most important event was a seminar centering on the topic of current art in Chile, which took place at TAV between May and June of 1983. Part of the discussion was published in two articles of the July 1983 issue of *La Separata*, a publication of Galería Sur in whose editorial board was Richard and Balcells (after his separation from C.A.D.A.), as well as Ivelic.

<sup>1564</sup> The invitation came from the Biennial's curator, Georges Boudaille, who had met Richard at a conference on criticism organized by C.A.Y.C. in Buenos Aires the previous year. As stated by Richard, Boudaille took an interest in the art she was presenting and invited her to participate as curator of the Chilean envoy. Nevertheless, Richard had already been in a campaign of bringing the Chilean arts she

remarked on the problematic discussion between Richard and the artists chosen regarding how the works were going to be presented at the Biennial,<sup>1565</sup> particularly if a semblance of a group or collective effort was going to be emphasized.<sup>1566</sup> A tentative exhibition was mounted at Galería Sur between April and May of 1982 generating discord among artists and several published responses to it.<sup>1567</sup> The dispute ended when Richard finally opted for sending photographs and reproductions of the most emblematic works of each artist dealing with the social body and the landscape, each entry given the same size and mounted in a homogenous grid-like arrangement along three horizontal lines on the wall.<sup>1568</sup> As mentioned by Mellado in the context of a discussion regarding the Chilean

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favored into the international spotlight. In 1981, Richard appeared on the cover of the Italian design magazine *Domus*, which had published in the same volume an article authored by Richard on the conditions of Chilean art and the avant-garde practices she advocated, being accompanied by reproductions of works by Dittborn, Leppe, and Altamirano. This sudden appearance had been the fruit of a letter sent by Richard to *Domus*' editor, Alessandro Mendini, requesting help to have her text and these novel practices published, a letter which Mendini showed in the magazine along with his own response. The magazine nevertheless, altered the portrait sent by Richard to go with the text, using it as a cover and highlighting her face against an Andean landscape taken by Altamirano which belonged to the book *Cuerpo Correccional*.

<sup>1565</sup> I will not refer to these discussions, since these have been documented by other authors. See, for example, Paulina Varas, "De la vanguardia artística chilena a la circulación de la *escena de avanzada*," in Investigadora Privada blog, <http://paulinavaras.wordpress.com/2008/07/05/de-la-vanguardia-artistica-chilena-a-la-circulacion-de-la-escena-de-avanzada/#more-34> July 5, 2008 (last accessed April 30, 2010), and Paula Honorato and Luz Muñoz, "Una mirada sobre el arte en Chile," in *Recomposición de escena*, <http://www.textosdearte.cl/recomposicion/mirada2.html> (last accessed April 30, 2010).

<sup>1566</sup> There has been a renewed interest in recent Chilean scholarship in revisiting the years 1982 and 1983 and questioning the role of the 'avanzada' and of Richard's 'invention' if it, with several texts analyzing the discussions surrounding the Biennial. Overall, these new readings confirm Mellado's 1983 prognosis of the situation when he questioned the effective existence of a 'scene' in Chilean art.

<sup>1567</sup> The underlying project of the exhibition titled "Con Textos" (a pun on the words "context" and "with texts"), consisted in creating interconnections between photographic reproductions of the artist's works and texts. The idea was to suggest different modes of reading the works through these textual captions. Part of the project was documented in *La Separata*'s first and second numbers of 1982, for example in "Texto Legible y Texto Visible," a series of quotes related to specific works of art and criticism, and in Adriana Valdés' text "'Caption' es palabra capciosa," *La Separata*, no.1, (April 1982), 1. By the second issue, there was a noticeable loss of steam and disillusionment among artists and critics, as seen in Richard's "'Con Textos" en Galería Sur: un marco de desalentamiento" (Con-texts at Galería Sur: A Frame of Discouragement), as well as in the critical responses of Brugnoli and the ironical stance of Díaz published in the same issue. According to Brugnoli, the works showed signs of "fatigue" and self-contentment even before they reached the public (and particularly, the Biennial). For Brugnoli, these works were not only produced in a marginal location, but their remoteness was being highlighted through the show, which led the artist to ask for an internal questioning of marginality and its meaning, particularly since the concept of the margin "leads us to the mechanism (mannerism) of self-feeding." Brugnoli even proposed "trespassing, breaking the margin," in order to make an art that would not revolve and die unto itself. See Francisco Brugnoli, "Una fatiga, un agotamiento," *La Separata*, no. 2 (May 1982), no page number.

<sup>1568</sup> The exhibition was briefly reviewed in *Revista Hoy*, where the article's author mentioned that "a group of the most outstanding within the vanguard and experimental art" were being shown. The photographs published show a different disposition of the works from the Biennial's installation, insofar as the works presented by Dittborn were displayed on a table and could be glanced through as texts, being used by viewers, versus the more static photographic reproductions on the walls used in Paris. See Ana María Foxley, "De ayer y hoy," *Revista Hoy*, April 28-May 4, 1982, 32.

participation that took place at the “Seminario de análisis de una coyuntura (Seminar of Analysis of a Juncture) in Santiago in 1983, the national works looked like the “reasoned anthology”<sup>1569</sup> of a movement that had already passed away. The only non-traditional element included in the Biennial was a performance by Leppe, which had been announced in the September issue of *Art Press* in a heroic text stating: “In defense of a new corporeal geography, on Tuesday 13 June 1982, the night of the total eclipse that returns our continent more obscure than ever, Leppe, hidden in the chicken stall, breastfeeds the tattooed egg of Latin American performance.”<sup>1570</sup>

In the performance, Leppe first appeared at the men’s bathroom of the biennial wearing a tuxedo and carrying a small suitcase (fig. 7.1).<sup>1571</sup> After taking out some of its contents and assembling a small mound of hair topped by a tiny reproduction of the Virgin, Leppe began loudly reading a text in Spanish relating his journey over the Andes while using the language and mannerism of an ambulant street seller. He then proceeded to undress, applied exaggerated make-up to his face including fake eyelashes, began shaving his legs and stomach, and dressed with tiny studded panties and bra, crowning his head with plumes dyed in the Chilean flag’s colors. Once outfitted, Leppe began to lip-synch and dance to Pérez Prado well known “Mambo Number 8,” which gave the performance its title (Mambo Number Eight of Pérez Prado). After collapsing exhausted on a chair, Leppe ate a large piece of cake, forced himself to vomit it as he attempted to sing the Chilean anthem, and then crawled out of the bathroom, mumbling calls for his mother, until he reached a tape-recorder playing Gardel’s “El día que me quieras” sung by the artist’s mother.

