Documenting Chile: Visualizing Identity and the National Body from Dictatorship to Post-Dictatorship

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Romance Studies in the Graduate School of Duke University

2016
ABSTRACT

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Abstract

I study three contemporary Chilean works of visual culture that appropriate and re-assemble visual material, discourse, and atmosphere from the bureaucracy of the military state. I examine Diamela Eltit’s textual performance of legal discourse in *Puño y letra* (2005); Guillermo Núñez’s testimonial art *Libertad Condicional* (1979-1982) based on the documents pertaining to his imprisonment, parole and forced exile; and Pablo Larraín’s fictional film *Post Mortem* (2010) inspired by Salvador Allende’s autopsy report. I argue that they employ a framework that exposes both the functional and aesthetic modes of bureaucracy complicit in state terror that operate within the spectacular and the mundane. Furthermore, I trace bureaucracy’s origins from the founding of the nation to its current practices that both enabled the societal conditions for dictatorship and continue to uphold dictatorial legacies into the present.

In my analysis, I engage theories from performance, legal and media studies to interpret how Eltit critiques the sensational media coverage of human rights trials, Núñez informs institutionalized preservation of memory, and Larraín demonstrates the power of fiction in our documentary reconstruction of the past. I conclude by arguing that this examination of bureaucracy is imperative because state bureaucracy anchors the vestiges of the dictatorship that persist into the present such as the dictatorship-era constitution and the newly revived preventative control of identity documentation law.
Dedication

For my grandmothers Virginia Suhey and Margaret Conti
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Acknowledgements

Esther Gabara has patiently guided me through all steps of this dissertation, helping me to develop my intuitions into concrete ideas and writing. Some of the initial questions she asked me about this dissertation have propelled my work for years. Kristine Stiles and her course on Art & Text introduced me to conceptual art and inspired me to pursue this research. Antonio Viego has been with me throughout all stages of my graduate work and his encouragement gave me much-needed confidence as I started on this path. Walter Mignolo turned my view of literature, art, and history upside down and inspired me to frame this dissertation in new ways. Gustavo Furtado’s guidance with the film portion of this chapter and help refining my topic was indispensable.

In Chile, Guillermo Núñez and Soledad Bianchi have been so generous with their time and books, graciously receiving me into their home and studio. Pilar Palacios helped to connect me with her wonderful family. The staff at the Museo de la Memoria y DDHH gave me a private tour of their museum and archives based on my research, the Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende let me view Libertad Condicional in person the day after a major 8.3 earthquake. I’m indebted to Fedérico Brega at the archives of the Museo de Arte Contempóraneo, Aracelli Salinas for sharing her research and personal collection of documents with me, Sebastián Vidal for encouraging this project and
helping make valuable research happen and Cristián Gómez-Moya for conversation both in person and through email.

The Department of Romance Studies at Duke University, The Center for Latin American Studies, and the Duke Graduate School have all supported the research and writing of this dissertation. Thanks to the faculty and my all colleagues at Duke especially to Jose María Rodríguez-García, Ariel Dorfman, Denise Wilborn, Daniel Astorga, Stephanie Reist, Jésus Hidalgo, Jacque Biehl, Isabel Ríos, Erin Laureano, Lucía Reinaga, Leonardo Bacarreza and Ana Ugarte. I also thank the Getty Foundation for funding my participation in the productive 2015 Emerging Scholars Seminar in São Paulo. Leaders Andrea Giunta, George Flaherty, Cristina Freire gave valuable feedback on portions of this dissertation, as well as fellow participants Gillian Sneed, Sean Nesselrode, Bruno Sayão and especially my friend and collaborator Dorota Biczel.

My in-laws Ester Vargas and Oscar Giaverini Sr. have given me a second home in Chile. Conversations with my brother Douglas have broadened my perspective on this subject matter and the world. My stepdaughter Francisca weathered with me the turbulence that went along with finishing. My partner Oscar Giaverini has supported me in every possible way through all stages of this dissertation. I don’t think I ever would have noticed bureaucracy if our love hadn’t required so many immigration applications, visas, and notarized signatures. My parents Larry and Chris have given me everything. My son Oscar Lawrence is my everything.
1. Documenting Chile: Visualizing Identity and the National Body from Dictatorship to Post-Dictatorship

