“La Sábana”, “The Sheet” (2016-2017)

A Remembrance of the Detained-Disappeared in Chile in 1976

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◆ This section aims at providing insight into processes of memory construction in different parts of the world. Instead of focusing on the events themselves, the Memory Laboratory explores collective ways of remembering, with a view to uncovering possible challenges, and sociopolitical consequences of memory work.

“LA SÁBANA”, “THE SHEET” (2016-2017)

A REMEMBRANCE OF THE DETAINED-DISAPPEARED IN CHILE IN 1976

According to the “Rettig Report”, the result of the work realized by the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation whose mandate was to investigate crimes committed by the Pinochet dictatorship from 1973 to 1990, of a total of 2115 victims, 1158 were assassinated, and another 957 were detained and later “disappeared”.

Behind these statistics, there was not just a vision of the world based on the belief in “internal enemies” stemming from the so-called National Security doctrine. There was also a policy that sought to defeat these enemies and an operative capacity to accomplish the physical annihilation that would evidence the new balance of power. In Chile in 1973, the reigning civil and military project sought the historical subjugation of the democratic forces that had brought Chile to the threshold of socialism.

The Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation was created in April 1990, following Chile’s return to democracy, and its report came out in March 1991. Two subsequent

commissions were created, in 2004 and 2010, whose work continued the identification and classification of victims during the dictatorship, including political prisoners and those tortu-

red, amounting to an estimated 40,000 people who were victims of human rights violations by agents of the state, from the period of 1973-1990.

THE PINOCHET DICTATORSHIP AND THE DINA (1973-1974)

The Chilean military, with the support of civilians, developed an efficient machine of human destruction, based on “intelligence” used to discover supposed enemies and later on means of repression to accomplish their subjugation or eradication. The National Intelligence Directorate, the much-feared DINA, created in June 1974, was the clearest expression of this directive.

The first months of the dictatorship in Chile were marked by detentions on a mass scale in the country’s main cities. Tragically, these events immortalized the imposing National Stadium, the main sporting arena in Santiago, as a place where prisoners were gathered and detained. There were also summary military trials – court martials – that authorized the execution by firing squad of hundreds of people throughout the country. The plan according to which this policy of summary execution was accomplished became known as the “Caravan of Death”, which from 30 September to 22 October 1973 passed through sixteen of the country’s cities, leaving a trail of 96 executed.

The new regime, however, did not want to be bound to any form of legality, not even to that which was entirely in its hands and could be wielded almost without opposition. It is sufficient to remember that legislative powers were immediately abolished, with the closure of the National Congress, and judiciary powers were effectively dissolved on account of the obsequiousness of the courts toward the new political authority.

The DINA, created a little more than six months after the military coup under the direction of Colonel Manuel Contreras, a close collaborator of Augusto Pinochet, originated in order to bring about a covert repressive agenda. By means of meticulous planning, one by one, the various leftist political groups of the time were falling under its remit, 1974, 1975, and 1976 being the most intense years of persecution. With extermination as its objective, the military regime used, basically, two methods of repression: the death of the persecuted in supposed armed confrontations, in which “extremists” always incurred the worst losses;

or, rather, the disappearance of victims after having been illegally detained, with the purpose of leaving as few traces as possible.

THE VICARIATE OF SOLIDARITY (1973-1976)

Almost as soon as the repression began, new initiatives emerged that sought to assist victims and, when possible, to protect the persecuted. Chilean churches took on this task, becoming – first through the Peace Committee and then through the Vicariate of Solidarity – fierce defenders of human rights.

These organizations resorted to every possible form of defense, humanitarian and judicial. Among the humanitarian, they undertook actions such as visiting and assisting those who were detained; hiding or protecting those who were persecuted to help them avoid detention; providing support to leave the country when necessary; or caring for the injured that could not access public health facilities. Judicial actions included taking on the defense of those who had the possibility of getting a formal trial; filing protection appeals for the persecuted; or, alternatively, filing writs of “habeas corpus” for those that were disappeared after having been detained.

In order to accomplish this humanitarian and judicial undertaking, the Vicariate of Solidarity relied on the efforts of hundreds of civilians that lent their resources and professional skills to the cause. Dozens of lawyers deployed throughout the country risked their personal safety, with the purpose of providing legal assistance to those that needed it in the course of trials that offered very few guarantees. In order to assist those who were detained and then later disappeared, the work was more complicated; it was necessary to gather as much evidence as possible to confirm detention, so that the person concerned be recognized by repressive organizations and returned to public life alive. The writs of “habeas corpus” had to be prepared with family members or close associates of the detained-disappeared, and thus became a very demanding investigative undertaking, one always realized against time.

The Vicariate’s teams became, over time, virtual “counter-intelligence” units who endeavored to

→ Facsimile copy of the document produced by the Vicariate of Solidarity as registry of the situation of forcibly disappeared persons in 1976. Squared regular paper, lead pencil, pencil, markers. 66 x 173 cm.

... expose ways in which the DINA and similar organizations functioned. The number of cases surged between 1974 and 1976, at a time when the information gathering provided evidence of recurrent repressive procedures.

In the absence of means of technological or computational support, like those that we have today, information had to be recorded, organized, and analyzed manually. To do so, the Vicariate's team of lawyers and social workers pasted graph paper together to create extensive charts or makeshift spreadsheets with multiple entries, organized in rows and columns, in which the information about individual cases was written out by hand. In each row, the names of the detained-disappeared and the dates of their detention; in each column, as much information as possible about them, the circumstances of their detention and disappearance, as well as the actions realized in searching for them. On account of their scale, these charts, to be seen in the aggregate, were spread out over large tables or hung on the walls, and were colloquially called “*sábanas*” or “*sheets*”. In daily practice, when referring to the chart at hand, one called it a “*sheet*”.