During his performance, Leppe regurgitated more than just a piece of cake. A series of stereotypes regarding Chile and Latin America were abjected by the artist and left as a gift. The announcement’s defensive position around the “new corporeal geography” tying the artist’s body to Latin America implied from a start that this region had been attacked or was in a diminished position, needing the artist’s help as its lawyer or spokesperson. Yet if Leppe became its medium and translator, the communication would not be even, as suggested by the multiple references to Leppe’s earlier works. The allusions to Leppe’s 1974 happening of the chickens and the Latin American transvestite doll appearing in *Cuerpo Correccional*, anticipated a hermetic, self-referential discourse that might affect clear communication. Leppe’s parsimonious reading of the Spanish text without translation emphasized such a difficulty, impeding the Parisian public’s clear understanding of his words and thus of the difficulties described by the travel narrative of crossing the mountainous frontier. Leppe’s own journey was belittled, minimized by rendering it incomprehensible, the menacing mountain reduced to a grotesque small pile of dark hair.

But there were several elements that a European audience could indeed recognize. The artist’s exoticism and strangeness, as well as his bizarre and exaggerated acts, could

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<sup>1569</sup> Justo Pastor Mellado, “Seminario. Ensayo de interpretación de la coyuntura plástica,” *Cuadernos de/para el análisis*, no.1, December 1983, 9.

<sup>1570</sup> Announcement in *Art Press*, no. 62, (September 1982). A text by Richard and another by Dittborn were also published in a twofold spread within the magazine.

<sup>1571</sup> Leppe’s performance “Mambo número ocho de Pérez Prado” is documented in *Cegado por el oro* in pages 22 and 23 and in *Copiar el Edén*, in page 413.

fulfill expectations about a flamboyant, baroque Latin-ness on one hand, or assumptions regarding performance art as a genre on the other. Leppe had been invited to perform, yet what he re-presented were stereotypes of Latin America produced by a European (and by extension “Western”) other. As Leppe’s transvestite changed genders, he took up and put on different masks connected to Latin America like a prosthesis or make-up, from its marginality and poverty (the ambulant seller, the poor immigrant), to its baroque histrionics and drum-based music. Or at least, the stereotypical version of Latin American music as exemplified by Pérez Prado’s mambo, a ballroom version of Cuban music and a recognizable “Latin” tune. Even if the music was Cuban and related to the period of North American domination of the island, it could stand for everything exotic. Like Leppe’s un-translated words, his absurd actions, or even the reference to the Chilean flag, which could double as the French, these were all signs that presented an unfamiliar closeness embodying ideas about an ‘other.’

Leppe’s gender transformation implied the presence of a male viewer and a patriarchal culture, a dominant master for whom the Latin American doll would perform its invented identity. His metamorphosing into an exotic, pseudo-erotic dancer for the audience, a body performing its own extravagance for others, suggested that this was a spectacular, feminized body, Latin America transformed into carnival and world turned upside down.<sup>1572</sup> This was a continent made up of excess, abundance, and lushness, a new world of purely seductive flesh ready to be conquered, measured, and surveyed. Yet this was also a dubious body, altering forms, its identity not so clearly fixed, a grotesque body vomiting its interiority. And this bad boy who had too much fun at the party and ended with a tummy ache, found himself lost in the midst of so much European tradition. Without a father to claim as his own, Leppe crawled his way back through so many layers of Western artistic genealogy to the voice of his Chilean mother, singing a love song of an Argentinean tango star. If there was any residue of identity left in this encounter, it was continually being displaced.

Leppe’s assumption of a marginal position was reinforced by the performance’s location: the men’s bathrooms in the Biennial. At the time, Richard connected such act of marginalization to a Latin American question, arguing that Leppe’s work put in tension how Latin American art was “discriminated” against by dominant cultures when the former’s discourses did not fit the latter’s interpretative or historic parameters.<sup>1573</sup> In the museum space, Latin American art was literally the refuse, “marginalized from the spaces

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<sup>1572</sup> This kind of reading can be seen in Francesca Lombardo’s notes on the performance, “Apunte y Glosa,” *La Separata*, no. 6 (July 1983): 7. Lombardo emphasized the connections to matter and the corporeal coming from the bathroom as a location, joining them to Leppe’s “histrionic liturgy,” “an uncontrolled discourse,” and the creation of “simulacra.”

<sup>1573</sup> Nelly Richard, “Nelly Richard responde a un cuestionario. Los chilenos en la Bienal de París 1982,” *Revista Pluma y Pincel*, no. 2 (Summer 1983): 24. Four years later, Richard interpreted this choice of site as an “improper place,” far away from the “consecrated exhibition spaces” of the show, which helped to reveal the “peripheral discrimination” to which the Biennial had subjected the whole Chilean entry, with Leppe being the only artist participating in one of its competitive sections. Richard, *Margins and Institutions*, 89.

of consecration,” and thus “disabled for international competition.”<sup>1574</sup> Though Richard was making an important point regarding the perception and reception of Latin American art in European and North American contexts, which she identified with a body that had been victim of a historical declassification of identity and discourse, Leppe’s performance also brought the target inwards. For while Leppe’s work illustrated the center/periphery problematic that Richard was beginning to outline in her critical work, the problem of encountering otherness could be read in the opposite direction. Leppe’s vagrant turned chorus girl resisted assimilation, reveling in and exaggerating her/his own difference, enhancing the non-translatable, while positing his own cultural ‘other.’ Though Richard rightly read these gestures as “going against forms of cultural imperialism,”<sup>1575</sup> they also underlined the two-way problem of encountering otherness, nationalism, and location, especially in the realm of the arts.

Back home, Richard had to respond to incisive questions regarding the selection of works and the perception of Chilean art abroad. Besides receiving attacks from the press because of her limited choice of works, to which she responded that any selection involved an act of editing and was determined by the subjective preferences of the curator,<sup>1576</sup> Richard had to defend the poor reception of the Chilean participation in the Biennial. In 1982, Richard argued that the inclusion of Chilean practices based on “the intervention of the social body as a support of creativity”<sup>1577</sup> within a context that celebrated instead a neo-expressionistic pictorial model that underplayed the “utopias of the vanguards,”<sup>1578</sup> was a defining element marking the distance “separating us from other cultures (European and North American) that authorize the success of the Transvanguard.”<sup>1579</sup> According to Richard, these latter cultures were characterized by “accumulation” and a “saturation of references,”<sup>1580</sup> leading to the production of an art that did not question tradition and only quoted its own past, excluding from history other practices. In a cultural field that was mesmerized by a self-referential expressive pictorialism, the Chilean avant-garde model could not compete fairly and was thus denied a place in international annals.