1.1 Introduction

When one thinks of the legacy of the former military dictator, General Augusto Pinochet, some of the most notorious impressions left on history were the most spectacular. The dictatorship began when the military staged a violent coup d’état that left the government palace in flames and resulted in the death of the first democratically elected Marxist president, Salvador Allende. The 17-year-long dictatorship that ensued was marred with decades of human rights violations, which included the extrajudicial imprisonments, executions, and exiles of thousands of political opponents. Today, even though the government palace was rebuilt, the secret prisons closed, and Pinochet himself died in 2006, the legacies of the dictatorship quietly endure in written form, on paper. One of the central assertions I make in this dissertation is that political power is not always derived from grand spectacles of military might, and its residues can reside within aesthetics, found in bureaucratic documents, discourse, and practice.

I analyze how traces of bureaucratic materials appeared in works of Chilean visual culture during the military dictatorship, and why they continue to surface in works today, even decades after the transition to democracy. I argue that by incorporating the aesthetic elements of bureaucracy—what I call the aesthetics of bureaucracy—into works of literature, visual art and film, artists, writers and filmmakers implicate bureaucracy in state-sponsored violence and repression. I explore the
historical connections between bureaucracy and the imposition of the Chilean military dictatorship. I demonstrate how the civilian entities of the government were not only complicit with the dictatorship, but were effectively absorbed into the military apparatus that infiltrated all aspects of governance. What’s more, I assert that present government and institutions have yet to completely disengage with the dictatorships legacies, in spite of the restoration of democracy in 1990.

Bureaucracy’s role in the dictatorship was based on two different, but related purposes—functional and symbolic. I begin with its functionality because first and foremost, bureaucracy has a purpose. It can be used to identify an individual, establish their legal status, and work as a tool of visualization in order to learn about, see and classify large populations. In climates of repression, as we see in the examples from the dictatorship, bureaucracy can also be used as a tool of repression. Its symbolic purpose is based on a less concrete, yet still powerful premise, that bureaucracy’s visual elements and aesthetics serve to communicate and reinforce the project of nationalism.

In each chapter I focus on examples from different genres related to visual culture. Before I analyze each work, I trace histories behind Chilean bureaucratic documents, practices and archives to provide context for my analyses. This historical background supports my assertion that bureaucracy not only anticipated, but also facilitated the dictatorship. It shows how purveyors of the nation embraced bureaucratic practices and procedures in their efforts to continually define and designate not only
whom and what comprise the collective body and imagery of the nation, but also construct their own images of legitimacy, authority and sovereignty. The architects of the state bureaucratic archive— the ruling elite who established practices of identity documentation and networks of information sharing in the second half of the 19th century— provided the scaffolding for the construction of the powerful transnational intelligence apparatus known as Operation Condor. Next, I examine how artists, writers and filmmakers have responded to these forms of state power and propose that Diamela Eltit, Guillermo Núñez and Pablo Larrain inhabit, appropriate and personify the aesthetics of bureaucracy. The artistic strategies developed by writers, artists and filmmakers, which I relate to strategies derived from Latin American conceptualism, expose how bureaucratic mechanisms supported campaigns of state repression. At the same time, they reveal that the image of a powerful, all-encompassing bureaucratic system is a self-reinforcing projection, one that manufactures the myths of bureaucracy’s power. In other words, while these works affirm that bureaucratic control produces real, material consequences, they also reveal the instability behind state power, as it is dependent on cultural constructions or mythologies.

1.2 Foundational documents

In most countries, the building blocks of the nation are founded upon the constitution, the document where laws, principles, and rights originate. The Chilean constitution has changed a number of times throughout the history of the nation,
reflecting the ebb and flow of the country’s political turmoil. Constitutions were adopted and discarded during the period of civil wars that marked the early formation of the nation in the first half of the 19th century. After the coup d’état in 1973, however, the new military regime declared a state of exception and suspended constitutional rule until officials were able to draft and institute a new version of the constitution in 1980. They engineered the new constitution especially to protect the interests of the military government. Although democracy was restored to Chile in 1990, the constitution adopted during the dictatorship is still valid, even though it has been repeatedly amended in an effort to mitigate its alliance to the dictatorship. This shows that despite these attempts to affirm the new government’s principles of democracy, the enduring legacies of the dictatorship remain ingrained in the fabric of the nation.

