

Beyond the Book, but Still Attached:

Publishing by Artists in Chile in the 1990s and 2000s

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*¿Hasta dónde puedo llegar? Yo viajo en
un viaje sin rumbo y voy a chocar...¹*

Tiro de Gracia

The background: artist's publishing in Chile during the dictatorship

In Chile, the expansion of conceptual art took place relatively quickly. Art historian Mari Carmen Ramírez (2000: 373) has pointed out that conceptual practices in the arts started spreading in Latin America in two phases: first, roughly between 1960 and 1974, when conceptual artworks similar to those being made at the time in the United States, Europe and Japan also appeared in Brazil and Argentina; and then, from 1975 onwards, alongside its international unfolding, where its development could also be detected in some more countries of Latin America, including Chile. According to Ramírez, this second phase was distinguished by a 'vast rearticulation of conceptual practices in terms of both the appropriation of urban spaces and attempts to involve popular audiences in their proposals' (Ramírez 2000: 373).² Given Chile's specific political and social context at the time, with the country ruled by a violent and repressive dictatorship, aspirations such as regaining public spaces for art and capturing the attention of the general public — beyond

¹ 'How far can I go? I'm travelling on a journey without a destination and I'm going to crash...' Fragment of the lyrics of *Viaje sin rumbo* [Journey without a destination], one of the songs on the album *Ser humano*, released in 1997 by the Chilean hip hop band Tiro de Gracia.

² Unless otherwise specified, all translations are by the author.

the art community — took on a profile of their own and a particularly penetrating significance.

Running parallel to the development of conceptual art, artists in Chile also experienced a broadening of perspectives that allowed printed formats to be incorporated into the range of possibilities available to them: the Chilean avant-garde scene of the 1960s and 1970s manifested a serious interest in the printed page as a medium for visual creation, in the continuity between visuality and writing in intellectual reflection, and in the ephemeral and non-auratic nature of printed formats. While this interest differed from the tradition of the ‘artist’s book’ that had started to take shape in the 1960s, particularly in the English-speaking world, it was nevertheless intensely productive and had its own specific attributes.

In their desire to work with printed formats, Chilean visual artists were aligning with photographers — who had always considered the book to be one of the most appropriate media for the circulation of their visual work — as well as with their contemporary writers and poets. The latter had inherited a powerful tradition of experimentation that had been consolidated since the 1950s and would bear fruit in works such as *La nueva novela* [The New Novel] by Juan Luis Martínez (1977), or the first poetry books by Raúl Zurita, *Purgatorio* [Purgatory] (1979) and *Anteparaíso* [Before Paradise] (1982). As Argentinian art historian Andrea Giunta has pointed out, the most striking feature of the Chilean scene lies precisely in the very close connection that was established in those years between the artistic and literary scenes:

The Chilean case has no Latin American equivalent. That is why it should be studied as a unique, distinct model within the fluidity of the process of globalisation in art. Although it stems from theoretical references that can be found in all writing on contemporary art, these served to create a different terrain, in which the texts occurred at the same time, before or immediately after the works, leaving their meaning vacant, incomplete, always happening again. The open nature of writing about art makes the texts available, offering the possibility of intervention on the basis of what the other postulates (Giunta 2010: 22-23).

Such an intimate link between art and literature unfolded in a rich and sophisticated publishing production, as well as in a dense network of personal relationships that connected the protagonists of both scenes. The resulting network not only provided its members with mutual intellectual stimulation and freedom of expression in spite of the difficult external circumstances, but also — and equally relevant — with a feeling of protection or refuge. As artist Carlos Altamirano would later

declare, '[t]o a certain extent, art lent its space to politics, inventing a way of speaking politically without talking about politics' (Altamirano quoted in Galende 2007: 269). Art and literature thus converged in a crossroads where it was possible to resist and oppose, albeit always in subtle and indirect ways, so as not to fall into the trap of making overly explicit provocations that could attract censorship or punishment.

This way of 'speaking politically', also described as 'opaque textuality' (Giunta 2010: 14-15), was certainly left undefined or vague in order to avoid censorship, but it also opened up multiple possible meanings, thereby gaining a degree of freedom in an otherwise suffocating and closed environment. More than a matter of style, expressive indeterminacy was often a necessary reaction to dictatorial oppression. In Giunta's words:

The practice of writing as an act of resistance. Writing in a condition of opaque textuality, but writing, nonetheless. Thinking. Because if there was one thing the dictatorship wanted to do, it was to obliterate the possibility that any meaning could still be realised. The form of writing as an oppositional gesture and its openness as a way of keeping meaning vacant, to leave open the possibility of thinking everything again, everything from the beginning (Giunta 2010: 14-15).

While textual ambiguity, which both obscures the meaning and has the potential to project it in multiple directions, is characteristic of a significant number of publications by Chilean visual artists produced under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, many of these publications also share another significant feature: an ephemeral materiality. Their perishable nature can either be due to the fragility of their material support (sometimes just a simple leaflet) or emanate from the very conditions of circulation of the medium where they are made to exist. Many artists' interventions in everyday communication channels, expressively referred to as 'critical interferences' by art historian and writer Nelly Richard (1979: 13), had a very short existence — in the case of newspapers, barely 24 hours. After that, they were immediately discarded as waste and, as such, doomed to be lost in the final stage of the life cycle of the publications in which they had been made public. See, for instance, the self-denominated *acciones de prensa*, or 'press actions', carried out by Colectivo Acciones de Arte (C.A.D.A.) in the 1980s, consisting of insertions in daily newspapers or mass-circulation magazines.

Some sections in art magazines were explicitly devoted to presenting visual interventions by artists, thereby creating the proper conditions for such 'critical interferences' to circulate. This certainly had an impact, since, between 1979 and

the early 1980s, magazines played a particularly important role in the Chilean neo-avant-garde art scene. Among the periodicals that most eagerly lent themselves to this function was the magazine *CAL* (an acronym for ‘Coordinación Artística Latinoamericana’ or ‘Latin American Artistic Coordination’), published by the eponymous gallery between June and November 1979.³ Directed by Luz Pereira, founder and director of the gallery, and designed by visual artist Teresa Gunther, *CAL* magazine was conceived from the outset as a medium with a dual function: as a tool for disseminating information through articles that presented or commented on the art, literature and music scenes both in Chile and internationally; and as a space for artistic creation.

The latter function was performed in one of the sections that structured the magazine. In this section, as Gunther would later explain, the idea was to ask artists ‘to create an original artwork, just for the magazine and that only works in the magazine. The artwork was conceived exclusively for those pages *and then disappeared*’ (Gunther quoted in Raveau 2013: 54; emphasis added).

The first contribution to this section in *CAL* bore the eloquent title ‘Aproximaciones al concepto de ocupar la página de una publicación de arte como medio para el arte’ [Approaches to the Concept of Occupying the Page of an Art Publication as an Art Medium] and was signed by Nelly Richard. It consisted of a short text in which Richard advocated awareness of the physical aspects — typographical, compositional, and textual — of the printed page and its potential as a material for creative use. Based on the relationship between the authenticity of the work of art and the here and now postulated by Walter Benjamin, Richard proposed in her text to consider the publication ‘as a place of occupation by art, in terms of presentation and not re/presentation,’ and also ‘as a mechanism that is not reproductive but productive of art,’ given that it was in the ‘situation/publication where the process of collectivisation of art had to be produced and consumed’ (Richard 1979: 13). Richard’s definition describes, in a sense, many of the experimental practices in print that took place in Chile during the dictatorship. In these practices, certainly, the aim was to *occupy* a space understood as public — particularly media such as newspapers and magazines, but also other ephemeral supports such as posters and leaflets — and use it for *production* (rather than mere reproduction), because such space offered greater flexibility, and its reach could be wide enough to secure the printed artwork a good circulation — in Richard’s words, to guarantee its ‘process of collectivisation.’