In 1986, Richard re-conceptualized the causes of this exclusion under a post-colonialist lens. The Chilean marginalization in the Biennial had responded to a “colonial sanction”<sup>1581</sup> that reduced the Chilean practices to an “anachronistic” re-elaboration of

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<sup>1574</sup> Nelly Richard, “Chile en la XII Bienal de París,” *La Separata*, no. 6 (July 1983): 1. Lombardo instead interpreted the public bathroom as embodying a “secret democracy.” Lombardo, 7.

<sup>1575</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1576</sup> Richard, “Nelly Richard responde a un cuestionario. Los chilenos en la Bienal de París 1982,” 24.

<sup>1577</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1578</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1579</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1580</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1581</sup> Nelly Richard, *Márgenes e Instituciones*, 110. I have translated the phrase from the Spanish original, for the meaning comes out stronger in it. The English version merely asserts that “the Chilean exhibition

older performance and body art practices which “the postmodern rehabilitation of the pictorial had already cancelled.”<sup>1582</sup> Unable to grasp art forms that rethought the “models borrowed from international art so as to return them completely transformed –and re-intentioned- by the tensions between art, politics, modernity, and periphery,”<sup>1583</sup> the international scene had not been aware that the Chilean works had performed a “perverse recuperation of [international] residues,”<sup>1584</sup> an act that was “in itself a critique of what was left over in Europe and the United States.”<sup>1585</sup> With a four year distance from the disillusionment, Richard could put the blame on the European other and transform the entry of the Chilean “escena” into a truly avant-garde post-colonial critique. Chilean artists were now “borrowers” of international models, anticipated appropriationists that returned to the European motherland deviant copies.

But Richard’s 1986 reevaluation of the “escena de avanzada’s” performance in an international context denied what until 1982 had been one of the main characteristics of the conceptual trends that she had fervently outlined. Though much of Chilean art’s isolation from international artistic scenes could be, rightly, ascribed to the effects of the dictatorship, as Richard did in the 1982 interview with *Pluma y Pincel*,<sup>1586</sup> the insularity of the Chilean conceptual practices had also been the product of the very discourses they had upheld. In defining their identity as avant-garde, and thus as clearly distinct from the past, the conceptual artists had not only attempted to distance their own production from the tradition embodied by painting in Chile, but had tried to define themselves as eminently national and therefore, unrelated to international trends. If the art from the past was qualified as being dependent on foreign influences, the new art had to be strictly independent from them.<sup>1587</sup>

Yet, to be completely autonomous would prove to be a hard enterprise to accomplish. Conceptual artists in Chile between 1974 and 1985 constantly referenced international models, either directly or indirectly, from Vostell to Kaprow or Duchamp to

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was assessed in a colonialist fashion as so much “déjà vu”.” For the English version see Richard, *Margins and Institutions*, 91.

<sup>1582</sup> Ibid. My translation from the Spanish version.

<sup>1583</sup> Ibid. The original in English states: “Thus their critical toying with the international models or forms went unnoticed, as did their aim to *transform* or revitalize them.” (Emphasis in the original). The translation eliminates the emphasis placed by Richard on politics, periphery, and the act of borrowing.

<sup>1584</sup> Richard, *Márgenes e Instituciones*, 110.

<sup>1585</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1586</sup> According to Richard, Chilean art had been marginalized from important international events for several reasons, the first of which was political, but also because there was a general lack of knowledge of Chilean practices abroad. This was caused mostly by a lack of diffusion and cultural exchanges, which could be explained by the peripheral situation of the country, as well as a general historic and geographical marginalization. Ibid.

<sup>1587</sup> This has also been the main problem with Chilean art history in recent years, the guilt of falling into what Mellado has defined as the model of “dependent analogy,” which he ascribes to Romera and then to Galaz and Ivelic.

Beuys. Even when they were attacking the ‘new’ Chilean painting for being based on foreign models such as Neo-expressionism, the local conceptual artists and the critics supporting them resorted to external examples, as seen in *La Separata*’s publication of extracts from Joseph Kosuth’s text “Necrophilia, Mon Amour,” which had appeared in *Artforum* in May, 1982.<sup>1588</sup> The situation described by Kosuth seemed to mimic the current Chilean discussions, particularly his interpretation of the “rebirth of painting” as a reaction of younger artists against the conceptual self-reflexivity of the author’s own generation.<sup>1589</sup>

Curiously enough, Kosuth’s text as quoted in *La Separata* finished with a question regarding the definition of national identity in art. According to Kosuth, the effects of the late change of waters in the arts had a special impact in the United States of America, insofar as its “culture” had been defined according to international parameters and had yet to find its national “character.” The artist argued that this lack was partially the reason why ‘modernism’ had been embraced in the United States to the point of becoming identified with it, even though the local art scene was still dependent on European intellectual models to help understand it. Europe in turn, had supported the new avant-gardes of North America, seeing in them a fountain of youth of sorts. They represented a way to remain alive after the vanguards had taken flight from the old continent in the first half of the twentieth century. Now that modernism had been allegedly killed (by conceptualism among other art practices), the artists from the United States were left with empty hands, while the Europeans (particularly the Italians) still had their own rich and long cultural tradition to quote.

It is interesting that while tacitly referring to these foreign sources as presenting situations comparable with the Chilean case, there was little reflection in *La Separata* regarding the question of the local conceptual trends’ influences or its process of self-definition. Even later discussions of the “avanzada” and Richard’s active participation in its molding have retained the idea that the dictatorship generated a break that was reflected in the art scene, severing all connections with the past and other locations. These discussions have either assumed that the conceptual practices in Chile were eminently disruptive because they were defining a different way of making art within the nation regardless of the anteriority or influence of exterior models, or they have rethought the problem of its reception abroad according to the conceptual artists’ assumption of a peripheral condition that was understood in the 1980s as equivalent to that of other Latin

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<sup>1588</sup> See “Necrofilia, Mon Amour (extractos de un texto de Joseph Kosuth en *Artforum*, mayo de 1982), *La Separata*, no. 5 (October 1982): 2. Originally published by Joseph Kosuth as “Portraits: Necrophilia Mon Amour,” *Artforum* 20 (May 1982): 58-63.

<sup>1589</sup> Kosuth’s characterization of the new painting as lacking criticality and being unhealthily connected to the market was echoed in Richard’s comments published in the same issue on the Italian Transvanguard and in Díaz’ text, which attacked the works of Tacla and Benmayor as hedonistic imitations of foreign examples. In one of the last chapters of Richard’s *Margins and Institutions* titled “Return to the Pleasurable,” Richard argued that painters like Tacla, Benmayor, and Frigerio were “rebellious” against the “authority” of the “avanzada” by basking in the pleasures of painting and taking as their models international examples. The parody and appropriations of these works were nevertheless poor imitations, postmodern deflations of international languages that had no real tradition which to critique in the Chilean context. Richard, *Márgenes e Instituciones*, 119-121. (I am using the Spanish version, since the English translation omits this passage).