I have begun with a discussion of the 1980 Chilean constitution because it acts as a protagonist throughout my dissertation. Indeed, along with other foundational documents like the Chilean Civil code, it provides the legal basis for bureaucracy, and everyday practices of governance and administration emerge from these documents. I have always imagined it as a sort of bureaucratic Frankenstein’s monster that should have been put to rest long ago but trails and derails all attempts at instituting democracy. Humor aside, constitutions directly affect bureaucracy. Fred W Riggs writes that constitutions “[establish] the context within which our public officials must do
certain things and cannot do certain things,” and in turn, bureaucracies also influence the making of constitutions (“Bureaucracy and the Constitution” 65).

Whether we are talking about the constitution, which establishes the foundations of the government, or more mundane forms of bureaucracy that emerge from these foundational documents, bureaucratic documents—constitutional or otherwise—codify the relationship between nation-state and its members. Citizens seldom refer to the constitution or other foundational documents like the Chilean Civil Code in everyday practice. Instead, we participate in rituals of bureaucratic practice that emerge from their guidelines. Bureaucratic procedures and practices register the moment of contact between individuals, their daily lives and the state. They act as records of the sites of encounter between a government and the body of the nation. In Chile, contact with the state typically occurs during life events of citizens and residents, like the registry of births, marriages and deaths. Presently, as was the case during the dictatorship, these registrations are centralized through the government entity called the Civil Registry Service, which both issues and controls identity documentation and legalized certificates. Bureaucratic controls also take the form of state-issued, mandatory, identity documentation, which in Chile includes identification cards called “Cédulas de identidad” (for domestic purposes) as well as passports (for international purposes). Contact with the state through bureaucratic means can extend beyond this including participation in registries like the national census, military service records, the national
census, as well as systems of taxation.¹ These processes occur as second-nature rituals that may not even appear to be overtly bureaucratic, such as signing a signature to authorize a document, or presenting identity documentation to prove one’s identity to a store clerk, police officer, or low-level bureaucratic official. As Veena Das makes clear, these encounters between the individual and the state occur “sporadically,” or “intermittently (Das 167). Yet, they do so in a way that is sometimes so banal that it becomes almost invisible, or is considered to be a “commonplace given” (Handelman “Folding and Enfolding Walls” 74).

It is important to point out that these practices serve more than merely a functional purpose; these material forms construct the idea of the nation. Bureaucratic controls are “decisively bound up with the rights and duties” of individual citizens, and they establish one’s membership as a part of the nation state (Torpey 19). As John Torpey has stated, bureaucratic documents and practices provide a concrete basis on which the nation is built. He writes that “in order to be implemented in practice, the notion of national communities must be codified in documents rather than ‘imagined’” (“Coming and Going” 241). Along with flags, crests, national anthems and patriotic colors, bureaucratic documents are symbols of nationalism that we can physically grasp, rituals that we perform and procedures that signify belonging to the corpus of the

¹ When combined with increasingly widespread “shadow bureaucracies,” comprised of sensitive information for banking and financial services which use technology such as biometrics and microchip technologies, these bureaucratic mechanisms not only identify us, but they also track us as we move throughout both domestic and international spheres.
nation. Governments can use these elements not only to construct their image of what the nation but also to affirm its legitimacy.

Although bureaucracy can refer to the administration of private, commercial and non-governmental organizations, the most relevant context for my analysis is the use of bureaucracy by the Chilean “state.” A blanket term, in this dissertation I contextualize the term “state,” as the individuals and departments that functioned both within and alongside military in order to support and impose totalitarian rule. In Chile, the state blended civil and military organizations so that both worked in tandem to support the agenda of the regime. Other than specific officials who represented the regime (the most prominent being Pinochet) the term “state” is nebulous. To describe the role of the state in Latin American history, Juan Pro Ruiz characterizes that state as a process, rather than a fixed entity. Pro Ruiz describes the state as a “field in which the power relations among all other social fields are clarified.” Because of the lack of fixity, bureaucracy serves as “material support” for the state (Ruiz 3). Bureaucratic documents and materials comprise the “stuff” of governance; bureaucratic material and procedures serve as tangible representations for the moments of encounter between the state and the individual, or to use the words of Michael Taussig, they are “testimon[ies] to the fact that contact was made” (220).
1.3 Bureaucratic documents, design

Bureaucratic materials are designed and implemented by the state as haptic objects, implements to be grasped, inspected and passed between individuals and officials. They also serve the purpose of representational objects that stand-in for the individual or make record of a contact with a bureaucratic entity. They are designed to identify, classify, sort, and track a nation’s inhabitants, as well as to grant and deny privileges based on these actions. In addition to these functional modes, bureaucratic documents are aesthetic objects that contain elements of design. For instance, they contain symbols, colors, and visual elements used to represent organizations, entities and nations. Their purpose is two-fold. They are first objects of design that contain symbols that reinforce notions of nationalism. Second, they enforce the overall design of the nation by determining who belongs to the nation and who does not.