³ *CAL*. 1979. Issues 1–4 (June, July, August and November). The director of issues 3 and 4 was Luz Pereira, and the editor was Nelly Richard.

Mutation of sensitivity: new forms of publishing since 1989

In the early 1980s, Pinochet's government established a new Constitution, draughted by the dictatorship and approved in a referendum whose results were illegally rigged.⁴ From that year onwards, despite harsh repression, citizen protests against the dictatorship intensified. In 1988, the state of emergency that had been in force since the 1973 coup d'état was finally suspended and, in accordance with the provisions of the 1980 Constitution, a referendum was called to elect a president. Although Pinochet had appointed himself as the only candidate, the 'No' vote, advocated by most of the opposition parties grouped together in a grand coalition won by a large margin and the dictator lost the referendum.

Thus began a complex and painful transition to democracy, which was consolidated in 1989 when Patricio Aylwin, the Christian Democratic Party candidate, won the first free presidential elections held in the country since 1970. However, Aylwin's election marked only a partial break with the dictatorship: although he took office as president in 1990, Pinochet retained supreme command of the Chilean army until the end of the decade, and many officials of the Pinochet dictatorship continued to hold public office and positions in the new government.⁵

Immediately after democracy was reinstated in 1989, Chilean society experienced a rapid transformation (though, given the continuity of part of Pinochet's regime, it is questionable how profound this transformation actually was). Among other improvements, freedom of ideology and expression was restored, and political persecution disappeared. The slow process of healing the social, emotional, intellectual, and cultural rifts caused by the dictatorship began: a process that was — and continues to be — experienced differently by those who suffered first-hand (both in Chile and in exile) and those who, belonging to later generations, did not have to endure the dictatorship itself, but grew up under its sinister legacy.

From 1989 on, visual artists who had been active during the previous fifteen years quickly perceived how the limitations that had impacted on the potential development of their practice gradually disappeared. Real possibilities to carry out projects that would have been impracticable under the dictatorship opened up. And yet, institutional or commercial structures aimed at supporting art practices and making resources available to creators did not come into existence so fast; indeed, a structural network of support would take quite some time to develop.⁶

In turn, the so-called 'generation of the 1990s' — those artists who began their professional practice in the years following the end of the dictatorship and the restoration of democracy — perceived this post-dictatorial period differently, since their awareness of their own position in the world had certainly changed.

⁴ This Constitution remains in force today, although it has undergone some seventy reforms, almost all of which were approved after 1990, in the democratic period.

⁵ In 1991, the Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación [National Truth and Reconciliation Commission], created by the Chilean government two years earlier, published its report on the savage repression carried out by the military dictatorship. Despite the controversy caused by the harshness of the criminal acts revealed in the report, Pinochet retained his military rank until 1998, when he relinquished it to be appointed, the following day, senator for life, a move that led to intense protests. A few months later, Pinochet was arrested in London at the request of Spanish judge Baltasar Garzón, who had issued an international arrest warrant accusing him of genocide. He was released in 2000 due to dementia, and returned to Chile, where the diagnosis was confirmed, prompting his resignation from the senate. Augusto Pinochet died in Santiago in 2006, never having faced trial for these charges.

⁶ The lack of supporting structures forced artists to work in precarious conditions, in which persistence and inventiveness were almost the only way to carry out projects. For example, in order to be able to take the photographs that would turn into one of the most celebrated Chilean photobooks of the second half of the 20th century, *El infarto del alma* [Heart Attack of the Soul] (Eltit and Errázuriz 1994), Paz Errázuriz had to finance the project with her own resources — and made use of creative solutions such as exchanging a portrait of the director of the psychiatric hospital where she would be photographing for permission to reside with the inmates for some time. I am grateful to Martín La Roche for sharing this anecdote about Errázuriz with me.

Among other aspects, their expectations about the possibilities that printed matter could offer them when used as a medium for visual art had been reshaped. On the one hand, artists now felt more entitled to take on an active and productive role in the institutional — or at least pseudo-institutional — legitimisation of their own practices, adopting discursive analysis and theoretical comment while they continued to work with visuality. On the other hand, the absence of truly democratic art institutions that support their work and ensure its visibility was a shortcoming, but for some of them it seemed plausible to overcome, at least partially, by using printed media as a form of para-institutional, or para-legitimising, device.

Technological advances also played a significant role in this change of perspective, as they were slowly beginning to challenge the previously unquestionable solidity and intellectual authority of the book as a container and transmitter of knowledge. It was in around 1990 when access to domestic digital devices — personal computers, the first (still rudimentary) desktop publishing software, and the home printers a bit later on — began to spread throughout the Western world. Although it would take another decade for the use of these technologies to become truly widespread, it was at that time that the relation and interaction with books began to change inexorably, just as the symbolic values associated with the printed word were mutating. This trend was incipient and difficult to detect at first, but over time it would only strengthen. Considering this change in the attitude towards books and print retrospectively, Chilean artist Voluspa Jarpa, who had begun her Fine Arts studies in Santiago in the very year that Pinochet lost the referendum — and whose work is discussed in greater depth below — accurately observed in 2018 that the book was now ‘an object that is becoming technically obsolete’ (Jarpa quoted in Pérez Rubio 2018: 32), and that ‘the end of certain ideological projects related to printing and the precepts of the encyclopaedia, with a technological system that closes with the book’ was approaching (2018: 33).⁷

However, in 1989, these processes were still in their early stages. Books and other printed matter had not yet lost their symbolic prestige; on the contrary, at the time, eventually free from the restrictions imposed by the dictatorship, they seemed ideal channels for the dissemination of the artistic positions of the new generations.

Jemmy Button Inc. (1994–1995)

Very soon after 1989, artist-driven publishing initiatives emerged in which, instead of delegating the presentation of their work to third parties, artists themselves wrote the theoretical texts in the first person or took on the role of compilers and editors. Notable in this regard are the two publications edited by the Jemmy Button

⁷ In the same conversation, Jarpa pointed out that the expansion of digital media was also shifting the meaning of the concept of authorship and, therefore, intellectual authority, as they had been understood until the 1990s (Pérez Rubio 2018: 33). This transformation, in fact, has not yet been completed, but the recent explosion of Artificial Intelligence-based tools seems to have sped it up.

Inc. group in the mid-1990s: *Deficit Club* (1994), and *Taxonomías (Textos de artistas)* [Taxonomies (Texts by Artists)] (1995).

Jemmy Button Inc. was the name under which artists Mónica Bengoa (1969), Mario Navarro (1970), and Cristián Silva (1969), and art critic Justo Pastor Mellado (1949), all born in Santiago de Chile, signed the curatorial authorship of a collective exhibition presented in the Netherlands in November 1994.⁸ The name was inspired by a historical figure, a native of Tierra del Fuego from the nomadic Yaghan ethnic group who, in 1830, when he was about fifteen years old, was bought by the crew of Darwin's ship, the *Beagle*, and taken to England. There he learned English, became familiar with English customs, and came into contact with the country's elites, even being presented at the court of William IV before being taken back to Tierra del Fuego in 1831.

Button's life story was of course exemplary of the alienation that results from colonial extractivist desires, but it was in particular the successive processes of estrangement and cultural assimilation that he was forced to undergo, both on arriving in England and on returning to his native region, which seemed to Bengoa, Navarro, and Silva specifically suited to symbolise the difficulties they were experiencing first-hand during the preparations for their project in the Netherlands.⁹ Throughout this process, they were constantly faced with a double paradox: firstly, despite having been educated in Chile, their solid academic background had been entirely shaped by European cultural and artistic traditions; secondly, regardless of such education, their Chilean birthplace and upbringing prompted Dutch institutions to exoticise their work by inertia, without evaluating the cultural and artistic genealogy to which their actual practice belonged.