American (and now, any other marginal, Third-World) nations. The contradictions and motivations involved in these processes of self-definition have remained relatively untouched, leading to the myth of the “*avanzada*” as a politically charged conceptual field on one hand, and to the continued obscurity of many works, ideas, and parental influences that enabled its formation and ultimately contributed to its isolation on the other.

Identity is a subject fraught with problems regarding who speaks for whom and with what authority. It is bound to raise suspicion, since subjectivity is the fragmented ‘center’ from which the speaker begins to refer to his or hers own identity or that of others. And though the recognition of such fragmentation has become everyday currency in a postmodern, postcolonial world, it is still difficult to incorporate its consequences on an everyday level or to avoid rigid classifications and binaries. If one cannot step aside from the questions of center/periphery, novelty/copy, or national/international when analyzing Chilean conceptual practices during the late seventies and eighties, it is possible to observe them from yet another position that might take into account the deviations, particularities, continuities, and displacements performed by these artists of both interior and exterior models.

This implies looking askew or at an angle, simultaneously inwards and outwards, or at least letting the gaze go back and forth, echoing what was one of the most important models proposed and enacted by these artists: to locate oneself in the margin. But this meant understanding the latter not as a privileged peripheral position eminently anti-institutional (as the title of Richard’s book suggested), but as a point that is both within and without, that is thus never fully just one thing. My interest in this work has been to trace multiple intertwined maps in a specific art scene where the territorial and the displaced converged, where inside and outside were repeatedly posited and dismantled, showing their instability and possibility of transformation. As Chilean artists simultaneously re-worked foreign examples (from Duchamp to Vostell, Kaprow to Kosuth, Page to Beuys, Structuralism to Postmodernism), questioning their originality and responding to their own changed environment, they were making the exterior and the interior encounter and refract in fertile ways at a time when defining identity was at the center of everyday life. In a context of constriction and boundary anxiety, the displacement of limits and the instability produced through excessive repetition were joined to the reevaluation of the marginal as a site for possible openness, offering alternative ways of producing reality.

In their demarcation of internal borders, Chilean conceptual artists looked at recognizable national elements stemming from culture and nature. From Dittborn’s references to Chilean art and local landscape models, to Parra’s recuperation of the Chilote “*Imbunche*” myth, passing through Smythe’s San Diego arcades and Altamirano’s metropolitan subways, to Leppe’s Virgins, and the repeated evocations made by multiple artists of the Andes mountains or the Atacama desert, the choice of emblems was related to what was perceived as forming part of Chilean history, cultural patrimony, geographical qualities, territory, and its people. These were all elements that circled around identity, defining its contours, and distinguishing the national from other countries, other histories, and ultimately, other kinds of art. The choice of such notorious elements was not natural or neutral, in spite of their apparent persistence over time. Rather, they were in direct relation to the representations that were also chosen by the

dictatorship as symbols of national unity, homogeneity, and collective identification, images transformed into local archetypes that were used as signs of authenticity.

But the fact that these models were not naturally given, but rather man made and filled with contingent significance, was something that the dictatorship indirectly revealed and the artists attempted to underscore. Events like the dispute of borders with neighboring countries, particularly Argentina, pointed to the contested nature of frontiers and claims over a territory. Changes in the cities, especially the capital where the model of modernization and economic liberalism met with the resistance and persistence of marginal zones, signaled some of the discrepancies found in the regime's overarching vision of a nation on a straight course towards progress. And it was the insistent repetition that the nation's borders were secure while history and present conflicts signaled in the other direction, that the economy was working in spite of a recession to counter it, that shantytowns had disappeared even though they were merely translated to more remote locations, and that there were no human rights violations in spite of missing bodies proving the contrary, which revealed the contradictions and fissures in these exemplary notions. Iteration became more than propaganda: it was turned into a form of normalizing an exceptional state, a way of naturalizing the unnatural, a form of performing identity.

Several artists working in conceptual modes were questioning the uses and representational values of such 'original' nationalistic sources. For a growing number of artists, to intercept the images of a unified nation, to deconstruct the seamless surface of economic progress, to detain and revise the progressive view of history, and to denaturalize the natural by looking at the landscape as a construction, became ways of exposing the flaws and jagged edges of these representations. To the pulchritude of national symbolism and the peaceful, 'eternal' landscape promoted by it, these artists raised hellish visions of monstrous mountains, with deserts turned into purgatory and sites stained by ethnic extermination, while the neatness of urban modernity was transformed into a sterile cage and the city converted into a site of murder. Repetition was taken as a sign of trauma, a symptom of lack that posited a radical absence at the center and fringes of national identity and its visual manifestations. To repeat was not only to perform identity, but to show its failure to coalesce as a stable marker.

In this battle of identity, the graphic mark acquired a new centrality as a sign of inscriptive social practices and as a physical experience of a limit. Parallel to the dictatorship's efforts to graft the national territory's borders in a permanent manner, asserting its own sovereignty over its 'contents' and defending its edges from foreign influence (whether it was of Communism or the United Nations), artists were proposing other forms of mapping that questioned the regularity and natural-ness of those frontiers. By looking back to national history and probing into the intertwined relations between economics, politics, and colonial desires, artists like Dittborn were pointing to the nation's changing frontiers and how these had helped to mould symbolically and physically spaces of identity. Furthermore, maps could contain underlying layouts, hidden inscriptions, and a series of traces that might expose irregular topographies, raising a specter of another human geography.

Borders and lines adopted in some cases the concrete form of natural entities separating the nation from others. But if mountains, deserts, oceans, and plains of ice could be interpreted as offering intrinsically fixed limits and a solidly native basis for

identity, the conceptual Chilean artists were deconstructing these landmarks' apparent immobility and innate local character. The discourses dealing with the nation's territorial extremity and remoteness, or with the pristine and Edenic qualities associated with different natural spaces and its landscapes, were revised and torn open as networks of other social relations and significances were reconstructed. As the regime made patent in its projects, what could be considered an extreme, inhospitable land such as the desert could be also read as an 'unspoiled' site for future economic development. The Chilean landscape was not static or fixed, but was unraveled as an imaginary reconstruction of physical and mental projections, a site deeply invested with contested meanings.