In Chile, the identification card is one of the most important forms of identification in Chile used in everyday life. The first version of the card was created 1924, along with the establishment of the bureaucratic entity called the Service of Identification (M. P. Núñez). The newest Chilean identity cards issued in 2013 are made out of a polycarbonate material, contain a microchip, and utilize facial recognition software. In addition to date of birth, the card lists biographical information such as the holder’s place of birth and their profession. The background image depicts a Condor—a national symbol of strength and prowess—soaring over the Andes mountain range.
photograph of the document’s owner is not just affixed, but also embedded into the
design of the card. Underneath the photograph lists the abbreviation “RUN” and a
series of 9 numbers that are separated at different points by dots and a penultimate
dash. This number known as the “rol único nacional” (also referred to as the “RUT”) is a
number that can be more unique than one’s own name. The nationalized RUN
identification number system was implemented in Chile in 1970 and uses a uniform
numbering system that is standard across platforms and government agencies. Before
1970, different kinds of documentation each had their own systems of agency-specific
numbers (Registro Civil de Chile).

Bureaucratic documents (see fig.1) contain visual signs of nationalism like
national colors, and symbols; they reinforce the image of the nation, along with other
materials of nationalism like flags, crests and anthems. Yet, this identity document acts
as much more than a symbol. While the symbols on the card can serve decorative
purposes, they sometimes contain optical illusions and can be used to prove authenticity
and avoid forgery. Unlike symbols of nationalism, bureaucratic materials and
documents have real world applications. They have the ability to transform themselves
into a kind of currency, figuratively turning plastic into cultural and political gold. A
simple card can grant to or deny its holder from crossing borders, define his or her
status, and even, in some extreme cases, be a matter of life and death. Bureaucratic
documents—and their aesthetics—have real and material consequences.
In spite of its historical, political, and cultural significance, the power of bureaucracy can be overlooked, forgotten or ignored. As though it were a testament to its invisibility the use of the term “bureaucracy” in the west is relatively recent. Although administration as a concept has ancient origins, the derisive Gallicism, bureaucracy, that means “rule by writing desk” did not come about until the late 18th century (Kafka 77). Here, it’s important to make the distinction between the act of

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2 In both English and Spanish, Juan Pro Ruiz traces its linguistic origins in Latin American and Castilian Spanish in “Considering the State from the Perspective of Bureaucracy” in *Latin American Bureaucracy and the State Building Process (1780-1860)*, 5.

3 Ben Kafka gives an extensive history and psychoanalytical analysis of the word bureaucracy in Chapter 3 of *The Demon of Writing*, 77.
administration and bureaucracy. Archaeologists have tied the origins of administration and proto-bureaucracies to the ancient Sumerian civilization (Schott 53). As such, administration and accounting practices have origins in non-Western as well as pre-modern societies. “Rational-legal bureaucracy,” however, is a modern phenomenon, most famously described by Max Weber in his characterization of bureaucracy and organizational theory. This European model was initially imposed in the Americas during the period of colonial rule as both a monarchical legacy and a method of administrating foreign continents. As Hannah Arendt observes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, bureaucracy played a key role in imperialism. The control of foreign lands and peoples relied on two elements: “race as a principle of the body politic” and “bureaucracy” (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 185). She points out that bureaucracy was utilized by some of the most progressive thinkers of the time, as we also see in the development of bureaucracy in Chile in the mid-19th century.

“While race, whether as a home-grown ideology in Europe or an emergency explanation for shattering experiences, has always attracted the worst elements in Western civilization, bureaucracy was discovered by and first attracted the best, and sometimes even the most clear-sighted, strata of the European intelligentsia.” (Arendt *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 185)

Walter Mignolo further articulates the connection between classification and racism in the administration of the colonial world, describing racism as a “classifying matrix” (17). He writes, “‘Racism’ emerges when members of a given ‘race’ or ‘ethnicity’ have the privilege of classifying people and power in the words of concepts of a given group” (17). Mignolo underscores that power is exercised not only in the act of
classifying but doing so within a framework of knowledge that is only accessible to certain individuals or groups.