For Bengoa, Navarro, and Silva, such contradictions only served to highlight the problems inherent in every process of cultural assimilation. Accordingly, they chose to ground both the exhibition and the publication that they produced in the Netherlands — whose title was inspired by the difficulties they had encountered in obtaining funding for their project — in the opportunities for reinvention of one's own identity through the practice of art and writing such processes entail. It is no coincidence that the introductory text to *Deficit Club*, written by Mellado, is entitled 'The Darwinism of Curatorship on Latin American Art'. In this text, Mellado sharply states that:

[the mission of] this study and artistic production group is to put on stage — visually and textually — models of artistic significance; that is, minimal narrative units describing 'eventful' situations whose plots dismantle the *bon savage* honesty of intercontinental artistic relations (Mellado 1994: 6; emphasis in the original).

⁸ 'Deficit Club' was held at three consecutive venues: The Royal Academy of Fine Arts, The Hague and AKI of Enschedelt featured works by Natalia Babarovic, Paul Beuchat, Sybil Brintrup, Francisca García, Waldo Gómez, Nury González, Claudio Herrera, Voluspa Jarpa, Pablo Langlois, Carlos Montes de Oca, Iván Navarro, Carlos Navarrete, Mario Soro, Rosa Velasco, José Luis Villaplana, Alicia Villareal, and Ximena Zomosa. The accompanying publication is reviewed in the references section of this article. See Jemmy Button Inc. 1994.

⁹ I am enormously grateful to Ana María Fernández for sharing this information with me, as well as much of the narrative that follows: my account of the history of Jemmy Button Inc. and Muro Sur draws heavily on her generous comments.

The difficulties Bengoa, Navarro, and Silva had to face in the Netherlands were far from anecdotal; rather, they reflected a complex problem, related both to the way their generation of artists — more cosmopolitan than Chilean artists of previous generations — projected its position on the international art scene, and to the links that they believed existed between themselves and their immediate predecessors. Chilean curator Paula Solimano has pointed out that ‘Jemmy Button Inc. [...] artists were interested in circulating in global contemporary art not as *children* of the Latin American leftist printmaking of the 1960s, but as Latin American artists interested in printmaking in their own right’ (Solimano quoted in Halart 2022; emphasis in the original). Solimano suggests that both the exhibition and the publications produced by the Jemmy Button Inc. collective were explicitly or implicitly related to ‘the notion of *bastardism*, [...] the absence of an origin, both in their works and in their management’ (Solimano quoted in Halart 2022; emphasis in the original).

Actually, instances of a similar *bastardism* could also be found in other contemporary collective initiatives. That is the case of the art gallery Galería Chilena (‘Galchi’), active between 1997 and 2005 and that, contrary to standard models of gallery work, did not have its own premises. In fact, Galchi-organised exhibitions temporarily appropriated spaces outside the art world, such as the entrances to corporate buildings or certain real estate projects.

The second book published by Jemmy Button Inc., *Taxonomías (Textos de artistas)*, brought together a compendium of essays written by seventeen artists in a ‘political gesture of self-knowledge and understanding of their work.’¹⁰ While *Taxonomías* was quite conventional in its form, its most original feature was that the compilation of discursive approaches that underpinned the practice of a number of artists it presented had actually been promoted by other visual artists, rather than historians or theorists. In this sense, *Taxonomías* was a preamble to Bengoa, Navarro and Silva’s next publishing endeavour, *Muro Sur — Artes Visuales* [Southern Wall — Visual Arts].

Muro Sur (1994-2004)

The preparations for ‘Deficit Club’ in the Netherlands in 1994 brought Bengoa, Navarro, and Silva into contact with lawyer Ana María Fernández Parodi, who had been working as cultural attaché at the Chilean Embassy in Amsterdam since 1990. Through her work, Fernández had previously met artist Eugenio Dittborn when he was spending a few months in the city to prepare a solo exhibition at the Witte de With.¹¹ In Santiago, among other projects, Dittborn had been part of V.I.S.U.A.L.

¹⁰ Centro Nacional de Arte Contemporáneo Cerillos (blog of the National Art Centre). 2018. ‘Aires de cambio: los 90.’ <https://centronacionaldearte.cultura.gob.cl/aires-de-cambiolos90/>.

¹¹ Eugenio Dittborn, *MAPA*, Witte de With, 11 December 1993–30 January 1994, curated by Chris Dercon, Barbera van Kooij and Jack van Mildert.



Fig. 1 Installing the exhibition 'Fotografía Reciente Paz Errázuriz' at Muro Sur, Santiago, 1998. Photo Paz Errázuriz. Courtesy of Ana María Fernández and Paz Errázuriz.

alongside Ronald Kay (Hamburg, 1941 — Santiago, 2017) and Catalina Parra (Santiago, 1940). V.I.S.U.A.L. was a publishing imprint which issued a number of highly experimental artist publications between 1976 and 1979. At the time, Dittborn was also a university professor of printmaking in Santiago, and Bengoa, Navarro, and Silva had all attended his classes. He thus acted as a bridge, connecting the three artists with Fernández in order to promote their travelling exhibition 'Deficit Club' in the Netherlands.

Later on, in 1996, when Fernández decided to return to Chile with his partner, writer, photographer, and professor Ricardo Cuadros, they settled in a flat in Plaza Brasil, located in a popular neighbourhood in central Santiago. Shortly afterwards, during the opening night of an exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts,¹² Fernández met a group of young artists, including Silva. In the conversation that followed, they expressed their complaints about art institutions in the country, lamenting their lack of receptiveness to their work and their unwillingness to abandon the prejudices of the dictatorship era, which continued to exert pressure through inherited structures and personnel. Fernández spontaneously responded by offering them a space inside her own flat, specifically the *muro sur*, that is, the 'southern wall', which was approximately four metres wide and seven metres high.

So it was that, starting in that informal conversation, the self-managed and fluid artist's collective Muro Sur was born. Muro Sur operated from 1994 to 2004, bringing together a diverse and intergenerational group of artists for whom Fernández, in addition to space, provided organisational support and help. Artist Mario Navarro recalls that 'there weren't many independent initiatives in Chile at that time', and emphasises that for him, the most distinctive feature of Muro Sur was its 'lightness' of operation: the group of artists who ran it never felt the desire to create a well-structured collective, but rather 'came and went, they didn't always exhibit together...' (Navarro quoted in Bengoa 2019).

In its early days, as some sort of exercise of 'reconnection' with the previous generation of artists, Muro Sur organised five solo exhibitions dedicated to key figures in the Chilean visual arts — Eugenio Dittborn, Eduardo Vilches, Paz Errázuriz, Gonzalo Díaz and Carlos Altamirano — all warmly welcomed by the art community [Fig. 1]. Soon after that, the original venue was expanded by adding the basement of the same three-storey building, in order to meet the technical demands of some artists. Not all artists decided to continue — from then on, rent had to be paid for the space — but those who did created a structure of committees which would be responsible for curating, design, communication, and all other aspects of a new series of exhibitions, debates, and other activities held in that basement.

One of the fundamental criteria for defining the curatorial programme of Muro Sur was to 'invent exhibitions to which one would like to be invited.'¹³ This was

¹² Gonzalo Díaz, 'Unidos en la gloria y en la muerte' [United in Glory and Death] exhibition. Matta Room, National Museum of Fine Arts, Santiago, December 1997–January 1998.