If nature was dependent on social constructions and ideological meanings, in the case of the urban landscape this relationship seemed even more poignant. As the capital expanded into neighboring agricultural lands, the "limits" of urbanization and its concomitant motor of economic expansion came under attack. Though the creation of new urban patterns in the contemporary city could seem far removed from the colonial grid, artists made evident that both were physical forms of exerting social and ethnic control. This disciplining of space was associated with cages, cells, and hospitals as spaces of containment, related to street signs regulating traffic and the flow of bodies, or even to the cement buildings encasing the whole. Yet there were other concrete forms in which urban space was physically altered. The translation of whole urban populations to the city's margins, the creation of new upscale neighborhoods with their proper highways to connect them with the center, and the beautification of the city were all attempts to modernize and "cleanse" what was felt to be residual elements of backwardness associated with social unrest and unhygienic poverty. But as these new zones were built, artists constructed other views of the city that documented the existence of internal borders and marginal zones. These locations were valued as potential sites of social transgression, embodying the condition of the limit and a space of ambiguity. The margin was envisioned as a threshold segregating and joining difference, a borderland that might allow for new meanings to emerge of the urban and the community. Reclaiming the city and its marginal areas was associated with acts of marking and unmarking urban signs and lines so to interrupt the grids regulating urban behavior.

Such concern with borders as spaces of indeterminacy and social transgression led to the increasing identification of artists and their practices with the marginal. The latter acquired various forms and was interpreted as gendered, ethnic-based, class-related, or was connected to social deviancy and the popular as much as with physical remoteness. On a larger scale, marginality was linked by artists and critics alike to the opposition and distance from hegemonic formations and the associated social and mental constructions of these centers of authority. Thus, critics like Adriana Valdés could speak of the conceptual artists' works as marrying a strong theoretical background with the embrace of "a circumstance that [represents] precariousness, marginalization, repressed pulsation."<sup>1590</sup> As the title of Richard's 1986 book made evident, there was a conscious opposition from artists to the institutional, which was associated with both the dictatorship and any other conservative or traditional social and artistic forms.

Yet there was more to these conceptual practices than hostility to institutions, and the binary relation between them proved to be filled with in-between and hybrid

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<sup>1590</sup> Adriana Valdés "Meta(le) critica acerca del libro de Nelly Richard "Una mirada sobre el arte en Chile" Santiago, 1981," *La Separata*, no. 2 (May 1982): no page number.

elements. One of the most important problems was the assumption that the marginal was an inherent site of subversion, which led in part to its idealization and to the contradiction in the centralized position occupied by artists with regards to the margins they were speaking for or pointing to. This was the dilemma at the center of C.A.D.A.'s works, influencing the redemptive role taken on by the collective's members in relation to the social issues they were underlining and their perceptions concerning the effective challenges and changes their works were performing in the social landscape. In many cases, the extension of inscriptive practices onto the everyday and the blurring of boundaries between life and art were tempered by the dependency of these discourses on art and its institutions, particularly as the new conceptual practices found their artistic legitimacy in them. While there was more direct involvement of artists with different marginal communities and with protests against the dictatorship from 1982 onwards, there loomed in the conceptual works the ghost of becoming an inadvertent colonizer of the other, of creating their own marginal essentialism without being critical about it. How to speak from within and without, how to effectively engage with the margins and the centers remained an unresolved and yet a fecund problem for Chilean artists.

Another point of identification with the marginal came through the specific mediums employed by these artists. The hybrid characteristics of the local conceptual practices were derived in part from the "low" art mediums and genres used, from printing to photography, photocopies, and video to the broadsheet, the still life, the social magazine, and graffiti. While artists recognized in these mediums the presence of the "popular," and thus of the socially marginal, the very definition of this term was fluid and often defined by its setup against another medium or social formation. Printing and photography acquired a notable importance because of their links to local and mass-produced forms of information and visualization, as well as their inscriptive (graphic) basis. Mechanical reproduction in particular became the common denominator of experimental art forms, insofar as it presupposed a distance from values assigned to high art such as authenticity, originality, uniqueness, the touch of the creative individual, and meaningful (and sometimes, perspectival) depth. Instead, mechanical reproduction in its different embodiments was coupled with mass production, the absence of originals, the copy, the series, inorganic repetition, and the shallow. If the embrace of these characteristics seemed 'post-modern,' as it did to Richard and other historians in the mid 1980s even though they opposed the term, this choice was equally related to the contestation of tradition (or what was being passed as such), and to the popular classes, as well as to a deep desire to contest the images of national identity produced by the government and its forms of distribution.

Identification with the marginal could also take more direct corporeal forms. If an extreme example of this was Eltit's kiss with a vagabond, captured in a 1983 video in relation to her series titled "Zones of Pain,"<sup>1591</sup> the marginal could be conceptually and concretely connected to different bodies. These could be those of prostitutes, ambulant sellers, delinquents, indigenous people, urban passersby, virgins, women in general, transvestites, southern mythological creatures or well known artists, and could appear as anonymous, sick, healthy, fragmented, mended, duplicated, dead and alive. There was a

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<sup>1591</sup> The video showed Eltit standing next to a homeless man, then bending over to kiss him in the mouth for a few seconds. It is interesting that the body gestures of the man suggest he wanted the kiss to continue, while Eltit rapidly removed her mouth and body away from this exchange of fluids.

preference for representing precarious bodies associated with the unruly, the disorderly, and that went against social conventions. But whether they were bodies in pain, torment, contagious, transsexual, or simply existing in their everyday squalor and banality, the corporeal was intimately linked to national identity and the landscape, the somatic present in each act of marking. For the national territory was not empty or merely an abstract construction but experienced and made through the action and presence of real bodies. To speak of the nation was also to address the body politic as a physical manifestation and social production, a site made not just of rocks and water but of flesh.

Some artists identified their own corporealities with the body politic, while others involved their bodies in acts of marking the social landscape. In the works of Eltit, Leppe, Adasme, and Serrano for example, national pain and territorial limits were metaphorically translated and concretely converted into their own. Others like Altamirano, the members of C.A.D.A. and Parada were inscribing their own bodies in the everyday landscape, making actions that disrupted its homogeneous fabric and altered its sense of normalcy. In different ways, these artists were probing the boundaries of corporeality, its treatment and representation, particularly its historical exclusion from the world of thought, knowledge, and spirit. For the corporeal could also be a site of knowledge, language, and a producer of meaning and marks. Envisioned as a limit space, the body's pollutions, excretions, carnality and pleasures could be all sites of potential disorder, emphasizing the multiplicity of subjectivity.<sup>1592</sup> There was a privileging of the body as site of social disruption, evoking fears of contamination and of difference. By envisioning the body as a primary site of marking or as Kay put it, a body that writes and thus that has a history and leaves its own traces, conceptual artists in Chile were recuperating the corporeal as a political entity, going beyond the actual ideological affiliations associated with a particular individual.