Inherited from its colonial history and a cornerstone of nation building, bureaucracy came to play an important part of the formation Chile as a nation. As Latin American nations established their independence and negotiated their identities as nation-states, bureaucracy developed along with industrialism, democracy and nationalism (Riggs "Modernity and bureaucracy" 347). Mignolo points out that “with secularization in the eighteenth century and the emergence of the nation-state, ‘nation’ replaced ‘religion’ to bring about a new kind of imagined community” (16). By tracing the history of bureaucratic practices, I make the case that the framework of Chilean bureaucracy that was implemented in the second half of the 19th century acted as blueprint for the transnational surveillance apparatus founded during the dictatorship called Operation Condor. Furthermore, as I explain in the first chapter, because of its historical relationship with the incorporation of digital technology in order to process bureaucratic information, Operation Condor also served as the harbinger of the digital age in Chile.

1.4 Huellas dactilares to Huellas digitales: The creation of the bureaucratic archive

Before Operation Condor produced one of the most lethal mobilizations of bureaucratic documents for purposes of state violence in Chile, the prototype for a system of repression had been established nearly a century prior to the Pinochet
dictatorship. Although I focus on works from the 20th and 21st century in this dissertation, the cultural and historical trends that enabled the military dictatorship and its bureaucracy were forged long before the military regime seized power of the government. The powerful aristocracy in control of Chile at the end of the 19th century had already constructed the scaffolding for the exchange of information and intelligence in the form of identification practices and international police networks. After the initial decades of turbulence that characterized the Chilean struggle for independence, the second half of the 19th century saw waves of immigrants who arrived from Europe to both Chile and the broader Southern Cone. Residents also migrated from rural areas or other cities to larger metropolitan centers, which brought an influx of inhabitants to the capital. This resulted in a changing population and tensions increased between the growing populous and the already existing aristocracy in Santiago. Because they blamed increased crime underdevelopment and poverty on the popular classes, the ruling elite sought ways to control the movement of people across international borders, as well as domestic spheres.

The writings of Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna (1831-1886) exhibit some of the predominant ideas of the time that utilized bureaucracy as a form of social classification and control and continue as legacies throughout history, both during the dictatorship and into the present. He felt that the project of independence had been completed, and the new task at hand was build an ideal, “civilized” society (Robinson and Huertas 26).
Vicuña Mackenna saw progress—industrial, social, and technological—as the centerpiece for a modern society. Calling for a “new citizen,” he espoused the ideals of “urban modernity,” idealizing the “proletariat of the factory” who was a “consumer of technology,” “cosmopolitan in labor relations,” and had “access to information” (28).

Seeking to distance themselves from the “barbaric” legacies of Spanish colonialism (24), the progressive members of the Chilean aristocracy turned to European cities such as Paris as the prototype of an “organized” and “hygienic” modern metropolis. They proposed a society was divided not by castes—as this would have replicated antiquated ideals from the colonial period—but instead by “modern notions of science and technology” (24). Despite their rejection of the colonial caste-system, racism—this time backed by discourse based in science—permeated Vicuña Mackenna’s writings. Vicuña Mackenna considered “rural poverty” and the “indigenous aesthetic” as the “antithesis of civilization” and blamed inhabitants of non-European and indigenous descent as the sources of social backwardness, impeding the progress of the nation. Vicuña Mackenna even referred to the areas of the city where the lower classes resided as the “aduar africano”—a pejorative term most likely borrowed from Castilian Spanish to refer to the dwellings of the poor in North Africa (39).