¹³ Fernández in conversation with the author, August 2025. Unless another source is indicated, the description of Muro Sur's activities that follows comes from the same conversation.

how proposals were gathered, and then the most popular ones were chosen by vote. It was artist Nury González who came up with the idea for the collective exhibition 'El objeto y su par' [The Object and its Pair], in which each work of art was associated with an everyday object. In 'El lugar no ideal' [The Non-Ideal Place], artists had to present works in spaces that were not exactly ideal for art exhibitions — Claudio Correa, for example, exhibited a figurative painting depicting a battle in the toilet of the venue. In the exhibition 'Grandes paños' [Large Surfaces], in turn, participating artists had to create works which would cover completely the wall assigned to them; etc.

Artist Gonzalo Díaz recalled: 'Behind [the project] was always a way of producing work effectively, that is, works could leave the studio where they were made and reach an audience, even if it was a small one' (Bengoa 2019). For Díaz, one of the strengths of the project lay in its ability to create a community around the programme and activities, something that, after the extreme fragmentation that Chilean society had been forced into during the dictatorship, required a certain amount of effort, but at the same time satisfied an urgent demand of the new democratic era.

In 1999, Muro Sur began publishing a large-format periodical similar to a newspaper — although printed on thicker paper — which would become, over the next three years, the main tool for the dissemination of the group's discursive and visual elaborations [Fig. 2]. *Muro Sur — Artes Visuales* might be better described as an art magazine made by artists than as an artist's publication aiming to constitute itself as an artwork. Three different issues of the periodical would eventually be published. The cover of the first, which appeared in November 1999, included a detailed statement of purpose:

Muro Sur — Artes Visuales is a response to the need to create a stable space that allows for the development of all cultural activities related to the production of contemporary art.

Muro Sur — Artes Visuales is a response to the need to create a local space capable of housing artwork focused on the signs, conflicts, particularities, dissonance, mixture, and sensitivity of our cultural identity.

Muro Sur — Artes Visuales is an invention of contemporary artists who come from different backgrounds, who have diverse interests and artistic proposals, but who require a common space for discussion, reflection, and criticism.

Muro Sur — Artes Visuales was created to foster the connection and tension between the various manifestations and modes of appropriation of symbolic spaces, of the new art forms that have recently emerged in the form of small clans scattered throughout the different local exhibition circuits... (Muro Sur 1999: 1).

MURO SUR

artes visuales

Nº 1, noviembre de 1999



María Victoria Palacios,
Series: *Abstracción con la estructura formal de la materia*
(1998, media mixed, 80 x 100 cm, 4/100)

Muro Sur - Artes Visuales se debe a la necesidad de crear un espacio estable que permita el desarrollo de todas las actividades culturales afines con la producción del arte contemporáneo.

Muro Sur - Artes Visuales se debe a la necesidad de crear un espacio local capaz de albergar un trabajo de arte concentrado en los signos, conflictos, particularidades, disonancia, mixtura y sensibilidad de nuestra identidad cultural.

Muro Sur - Artes Visuales es una invención de artistas contemporáneos que provienen de distintas matrices, que poseen diversos intereses y propuestas de obra, pero que requieren de un espacio común de discusión, reflexión y crítica.

Muro Sur - Artes Visuales ha sido creado para propiciar la

conexión y tensión de las diversas manifestaciones y modos de apropiación de los espacios simbólicos, de las nuevas formas de arte que se presentan recientemente bajo la forma de pequeños clanes dispersos en los distintos circuitos de exhibición local.

Muro Sur - Artes Visuales ha sido creado para superar una carencia al interior del espacio cultural chileno. Esto se refiere al rol desarrollado por las galerías chilenas comerciales con respecto a las artes visuales contemporáneas. Dichas galerías han priorizado aquellos lenguajes que se relacionan con la 'tradición de las bellas artes', postergando las prácticas más experimentales.

Muro Sur - Artes Visuales es una apuesta para desmentir la veracidad del mito referido

al desinterés general del público chileno, aquel conjunto de espectadores para los cuales están formuladas las obras, las preguntas y las respuestas.

Muro Sur - Artes Visuales se propone crear una instancia situada en la intersección de los espacios tradicionales de muestra -los institucionales y los comerciales- acorde con las necesidades del arte contemporáneo, desarrollando un espacio multifórmico que cuenta, por un lado, con una galería, y por otro, con proyectos de intervención de espacios públicos y privados.

Muro Sur - Artes Visuales ha sido creado para exhibir el trabajo de pares artistas cuyas obras constituyan un aporte relevante y significativo dentro del proyecto general del desarrollo del arte chileno de vanguardia.

La Ilusión después de la Desilusión

A propósito de *Étant donné...*

Verónica Jara

Esta obra pretende ser una lectura posible de la última obra de Marcel Duchamp -*Étant donné...*- entendida como la producción artificial de una imagen versátil. Imagen elaborada a partir de un dispositivo objetivo que se transforma en la fusión de un fragmento escénico.

La versatilidad se percibe en artificios que se presentan como posibles. En la visualidad, aquello que es imaginariamente una posibilidad de constituir realidad. Esto que es una sensación, necesariamente lleva a una segunda etapa, posterior a la ilusión y esto se traduce en una sensación de realidad ficticia que posteriormente estará marcada por una segunda etapa, derivada de la ilusión, y que consiste en la constatación de la materialidad en cuanto verdad de lo que se ve. Esto es la etapa de la desilusión. Y se manifestará como la dilatación de la imagen a partir de la toma de conciencia del artificio de la representación. Luego de esto ya no se estará frente a una imagen sino participando de la construcción de una.

En *Étant donné...* se asiste a una escena que es de difícil aprehensión instantánea. La ausencia de la captación inmediata se debe a que no existe un solo punto fíctico y hay un aparente desorden, lo que obliga a recorrer la imagen. Esto implica para el espectador una determinada actitud corporal de quietud y un dispositivo sensorial de contemplación, entendiendo que la contemplación consciente requiere de un cierto estado de suspensión de los juicios y percepciones e prior. En esta disposición surge una sospecha. Nada es casual, todo ha sido cuidadosamente dispuesto. La mirada vuelve a recorrer la escena pero esta

vez para dilucidar la trampa, el artificio y la armazón.

Lo que logra Duchamp es la producción de una imagen que, se instala en el imaginario del que la ve, mediante el juego de la negación de la referencialidad literaria y narrativa, obligando al que la percibe a sufrir la experiencia de la obra en la búsqueda de sentido. La obligatoriedad de permanecer en ella, a pesar de las dificultades de sentido, se debe a la seducción y goce que produce esta apariencia. La imposibilidad de cerrar la anecdota sumada a la precisión formal que se transforma en la precisión conceptual es lo que produce la experiencia estética de la obra.

La ejecución, la superficie, el volumen, es lo que le permite presentar la escena en un nivel de apariencia o de apariciones momentáneas y fragmentadas. A través del recorrido visual de la obra, lo que vemos en esta escena aparente, es solamente eso, la apariencia de una escena. En realidad la imposibilidad de salir como una totalidad se debe al hecho de que ella ha sido



Marcel Duchamp,
Étant donné... (1917, óleo sobre tela, 21 x 27 cm, 1/1000)
Dibujo: 1º y 2º estado de agua, 2º y 3º de la obra original

construida a través de estos pequeños detalles realistas independientes entre sí, pero desplegados en la representación de un espacio unívoco de coherencia lumínica.

Esto hace imposible no sentir, con mayor o menor grado, de que ciertamente son fragmentos que han sido sumados para crear una imagen versátil como totalidad estética. No queda, en el armado, totalmente borrada la fragmentación a la que pertenecen. Ella se manifiesta en la imposibilidad de cerrar semánticamente la obra, y esto no es un error o falta de su autor sino más bien la claridad conceptual manifiesta en el procedimiento de creación de la imagen versátil.