POLITICAL TECHNOLOGIES OF MEMORY AND “LA SÁBANA”, “THE SHEET” (2016-2017)

The “Political Technologies of Memory: A Genealogy of the Devices for Registering and Denouncing Human Rights Violations by the Military Dictatorship in Chile (1973-2013)” project¹ is concerned with investigating and recuperating both the evidence of crimes committed by the military regime, and the actions undertaken at the time to take care of the victims and the post-1990 records, produced on request of the state. In the context of this project, an artist was commissioned with creating a work inspired by the documents gathered during the investigation.

After analyzing hundreds of documents, visual artist Nicolás Franco chose “the sheet” that documents

the detained-disappeared from the year 1976. It consists of a piece of paper that is 1.73 meters in width and .66 meters in height. It unites 42 categories of information about 110 people who were detained from January to December of 1976 and who disappeared following their detention. By crossing the data, now forty years after the fact, the artist incorporates into the records a personal event that took place in January of 1976, when he was four years old: a photo session in which his father captures him, next to his mother, in family scenes typical of the summer. The photographs were the last images of his mother who died shortly thereafter.

The work of Nicolás Franco, catalogued as a painting, is the result of the superposition of both records: the large-scale reproduction of the “sheet” from 1976 which the artist blends with fragments of family photographs, through a technique that consists of applying chemicals that are washed over the new piece, which is then coated with an application of ink. The artist does not have control over the final product: the fissures produced by the chemicals over the surface leave spontaneous fragments of the series of family photographs, which overlay the original storyline of the Vicariate’s informational record.

The painting by Nicolás Franco is titled “The Sheet”, and it is a work of archival pigment ink, acrylic resins and acrylic paint on linen, with total dimensions of 2.60 by 7.85 meters, composed of four assembled 2.60-by-1.95-meter parts.

HISTORY AND MEMORY: “THE SHEET” (1976) AS TAXONOMY AND MATRIX

History reconstitutes the past by making an effort to understand the specificity of certain facts, in their original context, in their time, by reason. Memory, by contrast, recalls them from sentiment, through emotions, from the present day and taking into account the time past (a posterity that the people of the original time period could not have known). According to the logic of history, inspired by historical critique, any record of the past constitutes a historical document upon external or internal examination. Records of the past can be involuntary or voluntary and self-aware. ...

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(1) This project is managed by an interdisciplinary team from Alberto Hurtado University, in collaboration with the Latin American Centre from the University of Oxford and financed by CONICYT and the Newton Fund in the U.K.

→ Detail of *La Sábana* by Nicolás Franco, 2017.

... “The Sheet” by Franco draws from two voluntary records from 1976: “the sheet” and the family photographs. Both are records of people and circumstances, that refer to time and space. Two records that hide from us which eyes were behind the camera and which hands did the writing on the sheet; even if we could find out, they do not form part of the record, they are not evident.

Drawing from such real records, historical, already past, the artist has created a new reality, that is happening now and that will continue happening, as many times as people see the work. It is what we technically can designate and recognize as an act of memory: recreating the time of the past in the time of the present, supplying it with meaning. What is no longer, becomes present again in our hearts: the very essence of remem- ...

... *La Sábana*, a work by Nicolás Franco, 2017. Archival pigment ink, acrylic resins and acrylic paint on linen. 4 parts, each 260 x 195 cm.

© Nicolás Franco

- bering. The magic and power of re-creating, of creating again. The genius of the artist. Thank you, Nicolás Franco.

When I had the opportunity to see “The Sheet” for the first time,² the work was exhibited next to the series of original family photographs and a reproduction of the original “sheet”, which wholly captured my attention. It awakened in me the emotion that historical sources generate: pieces of the past that make themselves present by making palpable the abstraction of time.

I examined it closely, trying to understand it in its primary historicity: in its own time. I noted in this moment nine words or concepts that came to mind while examining its size, its form, and the order of its rows and columns and its contents: order; intelligibility; aggregation; relation; to assimilate; to conjoin; to reunite; to find out what is common; a new reality. I realized that I was facing a taxonomy exhibited in a matrix...

The 1976 “sheet” is a taxonomy because it conveys a hierarchical and systematic ordering, it materializes the will to order, before the existence of computers. It allows us to reestablish the *magnitude* of what happened, but it also establishes an *order* in what happened. The column titles are the following: “causes” (of detention); “prior circumstances” (before detention); “position in the previous government”; “level of participation” (in the previous government); (how it happened) “detention with disappearance”; “circumstances after disappearance”; and “defence”. An order that is, at once, temporal, practical, and ethical. Graphically, the chart appears closed from the onset, because of the left-most limits of its first column, but it is also open-ended, since the right-side of the chart

ends in a column without margins, open, limitless...

The 1976 sheet is, at the same time, a matrix because it functions like a mould that shapes something and, at the same time, serves a function of containment; it is a container, that allows for taking more in. It is a matrix, much like the uterus, the principle function of which is to receive the zygote in order to create life after some time. To give birth, to be brought to light.

The 1976 sheet is a taxonomy that sought to impose order where there was none; intelligence where it was lacking; unity and aggregation in the face of dispersion; and defence in the face of an attack. It is a matrix that takes in 110 of the detained-disappeared, giving them such a form and containing them for 41 years. That is, until an encounter between the social sciences and the humanities and the arts allowed it to come to light again, to revive each and all through the work of “La Sábana”. ■

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(2) Exhibited in the Museum of Modern Art in Quinta Normal Park, Santiago, Chile, July 2017.