Cesar Leyton Robinson and Rafael Huertas write that during this period “science became a mechanism of political power” and scientific knowledge acted as “an essential element of state administration and the construction of the nation” (27). Writers like
Vicuña Mackenna viewed the population of the nation as a living organism or body. As stated by Richard M. Morse, Latin American cities were thought of as serving as a reflection, or in his words, a “symptom” of the “ills of the economy, society and politics that framed them” (Morse 227). What was considered at this time as the metropolis and later strengthened into a cohesive nation was imagined as a kind of bodily organism that was susceptible to contagion, illness and poor hygiene (Robinson and Huertas 28). Amongst the social ills identified were “alcoholism, pestilence, strikes and delinquency” (Laval 12). As I discuss in Chapter 3, this same rhetoric continued into the 20th century, when the military government referred to communist ideology and its supporters as a disease that had to be excised from the nation. In the 19th century, this translated to a desire to control “degenerate elements” and “social detritus” (24), either by imposing spatial constraints, imprisoning criminals and expulsing problematic individuals from the country. The ruling elite used bureaucratic control in two forms, topological and archival, in an effort to better control the unruly population of the city. These early campaigns utilized both the functional and cultural modes of bureaucracy and left a lasting influence on Chilean society. They resulted in the integration bureaucratic logic into the topography of the city in creating physical boundaries, as well as the creation of a bureaucratic archive for the purposes of establishing and controlling the identity of criminals.
Under the vision of Vicuña MacKenna, Santiago created a “sanitary wall” called the *camino de cintura*, or beltway, that imposed a designation between the city center, where the aristocracy lived, and the suburbs. Vicuña MacKenna’s wall sectioned off an area of roughly 30 blocks in the center of Santiago to separate, or protect, the upper class from the rest of the population. The plan included the planting of green trees in order to create a healthy buffer to keep out what Vicuña Mackenna described as the “infections that originated in the popular world” (Robinson and Huertas 25). To date, the city of Santiago continues as a space where social class and economic prosperity is inscribed across space, as the cities “comunas” are differentiated according to class. This kind of segregating project that imposed physical partitions in urban spaces, demonstrates how the aesthetics of bureaucracy operate in space, according to Don Handelman. He explains that “vectors” are created through space in order to impose control, and that they don’t always comprise hard lines but rather “statist-related physical forms that have qualities of walls” (61). Because these lines not only divide, but also create “enfolded space,” the “value” of the vector is “enhanced, augmented and made more powerful as it moves into and through the enfoldings…” (61). Handelman uses the contemporary example of a “mall-wall” erected in divided Jerusalem in order to create a space for shopping complexes, which he refers to as a “vortex,” to enfold, and thus “accelerate” “the capacity to consume” (71). This example is not too far off from the goals of the liberal aristocracy, as they hypothesized that the presence of the lower
classes and criminal elements impeded the aristocracy’s ability and desire to spend money.

Controlling the movements of the lower class did not end with the transformation of physical space and the construction of partitions. The Chilean police force underwent a series of reforms beginning in the 1880s, which included increased salaries, better training, professionalization, and the use of the latest technologies (Laval 7). Cristián Palacios Laval explains that the police reform was intended to support the overall “hygienic organization project” of Santiago, which imposed policies of “racial and territorial segregation” under the guise of “sanitation” (6). Based on cutting-edge understandings of criminal behavior, identification became a practice key to policing, with photography playing an important role in the formation of a registry of criminals. While photography as a technology evolved throughout the 19th century as an honorific, commemorative practice for the elite, it served as a regulatory, repressive one for the subaltern (Sekula 6). Capturing the image of a suspected criminal was both more efficient and precise than recording down unique characteristics and measurements. Photography became a permanent fixture in the criminological system in Chile, beginning at the end of 1860s (León 316). The criminal portrait—or mugshot—was the precursor to the institutional photograph, demonstrating that the photographic registration of citizens was derived from the criminal archive. Although mugshots and institutional photographs are still ingrained in contemporary police and bureaucratic
systems, biometric technologies have advanced the ability to analyze and differentiate photographs.

In addition to photography, which included a method of taking a front portrait and a profile against a backdrop of standardized measurements, systems of anthropometry—a nascent “biometric method” based on corporal measurements, physical descriptions, and photographs—was imported into Latin America from Europe and led to the first compilations of police archives with the purpose of identifying and distinguishing criminals at the end of the 19th century. Initially, the most widespread system utilized in Latin America was Bertillonage, which was developed by Alphonse Bertillon in Paris. However by the end of century, the methodologies used in North and South America took two distinct paths. British and North American police forces favored photography and the Bertillonage system, which were based in the science of physiognomy and phrenology. By the turn of the 20th century, Argentinean Juan Vucetich had developed his own uniquely Latin American system, which was quickly adopted throughout the continent after it was adopted in Buenos Aires in 1896. The Vucetich system “consisted of recording certain simple morphological data, distinguishing marks and scars, and eliminated all body measurements except height” (Laval 90). Vucetich also developed his own system of fingerprinting that promptly

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became the preferred method in Latin America after it was adopted in Buenos Aires in 1896.