En este caso la versatilidad no está dada solamente por la apariencia realista de la obra sino también por una necesidad erótica del propio espectador que transformará este fragmento de cuerpo en su objeto de deseo, del deseo de observar todo, en ser visto, aquello que se transforma en una imagen transgresora, y que luego traspasará el imaginario del espectador soñador como decía Duchamp, "son los mirados los que hacen los cuadros".

2.

En 1927, Marcel Duchamp solicita a un carpintero que le construya una puerta en el taller siguiendo sus indicaciones. Esta deberá estar situada en la intersección de dos muros, ocupando una esquina. En ella el carpintero instala la puerta que se quita a dos vueltas. Uno que comunica con el estudio y otro con el dormitorio. Por lo tanto, cuando la puerta abre el estudio, cierra el dormitorio, y viceversa.

Hago esta relación para referirme al papel que tendrá el trabajo de Duchamp en las artes



Roberto Merino, en el taller
(1998, fotografía de la obra sobre tela, 1917, óleo sobre tela, 21 x 27 cm)

visuales. Me refiero a esta función binaria de ABRIR y CERRAR espacios de significación de manera simultánea.

La puerta implica una construcción irónica, mediante la elaboración de un objeto ambiguo. Las puertas entre la función de abrir y cerrar, pero en el desplegar del espacio-tiempo, pueden solamente estar abiertas, cerradas o entreabiertas, y no podrán cumplir simultáneamente ambas funciones opuestas. La obra en este caso, no consiste tan sólo en el objeto material, sino en aquello que queda establecido a partir del mismo: el significado y su extensión simbólica.

Duchamp será el artista que con mayor precisión ampliará los límites formales y conceptuales del arte a principios del siglo. El objeto industrial variado de uso común puede ser considerado arte si es empleado en un espacio que lo prive de su funcionalidad. Pero también el gesto de arte o la idea estarán incluidos en estas ampliaciones significativas.

Esto lleva consigo un cambio en los parámetros y cánones artísticos. Duchamp, en muchos de sus escritos se refiere con gran desprecio al goce sensorial y retórico que produce la pintura, especialmente la impresionista, tanto en el pintor

Fig. 2 Muro Sur — Artes visuales, cover of issue no. 1, November 1999. Courtesy of Ana María Fernández.

The list of reasons and objectives of the initiative continued by underlining the absence, in the Chilean cultural fabric of the time, of spaces in which experimental practices could become visible, stating the participating artists' desire, with this publication, to position themselves halfway between museums and other institutional spaces on the one hand, and commercial art galleries on the other.

The complaint about what the group perceived as a lack of interest on the part of official art institutions in supporting Chilean younger artists was to be a recurrent underlying theme in *Muro Sur — Artes Visuales*. The first issue of the series included a study by Silva (1999: 7-8) on artist-managed spaces that existed in Chile outside the institutional framework [Fig. 3]. Silva started by pointing out that some of these spaces had been inspired by two performances from the 1980s, both of which took creative advantage of the precarious situation and institutional shortcomings that prevailed in the country at that time. These actions consisted of the brief occupation of an abandoned hospital by Lotty Rosenfeld¹⁴ and the equally short-lived occupation of a newly built house by Carlos Altamirano (Silva 2000: 7).¹⁵

Among the agents and spaces that Silva listed were Ian Szydlowsky, a visual artist and DJ who in 1996 initiated Casa Tomada [Squatted House], for which he temporarily occupied a villa that was about to be demolished; thirteen artists from Valparaíso, with Vanessa Vásquez as general coordinator, who temporarily occupied an office in the city's financial centre to set up a short-lived project which they called, appropriating customs vocabulary, *Pertrechos / Ordnance* (1998); and a group of recently graduated artists who, in 1999, in Santiago de Chile, undertook a self-management and self-promotion campaign under the name Casasucia [Dirty-house] (Silva 2000: 7). A reference was also made to Galería Chilena — 'Galchi', the project that, among all of them, would ultimately achieve the greatest stability and permanence. Galchi had been created by artists Joe Villablanca, Felipe Mújica, and Diego Fernández and, as has been previously explained, consisted of a commercial partnership without headquarters, that is, with a nomadic nature. According to Silva, 'in comparison to conventional galleries, [Galchi] denotes a flexibility and agility similar to those of a hunting and fruit-gathering tribe compared to an agricultural community' (Silva 2000: 8).

The third issue of *Muro Sur — Artes Visuales* was not published in Santiago but in New York as part of the 'As a Satellite' programme organised by the Visual Arts Department of the Americas Society. Subtitled *Backyard*, it appeared on 11 September 2003, that is, thirty years after the coup d'état that had overthrown the government of Salvador Allende in Chile, and two years after the attack on the Twin Towers in New York. The front and back covers of this issue were illustrated with large photographs referring to both events [Fig. 4a, 4b].

¹⁴ The video installation *Cautivos* [Captives] was made by Lotty Rosenfeld on 2 December 1989 at the Ochagavía Hospital, an unfinished building that was never completed; for more information, see Fundación Lotty Roselfeld. n.d. 'Video Instalación Cautivos.' <https://fundacionlottyrosenfeld.org/coleccion/fondo-lotty-rosenfeld/actividad-artistica/video-instalacion-cautivos-interior-hospital-inconcluso/>.

¹⁵ The performance (title and date unknown) by Carlos Altamirano consisted of the occupation of a house under construction in the La Florida neighbourhood of Santiago, Chile.

MURO SUR

artes visuales

Nº 2, junio del 2000



Patricia Cepeda, *Imbanché*, 1996, video, Imp. Contraste 23 mm, Colección de la artista

Antípodas

Durante abril Patricia Cepeda y Juan Céspedes presentaron sendas instalaciones en Muro Sur. El hilván que permitió trazar una comunión entre las obras fue el uso del video. Eso sí, desde intenciones tan opuestas como el título de la muestra sugiere.

Por Elizabeth Neira

Una mujer de cara encolada y vestida con una camisa de vaporoso nylon saca de su boca metros de cuerda matricados con perserveras durante largos minutos. Con el cordel envalado se afana atando dos figuritas de porcelana, a las que luego agrega unas hebras que parecen algas y finalmente los trozos cristalizados de la máscara facial de cola fría. Terminado el curioso paquete concluye el video y el televisor comenta de nuevo con la rara ceremonia. Esta es una parte de *Limpieza* la obra que Patricia Cepeda empezó en Muro Sur. A la cinta sumó un bordado, el objeto creado con las porcelanas y la cola partió en dos y otro objeto encontrado es el transcurso de la exposición, articulando una obra poliforma que integra lenguajes diversos: el bordado, analítico y manual, la instalación, la acción performativa y el video.

Cepeda habla de procesos. Observada con el correr del tiempo y su huella, la estructura cíclica de los acontecimientos intenta insuflar su puesta en escena de esa temporalidad. No quiere que el trabajo del artista se convierta "en un cóctel pasiflorado en la galería" así que la exposición se convierte en un trance, una estación de la obra, pero no la definitiva.

Limpieza comienza entonces mucho antes del día de su amolamiento en Muro Sur y termina después. Es decir Cepeda intenta hacer con su trabajo una *limpieza* (personal). Esta historia se remonta a un año atrás, cuando la artista realizó la acción performática a la que llamó *Imbanché*. "Imbanché es una pulpera en lengua nativa que significa algo así como un montón de cosas. Ese objeto terminó siendo un enjambre de cosas, unas escatillas, hierbas medicinales que me habían recetado cola. La escena es un cuadro interior con cosas que están a mano. En mi pieza una camisa que es mía, son mis cosas. Esto lo relaciono con un cine - realidad, donde el tiempo y los procesos reales son lo más importante", dice. El resultado es una puesta en escena que bordea el absurdo y lo orgánico, involucrando al espectador en la codificación de lo insólito y apelando sin estridencias a la naptura de cierto pudor. La saliva, la cola, el blanco corchil y el agua en que reposa las hierbas crean una visualidad serena, orgánica e íntima que sitúa a la cámara en una situación de voyeur, de testigo íntimo y privilegiado de operaciones de reclamar. El video en esta cinta es el espejo lógico. "Para retratar los propios procesos. No tiene como referente la televisión. Me interesa el video como entidad liberadora, su capacidad de narrar, no su significado social".