In a context of forced corporeal disappearance, re-presenting the body became an act of subversion. As actual bodies vanished, were killed or scarred, Chilean artists working in conceptual modes were insisting on its re-presentation, on making visible what remained opaque and veiled in official discourse. The body was understood by these artists as a site for concrete and symbolic social inscriptions, and an arena where a dispute regarding its meaning, value, and its connection to the nation was carried out. Thus, the geographies and maps traced by artists were also corporeal, the spaces they interrupted and the norms they disrupted were envisioned as used and produced by different bodies that were in turn marked and produced as visible or invisible, marginal or normal, diseased or healthy, expendable or necessary. The translation and displacement performed in conceptual works from the two dimensional to the three dimensional, from the individual body to the body politic, and from the latter back to the physicality of the city and its users, allowed them to critique and make manifest the interactions between body, space, and discourse. As they dismantled official representations of the corporeal, these artists proposed fragmented, disjointed and multiple body-scapes filled with contradiction and ambiguity, bodies composed of margins and openings.

Such acts of marking the body politic were associated in the local scene with an avant-garde gesture. The new value given to the corporeal meant not only breaking with a

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<sup>1592</sup> After Richard's capitalization on these ideas from 1980 onwards in regards to Leppe, other writers like Francesca Lombardo, continued reading the corporeal as opposed to a rational, male order. See, for example, Lombardo's reading of Leppe's performance, "Apunte y Glosa," 7.

tradition that had avoided its representation when it did not fit the parameters of high art, but represented a political commitment to the present and to a particular space. Avoiding and critiquing the idea of aesthetic autonomy, the Chilean artists and critics working in a conceptual mode capitalized on the necessity to join art and life by addressing directly the transformations in the body politic and countering hegemonic representations, sites, and messages with concrete visual inscriptions. Yet it is at this point where one of the greatest contradictions of the conceptual scene that became known as the “escena de avanzada” becomes apparent: the strictness with which they defined their identity and created their own artistic space, in other words, their territoriality.

Both the individual artists working in conceptual modes and the critics who supported them were performing acts of marking, setting limits, and closing their own edges. Though advocating models of ambivalence, ambiguity, uncertainty, and plurality that were closely associated with specific forms of marginality, these artists thought of themselves as operating with a distinct approach to art, separate from other practices, pure in their impurity, radically marginal. If this took at first the form of distinguishing their art from that of the Chilean Informalists or political murals as much as from the conservative pictorial traditions of Surrealist and geometrical abstraction, it also involved denying any form of dependency on exterior avant-garde models. Using images and symbols deeply connected to the local helped avoid the problem of dependency on exterior universalizing forms (such as abstraction), just like the deconstruction of images enabled artists to evade the question of becoming politically illustrative, while the emphasis on process and change apparently eliminated the creation of static commodities associated with bourgeois art. But in claiming their territory as an original avant-garde, the Chilean conceptual groups threatened to become confined in a small fief, avoiding other communities of resistance that did not fit their own parameters, whether these existed abroad or in a local level. As they de-territorialized the images of the nation and the body politic articulated by the dictatorship, these artists re-territorialized their own apparently multifaceted versions.<sup>1593</sup>

There were, nevertheless, conceptual artists that continuously worked to break down borders, even their own. Though there was tendency to repeat themes and to revert to the self-constructed myth of being an independent avant-garde, several artists like Leppe were also questioning the self-enclosure in the creation of national art, as seen in his performances from 1980 onwards. Yet as the Chilean art field was filled in the 1980s with more actors whose practices had evident relations to international examples, suggesting a hybrid approach to art and its sources, or already established artists like Dittborn seemed to be moving away from the Chilean imaginary while venturing into

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<sup>1593</sup> The conceptual artists in Chile even became ‘fathers’ or attempted to extend their seeds into younger generations. This became manifest in the exhibition Galería Sur titled “Provincia Señalada” (Signaled Province) co-curated by Leppe and Díaz. With the title, the artist’s were continuing with the themes of nationalistic symbols as embodied in Ercilla’s sixteenth century poem (used by Dittborn in 1976), where Chile is described as a “fertile signaled province.” Yet this new frontier land was reconceived in 1983 as a fresh province to be conquered by younger artists building on ground leveled by their conceptual fathers. At least, such was the position of Richard in 1986, when she argued that in 1982, young artists had “reoriented an after of the “avanzada” in a novel pictorial direction.” Richard, *Margins e Institutions*, 154 (my translation from the Spanish original).

international projects,<sup>1594</sup> the aloofness, reclusion, and identification of avant-garde art with a specifically national context became more problematic and its relevance marked as obsolete. In the end, even the discourse of the avant-garde had to repeat its premises to reinforce itself and assert the validity of its own borders. Richard's 1986 *Margins and Institutions* was not merely a swan's song marking the demise of groups like C.A.D.A. or the temporal retreat from art making by artists like Leppe and Altamirano, but it implied the naturalization in the realm of art history of a coherent, cohesive, and clearly defined group settled around shared ideas and brought together under the sign of "escena de avanzada."

It was in this context of re-defining Chilean identity and securing the borders of an avant-garde territory that Robert Rauschenberg suddenly appeared in the scene.<sup>1595</sup> The artist's presence was motivated by his *ROCI* project (Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange), a "humanitarian project to promote world peace through art,"<sup>1596</sup> that led the artist to engage in a series of trips and workshop collaborations around the world.<sup>1597</sup> According to Rauschenberg's 1997 retrospective exhibition catalogue, the project aimed "to introduce an artistic dialogue in those populations living under repressive or nondemocratic regimes,"<sup>1598</sup> with Chile being chosen because of the country's particularly long and repressive military dictatorship as well as "its geographical (...) uniqueness, being the southernmost part of (...) the known earth."<sup>1599</sup> The artist had already visited the country the previous year, taking photographs of the capital and particularly of the desert near Antofagasta, stopping at a copper mine in Chuquicamata and becoming "fascinated" with the landscape. So inspired was Rauschenberg with what he described as "a garden of minerals, where pieces of copper, *piritas* and other stones flowered in the midst of the desert,"<sup>1600</sup> that he decided to use copper plates in his works as "a sign of solidarity with the Chilean people, many of

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<sup>1594</sup> I am referring here to Dittborn's airmail paintings, to which he has been dedicated since 1984 and that have led to his recognition on an international scale. Nevertheless, it should be noted that when Richard sent a pre-selection of works for the Sydney Biennial of 1984, the curator, Leon Paroissien, chose only two of her artists (Dittborn and Díaz, as opposed to Leppe and C.A.D.A.) because they were doing an art more easily translatable and readable in international venues.

<sup>1595</sup> There was an exhibition of Rauschenberg's printed works in 1977 at Instituto Chileno-Norteamericano (Chilean-North American Institute), yet besides a brief mention in an end of the year review by Sommer, the exhibition went largely unnoticed. Besides, the artist had not actually accompanied the works. See Waldemar Sommer, "1977: año de afirmaciones plásticas," *El Mercurio*, January 8, 1978.