Diego Galeano and Mercedes García Ferrari reveal that the incorporation of the Vucetich fingerprinting system throughout Latin America led to a “consolidation” of “exchanges” and communications “between South American police forces.” Officials from Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Uruguay attended the first of a series of international police conferences in Buenos Aires. The first conference in 1905 featured a presentation by Vucetich as the main attraction. Yet, the consequences of the conference extended beyond merely educational. The police forces agreed to standardize their police archives across Latin America using Vucetich’s identification and fingerprints as the primary system and also maintain the judicial photograph derived from the Bertillonage system. Most interesting for my analysis is the detail that the conference “closed with the signing of an agreement for the sharing of ‘information useful for police purposes’” (Galeano and Ferrari). This collaboration demonstrates that police forces began to collaborate and share bureaucratic information nearly a century before Operation Condor. As revealed 70 years later, the police forces from these same nations attended an inter-police congress to coordinate the Condor apparatus, and signed a similar agreement for sharing transnational intelligence. Furthermore, the information passed across national borders included the very same components as were defined at the beginning of the century: institutional photographs, biometric descriptions, and fingerprints.
Derived from the criminal archives established by South American police forces, the bureaucratic archive served as a parameter for the creation of the military dictatorship in 1973. Tracing the history of how the bureaucratic archive developed in Latin America proposes a different understanding of the historical conditions that set the stage for the Chilean dictatorship, demonstrating that civil identity documentation and procedures not only assisted the military government in their campaigns of violence, but also provided the foundation for their repression. Even though the technology has evolved, the need to identify the inhabitants of a nation and track the movement and migration of peoples across borders began primarily at the fin de siècle and gained momentum in the subsequent decades of the 20th century.

1.5 Bureaucracy as Instrument of Domination

On September 11, 1973, in the evening after the bombing of the Moneda palace, the leaders of the four branches of the military transmitted a television broadcast to face the nation and establish the terms of the newly inaugurated military state. The scene was carefully composed (see fig. 2); the four generals from each branch of the military forces, were seated at a 19th century “bureau” that was positioned in front of an image of the “liberator” Bernardo O’Higgins, a historic military general from the struggle for Chilean Independence (Oquendo-Villar 267).5

5 Carmen Oquendo-Villar first commented on this live television broadcast in her article, “Dress for Success” from the book Accounting for Violence: Marketing Memory in Latin America regarding Pinochet’s military
Although he had not yet been named as the chosen leader of the junta, General Augusto Pinochet was the one to speak, declaring that the military had intervened in order to rescue the country from the “chaos” that resulted from the Allende government. His terse declaration concluded: “The junta will maintain judicial power and the administration of the controllership. Chambers will remain in recess until further notice. That is all.”
Pinochet’s declaration affirmed that the junta had taken over control—not just judicial, but also administrative—of the bureaucratic operations of the government. From the very first contact that the regime had with the public, they employed the aesthetics of bureaucracy to cultivate their image. Carmen Oquendo-Villar has commented that the strategic placement of the Bernardo O’Higgins portrait was a pointed decision to affirm the junta’s legitimacy. Of the same accord, the piece of furniture at which they were seated—a symbol of bureaucratic rule, an allusion to the “rule by writing desk” pun—was also an attempt to communicate, through television image that the junta was a powerful, but civilized and that operated according to the principles of bureaucratic logic.

Max Weber defined bureaucracy as “domination through knowledge” which referred to specialized technical knowledge about bureaucratic functions, as well as knowledge of the population—who the citizens are, what they look like, where they live, etc. In order to gain full control of a government, the leaders of a country need to attain access and control of the state’s bureaucracy. As such, state systems of administration played an important role in the implementation of authoritarian governments, not just in Chile but also other military regimes imposed throughout in Latin America, beginning in the 1960s. Political scientist Guillermo O’Donnell coined the term “bureaucratic authoritarianism” in 1973 to describe the rise of military regimes in Argentina and Brazil in the 1960s. O’Donnell’s analysis anticipated the violent
overthrow—which occurred the very same year his book was published—of Allende, and the subsequent installation of military dictatorship in Chile. The reason that O’Donnell used the adjective “bureaucratic” to describe his concept of authoritarian rule was to emphasize what he considered systems of high-level modernization (Remmer and Merkx 5) present in these governments. Despite its highly organized appearance, O’Donnell argues that the bureaucratic authoritarian state was unable to achieve power through legitimate means and instead had to impose its rule through coercion (6).