Luego y siguiendo con la historia, Cepeda sacó el arriero creado en la acción a la calle y lo fotografió 26 veces cruzando la Alameda. "Esa fue la *Procesión*, otra parte de la obra con la que gané el concurso arte y poesía joven de Valparaíso, en la muestra fotográfica".

El bordado y el nido fueron los últimos elementos que Cepeda integró en la obra, la que terminó con el entierro del objeto *Imbanché*. "Mi trabajo tiene que ver con la muerte. En ese sentido me gusta mucho y me siento cercana a Ana Mendicuti. Ella trabajó muy directamente con su cuerpo y su huella. Creo



Patricia Cepeda, *Nido en escudo*, 2000, hilo rojo, punt. Plumas, plátano, *Diamantina* variadas

que yo lo hago más a través de huellas difusas. La acción de arte que queda impresa en el video está hecha en un tiempo remoto el que puedo sacar a escena, revivir, ramorar"

en la galería con el uso del video. Es este trabajo intencional un vivir la realidad de la exposición desde el cóctel. Establecer un proceso que continúa".

Sin ser declarativa, Patricia Cepeda, con su obsesión por estructurarse en ciclos, el aún ceremonial y casi amaria en la realización del trabajo de arte, sébiera y rechazó en plena posmodernidad operaciones tediosas de arcaísmo, siguiendo de paso una reflexión crítica acerca de la femineidad y sus roles. La coherencia absurda, el vaporoso atrevido, los tonos apurados del cuadro, el bordado y el nido no pueden ser sino un camino errático de instalación social de un sueño que por lo menos se quede abortado, arte las disposiciones históricas del género. "Creo que esta obra resalta un montón de cosas. Su laboreo, cuerpos de la mujer, el trabajo del bordado. Tiene que ver con procesos vitales, traslapes de cosas, pero yo no critico esos roles del género, simplemente estar ahí", concluye.



Patricia Cepeda, *Objeto dividido*, 1999, hilos de negro y blanco, *Imbanché*, 13 cm., de obra toda en la Colección de la artista

Fig. 3 Muro Sur — Artes visuales, cover of issue no. 2, June 2000. Courtesy of Ana María Fernández.



Fig. 4a, 4b *Muro Sur — Artes Visuales: Backyard*, cover and back cover of issue 3, 11 September 2003. Courtesy of Ana María Fernández.

BAC > YARD

New York, Thursday 11 September, 2003, No. 3

MUROSUR
ARTES VISUALES



SANTIAGO, TUESDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 1973

By being juxtaposed, the photographs on the front and back cover of *Backyard* seem quite similar: both show buildings engulfed in smoke and flames caused by an aggressive attack. In the first text included in this issue, the artists who formed the Muro Sur group expressed their desire to take advantage of this double anniversary so as to stimulate collective reflection on the trauma and pain caused by both attacks. They continued:

Our project is called *Backyard*, and it consists of this publication and an exhibition at the Americas Society [...]. The title *Backyard* comes from the way U.S. government staff referred to Latin America in the late 1960s and the 1970s: Latin America as the United States's backyard.

We thought the best way to publicise *Backyard* would be to infiltrate and imitate the circulation system used by the print communications media. We chose the very day of 11 September to tell you how important it is to talk about, research, and reflect upon traumatic events, and use them to produce something. Indeed, the act of producing has been a lesson that history has undertaken to teach us in Chile. Implicitly and explicitly, we still have a need to reflect on 11 September that took place 30 years ago, a need that has not diminished from generation to generation (Muro Sur 2003: 2).

While setting the publication on the same level as the exhibition — in other words, by aiming to disrupt the usual hierarchy between exhibition and publication, which was an unconventional statement in itself — the authors of these lines explicitly expressed their desire to use the publication as a form of intrusion on mass communication systems. In this sense, their stance was close to the one giving rise to the 'critical interferences' that the C.A.D.A. had carried out a little over a decade earlier with their interventions on printed media. But while the older generation had interfered in already existing newspapers and magazines, the new generation now issued its own 'media', expecting interferences to take place in the process of circulation — ideally, by placing *Muro Sur* alongside news magazines and publications — rather than in the process of composition of news media on the page. Muro Sur's comment on mass media communication was taking place at a certain metalevel, which was in fact reinforced by the textual content of the publication.

Thus, while on the surface *Backyard* was dedicated to reflecting on the two violent events illustrated on its front and back covers, one of the underlying themes that cut through many of the texts published in this issue was precisely mass media communication. To give an example, in one of the contributions, Chilean journalist Andrea Insunza comments on the power of representation of photographs and

their ability to reinforce and weaken memory *at the same time* (Insunza 2003: 3; emphasis added). She compares the overabundance of images documenting the attack on the Twin Towers with the (relative) absence of images depicting the assault on the Palacio de la Moneda during the Chilean coup, consisting mainly of a few black-and-white photographs, disseminated over and over again:

Colour and black and white will leave a mark on our memories. But they are related. True, in New York, no one censored the images of what happened. In Chile, on the other hand, the records of horror were taken away from the collective memory for nearly two decades. However, censorship and overexposure do have something in common. Neither allows us to look on calmly. And both arouse suspicion (Insunza 2003: 3).

Unfortunately, the theoretical-practical comment on mass media that *Muro Sur — Artes Visuales* aspired to become did not continue after 2003: *Backyard* was the last issue in the series and the collective initiative behind it did not last much longer. In 2000, Fernández had already decided to leave Santiago and return to the Netherlands, although she did not completely sever her ties with Muro Sur, which had by then acquired the basic administrative structure necessary to manage a small budget. Thanks to financial support from the Prince Claus Fund, Muro Sur remained in operation for another four years in a different location in Santiago, on Mosqueto Street, near the city's art museum district. The last exhibition organised by the group took place at the Shanghai Biennale in the autumn of 2004,¹⁶ and featured a selection of works by its members. In this last stage, the programming was carried out by the only three artists remaining from the original group: Nury González, Josefina Guilisasti, and Voluspa Jarpa.¹⁷

Voluspa Jarpa, *Library of Non-History* (2010-2012)

Voluspa Jarpa was not only one of the members of the Muro Sur group, but also one of the few artists who continued with the initiative until the end. She had, in fact, actively participated in the call that led to the collective's participation in the Americas Society programme in 2003.

Jarpa was born in Rancagua, south of Santiago, in 1971, but because of her father's work-related travels she spent her childhood and early youth outside Chile: in Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil. In 1989, Jarpa decided to study at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Chile. Once in Santiago, she immediately noticed the

¹⁶ 'Muro Sur Chilean Contemporary Art'. Exhibition organised in the framework of the Shanghai Biennale, September–November 2004, curated by Sebastián López.

¹⁷ Muro Sur. 2020. 'About Muro Sur.' <https://www.murosul.nl/>.

stark contrast between her own personal and intellectual background and the closed and oppressive atmosphere of a country that was just beginning to emerge from a dictatorship. In her own words: 'With regard to Chile's cultural development, I wonder how one could demand a diverse, proactive or dialogical cultural context in a country that has restrictive material and intellectual characteristics. This determines institutions, artists, ways of thinking, the capacity for dialogue, academic control systems...' (Jarpa quoted in Pérez Rubio 2018: 32). The dictatorial regime, she recognised, was no longer in power, but the country was far from fully recovered from the trauma.