<sup>1596</sup> Elizabeth Carpenter, "International Collaboration 1982-1995," *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, ed. Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1997), 438.

<sup>1597</sup> The countries included in the project were Mexico, Chile, Venezuela, China, Tibet, Japan, Cuba, the Soviet Union, East Germany, and Malaysia.

<sup>1598</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1599</sup> Robert Rauschenberg, interview with Waldemar Sommer, "Rauschenberg, el gozo creador," *El Mercurio*, July 21, 1985.

<sup>1600</sup> Robert Rauschenberg, quoted in "El genio de los desechos," *Revista Hoy*, July 22-28, 1985, 35.

whom work[ed] in the mines, against Chile's dictator."<sup>1601</sup> With such a fraternal gesture, the copper plates could be read as casting a reflection of the land, a vision of Chile according to one of the 'fathers' of mechanical reproduction in the arts.<sup>1602</sup>

Though most of the press celebrated Rauschenberg's exhibition and individual achievements, there were a few examples of internal resentment against his paternal gesture. *Revista Cauce* wondered whether in a three day visit the artist could effectively "know"<sup>1603</sup> anything about Chilean life and represent it through art, specially having in mind that the artist claimed to be working in the gap between the two. Dismissing the question with the statement: "while I was here I totally exposed myself to what surrounded me (...) I believe that in the week or week and half we were more exposed to the country than those who have lived [here] an entire life,"<sup>1604</sup> Rauschenberg gave legitimacy to his own vision of the Chilean situation by claiming a complete state of unbiased sponge-like openness to the local context. And what he exhibited in nearly all the rooms of the Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago was a combination of silkscreened photographs whose origins were found in different parts of the world. The Chilean setting was reduced to the Greek-inspired caryatid columns as found in the Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago, combined with façades of Neo-Classical buildings encountered in the city, graffiti, street signs, Christian crosses, bottles of wine, local lottery tickets, palm trees, houses framed by bits of mountains, and the desert (fig. 7.2).<sup>1605</sup> The Chilean landscape was trimmed in Rauschenberg's vision to a paradisiacal, placid setting, filled with natural riches, ready to be exploited under the banner of humanitarian aims.<sup>1606</sup> What Rauschenberg presented at the Museum was a re-colonized landscape, drained of its most

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<sup>1601</sup> Joan Young and Susan Davidson, "Chronology," in *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, 580.

<sup>1602</sup> Rauschenberg was explicit about his didactic intentions. Speaking to Sommer of his choice of Chile for *ROCI*, the artist explained that he wanted to "reflect" the varied experiences he had had in the country, hoping to "contribute to eliminate some of the local prejudices regarding what is important and what is not. Also, to remind the inhabitants of Chile the things about which they should feel proud and singular. Because this is a unique country!" Rauschenberg, quoted in Sommer, "Rauschenberg, el gozo creador."

<sup>1603</sup> "Rauschenberg & Co.," *Revista Cauce*, July 30- August 5, 1985, 30.

<sup>1604</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1605</sup> Some of the works were partially documented in *El Mercurio* as the installation of the exhibition was underway, each day bringing a new image of the large scale project. The caryatids can be seen in the first page of the newspaper under the caption "work of art inspired in Chile," *El Mercurio*, July 9, 1985, while elements from the desert appear in the work "Caryatid I," which appears in the article "Rauschenberg, el gozo creador," on July 21. Rauschenberg also features in the latter's portrait, where he appears seated in one of the second floor railings of the museum, proudly smiling to the camera with a large scale hanging work interrupting the museum's main hall. Other works documented in the article are "Copper Head Bite XI" and "Altar Piece Chile." The caryatids reappear in the article "Un viento llamado Robert Rauschenberg" (A wind called Robert Rauschenberg), of July 14.

<sup>1606</sup> *Revista Cauce* described the show as "comfortable, brilliantly decorative, superficial, bubbling, and with a residue of something already seen (in his own work and in those of others)." *Ibid.* The article compared Rauschenberg's apolitical exhibition with the series of German prints of the Weimar period that were also exhibited at the Museum, seeing in the latter more criticism and actuality than in the former's works.



complicated political elements, a landscape where real bodies were replaced by Classical statuary.<sup>1607</sup>

The juxtaposition of the Chilean attempts to show their self-claimed avant-garde art abroad (and the poor reception such art obtained at the time) with the representations of the landscape shown by Rauschenberg in 1985, shows two radically different approaches to the relation between avant-garde practices and politics exhibited in an international setting. While opposing these examples might seem Manichean, my interest has been exploring some of the reasons why the Chilean conceptual graphics, performance practices, and video art between 1975 and 1985 have had until recently little impact on an international scale and a project like Rauschenberg's continues to receive critical acclaim. It is ironical that Altamirano's last exhibition for several years would be titled "Pintor como un estúpido" (The Painter as a Stupid), opening in late July, a few weeks after Rauschenberg's show and only a few blocks away from it.<sup>1608</sup> If in 1982 the Chilean works seemed like obsolete imitations of avant-garde art when displayed abroad, or were too self-referentially political for European metropolitan audiences to digest, Rauschenberg's own interpretations of the Chilean body politic were out of tune with the specific context they dealt with to say the least. But rather than blaming Rauschenberg for his political ingenuity, the question remains how effective and avant-garde were indeed the Chilean conceptual practices. What was the relevance of their works both within and without national borders? Was it only a question of context that gave them

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<sup>1607</sup> Even though the aim was political in intent, Rauschenberg's own words avoided any political confrontation. When asked about the situation in Chile, the artist responded by saying, "I do not necessarily approve of what is happening in Chile, politically. But that is none of my business; my business had to do with knowing about this and I did. When I was here before, Chile was having a hard time, with a curfew that was extended recently... the Church has had a great responsibility here to contact the people who cannot be contacted in any other way. Therefore, I know more about Chile than what can be seen in the reflections of a copper plate." Ibid.