After university, Jarpa began her artistic career as a painter. However, the complex political processes affecting her country prompted her to gradually move away from the conventional themes addressed by painting and to begin to develop a practice focused instead on archives, memory, and collective trauma. The declassification of part of the CIA files relating to the involvement of the United States in the recent history of Chile accelerated the change of direction in Jarpa's practice.

Between 1998 and 2000, responding to international pressure sparked by the arrest of Pinochet in London, the US government authorised the first declassification of its intelligence archives on Chile from the 1960s and 1970s. The declassification was not complete; a significant number of documents were partially (sometimes even totally) redacted, showing thick lines or entire blocks of black ink that prevented part of their content from being read. Even so, the documentary material that suddenly became accessible online confirmed beyond any doubt the significant involvement of the US in the overthrow of Allende's government.

The documents had a profound impact on Jarpa, introducing her to 'an aspect of [Chilean] reality that [people of my generation] had not dealt with' (Jarpa 2024: 422). The extent of the numerous blackouts with which many parts of those documents had been censored strongly defined their visual appearance, rendering them largely illegible. The omnipresence of black redaction bars forced the artist to contemplate those files 'first as images and then as texts', because:

Text says, names, signifies and is read. Images show, represent and are looked at. A crossed-out document is a fissure, it generates chaos in thought and experience, somehow presenting violence as the reflection of hysterical bodies that somatise their repressed narrative (Jarpa 2024: 425).

In 2002, when Jarpa decided to create her first artworks based on declassified documents, she was still approaching them through painting. Those works consisted of paintings depicting some of the documents, which the artist rendered in almost-facsimile form. With those paintings, she would later comment, she was trying to answer



Fig. 5 Voluspa Jarpa, *Desclasificados*, 2005.
Courtesy of the artist.

a question: ‘Could there be such a thing as documentary painting as opposed to representational painting?’ (Jarpa quoted in Pérez Rubio 2018: 25). Or, in other words: ‘How can the declassification of archives be made visible and, therefore, represented — symbolised?’ (Jarpa 2024: 421–422). In 2003, Jarpa’s contribution to *Backyard* — which was not attributed in the publication — consisted of reproducing some declassified documents so literally as possible, transcribing part of their contents, and adding two quotes taken from bibliographic sources that delved into the issue of US interference in Chilean contemporary politics.

These early graphic works, based on archival documents, were followed by *Desclasificados* [Declassified] (2005), a series of oil-painted facsimiles in which Jarpa reproduced the front pages of several Chilean newspapers that, on 11 September 2002, reported on the first anniversary of the attack on the Twin Towers [Fig. 5]. In Jarpa’s painted front pages, however, texts or images that did not refer to the terrorist attack in New York were blacked out with thick black lines similar to those covering part of the US declassified documents. By reproducing partially censored front pages of newspapers, the artist seemed to visually express the erasure of information that the terrorist attack in New York in 2001 meant for the

tragic anniversary of the overthrow of Allende's government in Chile, which had taken place exactly 28 years earlier.¹⁸ The process of 'erasure' of memory through superimposition of new images, and the degree to which it can be accelerated by the replacement of certain images with others — both pointed at by Insunza in her contribution to the *Backyard* issue of *Muro Sur — Artes Visuales* — were particularly well exemplified in these newspaper covers painted by Jarpa.

Soon, however, the artist found that painting was insufficient to continue processing declassified archives about Chilean political history. Gradually, as she connected her reflections with her studies of psychoanalysis, collective trauma, and the trope of the hysterical woman,¹⁹ she became aware that if her first reaction to the declassified documents had been on a personal level, the trauma to which they referred, in fact, transcended far beyond the individual:

The question 'What am I going to do with this?' shifted to 'What are you going to do with this?' I understood that the answer was going to be *collective*, that it was not something I had to answer. Ethically, the archives were not an issue related to a given authorship, but rather a collective issue, and I suppose [I] had acquired a notion of the historical collective through the hysterical women (Jarpa quoted in Pérez Rubio 2018: 29; emphasis added).

Such thoughts were at the origin of *Biblioteca de la No-Historia* [Library of Non-History] (2010–2011), an installation Jarpa first presented in the context of 'Dislocation,' a project curated by artist Ingrid Wildi in 2010 in Santiago de Chile, and by Wildi and Kathleen Bühler at the Kunstmuseum Bern in 2011. The first presentation of *Biblioteca de la No-Historia* consisted of 608 books in five different formats, whose pages contained facsimiles of a selection of declassified CIA archives [Fig. 6]. Some of those books were displayed on the backlit shelves of a bookstore and could be taken away by anyone who so wished, as long as they would reply to a question printed out on a small card next to the books. The question asked what people were planning to do with the copy from *Biblioteca de la No-Historia* that they were about to take away with them, under their arm or in their bag.

In 2012, Jarpa presented a development of this project entitled *¡La historia es mía!* [History is mine!]. In this case, visitors or readers could take away two different types of volumes: some of them, as in previous presentations, contained selections from US declassified documents, while others — the new ones — contained a selection of responses written on the small cards by the visitors during the two previous public presentations of the project (Pérez Rubio 2018: 32).

Jarpa has emphasised that distributing six hundred books for free to as many individuals entailed, for her, the gesture of attempting to socialise both the

¹⁸ Voluspa Jarpa in conversation with the author, August 2025. I am deeply indebted to the artist for her generosity in sharing with me time, conversation and information about her work during the preparation of this text.

¹⁹ Psychoanalysis uses the trope of the hysterical woman to describe female patients with physical, non-organic symptoms (e.g., paralysis or tremors) that originate from repressed psychological conflicts. The denial of these conflicts channels their expression through these women's bodies. The trope has evolved from early theories of hysteria — related to the idea of the 'wandering uterus' — through Freud's interpretation, which emphasised the frequent sexual nature of repressed conflicts, to the feminist readings that relate them to patriarchal oppression.

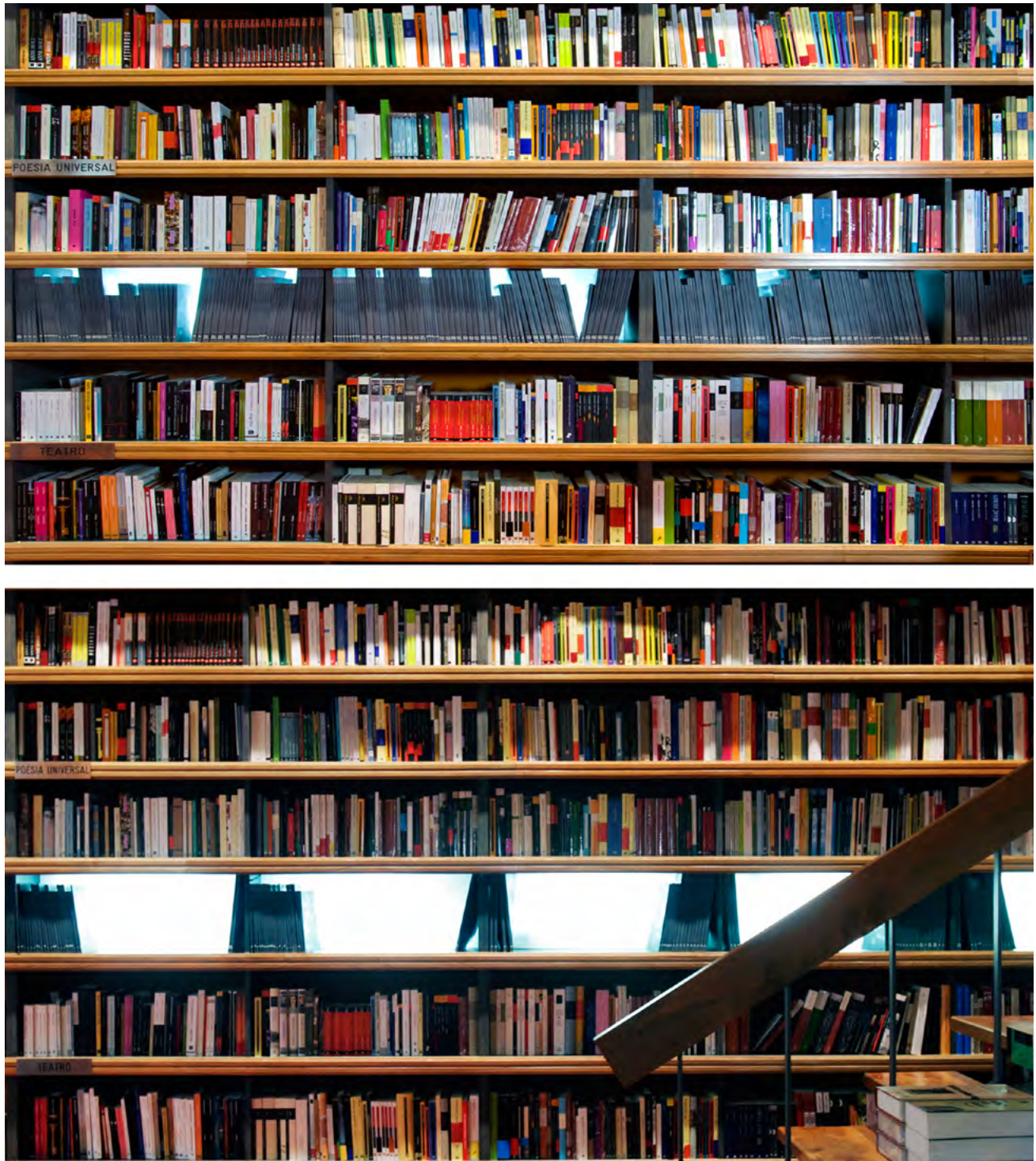


Fig. 6 Voluspa Jarpa, *Biblioteca de la No-Historia*, 2011, Santiago de Chile. Installation view in the context of the exhibition 'Dislocación', curated by Ingrid Wildie Merino. Courtesy of the artist.

historical trauma and the dilemma involved in dealing with the archival material that attests to it. This gesture, for the artist, served several purposes: it was ‘a way of processing this traumatic material, [and also] a strategy for raising awareness and dissemination’ (Jarpa quoted in Pérez Rubio 2018: 30). For her, moreover, such a gesture of socialisation was imperative because ‘more than ten years had passed since the first declassified documents appeared, and they were not being processed and transformed into books’ (Jarpa quoted in Pérez Rubio 2018: 30). In these words, it is remarkable how Jarpa uses ‘books’ as a metaphor for the collective historical, political and social handling of historical events and the trauma they had caused. ‘Books’ stand here, in short, for intellectual discourse.

Conclusion

Verisimilitude is perceived in artifices that are presented as possible. In visuality, [it is] that which is imaginatively a possibility of constituting reality.

Voluspa Jarpa (1999)

The publications edited by the Jemmy Button Inc. collective, the issues of *Muro Sur — Artes Visuales*, and the volumes that make up Voluspa Jarpa’s *Biblioteca de la No-Historia* seem, at first glance, to have little in common, except for the fact that they are the result of initiatives by visual artists and appeared in the same place — Chile — in the same period. However, if, instead of focusing on their contextual characteristics, we look at the symbolic functions that these publications sought to fulfil, each in its own way, then points of connection between them emerge that may not be so explicit at first glance.

Deficit Club and *Taxonomías* are, formally, fairly conventional books, not unlike an exhibition catalogue or a collection of essays. This should come as no surprise, since that is precisely what they are. As for *Muro Sur — Artes Visuales*, its appearance coincides with that of an informative magazine about the Chilean art scene. In fact, not only does it look like one, but that is exactly what it is. However, both publications present a certain resistance to standard categorisation. Their identity is complex because their function as conventional containers of information is not their only *raison d’être*. In addition to disseminating information, they were issued with a second mission: to become platforms on which a group of visual artists collectively assumed responsibilities in the production of discourse — editing, analysis, writing — which usually fell to other professionals in the art world. For the members of Jemmy Button Inc. and the Muro Sur collective, it was not only important

to have a print channel through which to make public their ideas about art, but even more so, to pursue the very act of publishing, of appropriating devices for the circulation of printed information that symbolically supported the legitimacy of their respective collective projects.

In the period immediately following the Pinochet dictatorship, democratic, stable art institutions open to new trends had yet to be consolidated; the cultural fabric had not been rebuilt, and the damage to the functioning of the art scene and community caused by political repression and the long period of martial law could not be left behind so quickly. Thus, by launching themselves into publishing essays and magazines that could contextualise and explain their work, artists were in fact taking on the task of generating spaces for discursive ratification of their own practice — a practice that was still developing outside official cultural institutions and often precisely as a reaction against them.

The status of these books and of this magazine as artist's publications should not, therefore, be sought in the nature of their material or aesthetic characteristics, but beyond them: on a symbolic level for which such characteristics are quite irrelevant. One of the most significant features shared by these publications lies in their potential to bring into play metaphorical implications derived from their identity as cultural artifacts that we commonly refer to as 'books' or 'magazines.' They were the printed side of artistic initiatives that involved more than mere publishing.

A similar modification, more symbolic than formal in nature, also takes place in the volumes that made up Voluspa Jarpa's *Biblioteca de la No-Historia*. These volumes were invariably different from one another, and yet those differences were irrelevant. (It is significant, in this regard, that in the photographs usually published to illustrate the *Biblioteca de la No-Historia* in exhibition spaces, the books frequently appear closed.) This is because their main purpose was not necessarily to act as carriers of content; they were not even useful as summaries or compendiums, since they were incomplete: they contained only a certain amount of the documents available online in much greater quantity. Art historian and curator Tobias Peper has pointed out that these books frustrate expectations as providers of information, aptly describing them as 'the physical representation of an apparent truth, whose impossible articulation simultaneously unmasks them as historical and political lies' (Peper 2015: 132). Jarpa herself has expressed the same idea in another way, emphasising the non-discursive and non-analytical nature of the content of these volumes, made up of documents that had not yet been properly assimilated, either intellectually or emotionally: '[The *Biblioteca de la No-Historia*] may look like a series of books, but it remains a document dealing with events that have not yet been given social and symbolic meaning' (Pérez Rubio 2018: 30). The books in the *Biblioteca de la No-Historia* lack individual

identity; they function only as a gesture, or as the materialisation of an idea that is neither connected to nor dependent on their material configuration.

I would like to suggest that these publications by artists, which appeared during a complex historical period in which Pinochet's dictatorial structures had not yet completely disappeared and had not been replaced by others, attest to the existence of a particular mode of publication which does not entirely conform to what is usually understood by artist's publications, nor can it be considered strictly an experimental practice, since it adheres to existing editorial standards in editorial standards in art. It therefore requires a different type of analysis: one that pays attention to the symbolic meanings and resonances of the publications it focuses on, as well as to the connections they establish with their respective contexts, rather than analysing the features of their materiality. A model, in short, that goes beyond the concept of the artist's book, whose definition undoubtedly needs to be urgently revised, reformulated, and expanded.

Acknowledgements

Paz Errázuriz, Ana María Fernández, Voluspa Jarpa, Martín La Roche.