<sup>1608</sup> Though the title seems to directly refer to Rauschenberg, it was connected to the local scene. Altamirano's exhibition continued with the theme of revising Chilean art history, particularly the landscape, as seen in the stenciled words "painting" placed on one of the gallery's glass walls facing the street, creating a mobile urban landscape of sorts. Next to the entrance were texts written by Richard, which spoke of "restituting to history the geography that was subtracted from it," and of how "the repressed (the national, the popular) must be reintroduced in the interior of its oppressing body (the culturally official or the academy) as proof of a censure which unblocks the trauma of history." Altamirano also made his own small anthology or personal history of the conceptual scene's major works, including his own sheet from "Versión residual de la pintura chilena" (Residual Version of Chilean Painting) now presented at the entrance's floor to be walked and stained on. In the following rooms, the quoted works were presented in a decayed, fragmented form. Most of the documentary photographs dedicated to works by Leppe and C.A.D.A. were printed or shown in between shards of glass next to the walls, a small avant-garde graveyard, a landscape of ruins and stains. Next to the glass pieces and mirrors was a video installation shown in the first Video Art Encounter, pairing on back to back monitors the works "Altamirano artista chileno" with "Panorama de Santiago" (a quote of Juan Francisco González' painting of the same title (Panorama de Santiago), which was shown in the video hanging on the museum, periodically visited briefly by crowds). There was something ironical in Altamirano presenting his recorded run to the museum, which was a few blocks away from Enrico Bucci's gallery in 1985, and his reference to the González' "Panorama de Santiago" (whose title had been pasted in mold letters on top of the television's monitor), when Rauschenberg was presenting his own views and panoramas of Chile in the museum. Altamirano's exhibition is a good example of how a current intersection of interests between the local and global was not noted by either critics or artists at the time, and continues to pass unmentioned in spite of contemporary revisions of Chilean art of the period.

their radical status, being rooted in the dictatorial setting and opposed to it? Or does this apparent international rejection merely reflect a neo-colonial position that dismisses art coming from non-hegemonic locations because of its lack of centrality?

If being avant-garde means by definition being exposed to obsolescence, then this was hardly an inherent problem in the Chilean works presented at the 1982 Paris Biennial. But the built in resistance and denial of international models, even while appropriating them, the attempt to self-define these practices as eminently Chilean, disclaiming fathers and influences other than their own, were all factors partly contributing to Chilean art's isolation from international scenes. It has been one of the underlying arguments of this work that the problem of defining an avant-garde art in self-referential terms, only by looking inwards, leads to an insular stance that in the case of Chilean art went beyond the "finis terra" complex of a third world country physically and psychologically 'separated' from the rest of the world, peripheral in its third-worldliness. Though the latter point of view gained ascendancy in the 1980s on an international level in the midst of identity politics and a growing concern with globalization, helping redefine the question of Chilean isolation on the axis of the hegemonic and the peripheral, the problem regarding a national identity in the arts has remained unsolved.<sup>1609</sup>

It is not the intention of this work to solve this problem or propose a definite version of this period, but rather I have attempted to look at the gaps and points of contact between the Chilean scene, its past, and influences. If this work started with a revision of how being avant-garde was defined in the 1960s and early 1970s in Chile as an opening to other Latin American experiences (political and artistic), it was to point how the gap produced by the dictatorship allowed for a new artistic space to be created that defined itself in opposition to this expansiveness and its ideological underpinnings for the first eight years. This new vanguard reflected in certain ways the closure and conservative stance of the dictatorship insofar as it denied any form of cultural assimilation. It is ironic that after 1982, Chilean conceptual artists and their supporters advocated a form of pan

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<sup>1609</sup> A few months before I wrote this conclusion in December 2009, a store called "Puro Chile" was opened in SoHo, New York. The name is yet another reference to the national anthem and its two first words (Pure, Chile ...). The store features mostly Chilean wines, one of the country's most prominent exports besides copper these days, yet has a separate space that will be increasingly devoted to selling certain local products, often blending the "traditional" and "native" (such as Mapuche wool, food, designs) with the "modern" (which could be variously qualified as sleek-looking, internationally adaptable, semi-abstract design). In the shelves and other non-obtrusive spaces, there are several brochures featuring spectacular images of the Chilean landscape, particularly of its "borders" and frontier zones, such as the desert and the dramatic views of the Patagonia in the south. It is of particular interest that the store's back room has been used twice to date to produce art related events that are meant to showcase contemporary Chilean art as another product for export. Nevertheless, though the interest has been to show the "new" happening out "there," the conceptual groups I have mentioned have been the foil and restraining force behind these efforts. This "influence" can be seen in the prominent space occupied by the "avanzada" in the book "launched" at the store (*Copiar el Edén*, published in 2007, backed by the government, though with a long and complicated story of international distribution) with the presence of its international editor and motor, Gerardo Mosquera, and in the talk about contemporary art that followed. The latter featured Arturo Duclos, a conceptual painter that emerged in the early 1980s and who variously addressed artists and groups from the 1980s and even before that, and Camilo Yáñez, who spoke of several current artists working critically and originally with themes related in part with identity. Who went to the talk? Mostly Chileans. The wine seems to sell better than the art.

Latin Americanism, opening up to other local scenes under the sign of the marginal instead of making connections among their political situations, historical intersections, and actual artistic influences.<sup>1610</sup>

The question of how these practices are seen outside the territorial limits of its scene of production is a well founded critique that also needs to be taken into account when looking at Chilean art. Hegemonic centers of artistic and theoretical production continue to control and manage the access to ‘official’ versions of history, giving value to some practices as opposed to others depending on their location or shifting attractiveness. The problem of translation in the arts is attached to this problem, how to make sense abroad of an art that refers to local problems, or simply of an art that is made in peripheral locations (from a ‘Western’ point of view). I have performed my own translations, since I have been looking at the past from multiple distances, physical, temporal, and personal. The importance of these Chilean conceptual practices lies in how they were re-thinking models of identity and representation, how they were reinterpreting exterior and interior models to criticize current society, proposing other models of action, communication, and experience in everyday life. One of the values of these artists’ works was the models of contestation they were proposing as embedded in an in-between space of irresolution, openness, and ambiguity that might suggest other avenues of being, whether in an evident repressive regime or not. While being conservative in their isolationist stance and though deeply rooted in the national dictatorial context, the Chilean conceptual practices of 1975-1985 posed different ways to experience space, the body, and everyday life itself that revealed in ambivalence, intersections, trespassing limits and displacement while taking into account the very space from which they emerged. Appearing in a moment and space of crisis, they reasserted the value of criticality and transformation, pointing to other ways of producing space and corporeality. If this type of discourse had received in the last thirty years more relevance and validation through post-modern and post-colonialist critiques, and would apparently make of these practices anticipated or at least up-to-date versions of them, this temporal coincidence is less important than the possibility suggested by them of changing the maps of reality and creating different forms of social action.

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<sup>1610</sup> This could make the topic of an entirely different dissertation. I will only mention here Dittborn’s exhibition in Colombia during the late 1970s for example, and the later exhibition of Leppe, Dittborn, Díaz, and C.A.D.A at CAYC in 1984. Leppe exhibited a series of paintings based on Magritte with the word “montaigne” inscribed over old-fashioned looking portraits as part of his installation.

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