In the case of the Chilean dictatorship, bureaucracy first served the practical role of taking over the existing governmental organizations, but culturally, employing its aesthetics served to legitimate the military government. By “aesthetics,” I refer not to the Kantian philosophy of aesthetics as “judgment of the beautiful,” but rather as a visual system that is sensed and perceived. As the dictatorship wore on, they used bureaucratic means—namely the adoption of a new constitution—to protect the interests of the military, even after the transition back to democracy. After the junta took control, in the first phase of the dictatorship constitutional rule was suspended and the military successfully consolidated power with the civilian government. In the second phase, they inscribed their interests into the new constitution so that they only had to answer to the guidelines outlined in this document, rather than other branches of the government:

“Rather than obedience to civilian power, the armed forces, through constitutional and legal designs, constituted themselves into a power of state whose subordination is to the constitution (which they are their civilian advisors drafted) and to the nation which they believe they embody), and not to politicians (for whom contempt is the norm).”

(Galleguillos 95)
Not only did the Chilean military government take control of the nation’s civil organizations, it also adopted bureaucratic controls as instruments for their campaign of repression. Chile, of course, was not the first country, nor the last, to use bureaucracy to enact campaigns of government-enacted violence. Zygmunt Bauman contemplates the role that bureaucracy and organizational design played in the large-scale genocide Nazi Germany enacted during the Holocaust. Bauman credits the level of mass murder and extermination that the Nazis attained to the adoption of the “atmosphere of the office” which Bauman describes as a “meticulous and precise division of labor, of maintaining a smooth flow of command and information, or of impersonal, well-synchronized coordination of autonomous yet complementary actions” (15). In addition to the dehumanized mechanization of modern society that allowed the killing-apparatus of the state to be so efficiently devastating, they created a complex system of bureaucratic documents to define the identities of whom belonged within the National Socialist state, and whom did not. Bureaucratic documents, thus, functioned to control the movements and fates of millions of victims for their religion or ethnicity.

The difficulty in analyzing the true extent of bureaucratic influence and logic in the campaigns of state violence in Chile is that the transition to democracy afforded the military government ample opportunity to destroy evidence and maintain silence about the administrative workings of the regime behind the scenes. The understanding that historians have about the way the government functioned is based on an incomplete and
fragmented portrait of testimony and uncovered documents, but even within this small amount of information it is clear that bureaucracy played an essential role in the identification and surveillance of political opponents, and in their subsequent detentions, tortures, executions and disappearances. Bureaucracy played an even more integral role in the military state’s campaign of violence because their biggest enemy was not foreign nations or alliances, but rather, members of their own nation.

Although much information pertaining to Operation Condor has been destroyed and never recovered, following the transition to democracy in the early 1990s, the United States government, headed by the Clinton administration at the time, ordered the release of over 50,000 pages of intelligence documents pertaining to the Latin American dictatorships, as a part of a “discretionary review.” What has emerged from an incomplete puzzle (as much of the documents had been redacted) was that the bureaucratic archive comprised the foundation of the information shared within the condor apparatus. When viewed in this light, something mundane like an institutional photograph becomes complicit with—or a weapon of—state crime.

Even more information was uncovered in 1992, when officials discovered over 700,000 documents related to activities of state repression in an old police station in Asunción, Paraguay, known as the “Archives of Terror” (see fig. 3). The massive archive revealed how identity documentation and bureaucratic information were circulated, both internally, between police forces throughout Latin America. This transnational
coordination of intelligence information involved a sophisticated web of bureaucratic identity documents, surveillance materials, and government correspondence. The information was aimed at facilitating the detention, extradition and elimination of political targets. Included within the archives were “identity documents, personal correspondence, subversive political literature” and “membership lists of political parties,” as well as surveillance materials such as “photographs and transcripts of bugged phone conversations,” “8,369 files on political detainees, transcriptions of 400 statements extracted under torture, and records describing the internal administration of the repression apparatus, including personnel lists and documents from the years before the dictatorship (Baets 49). What is more, as I discuss in the first chapter, the archives exposed organizational plans and descriptions of the campaign that utilized cutting-edge communication and computer technology to make information-sharing function with unprecedented efficiency. Once military governments absorbed the civil branches of the government, identity documents, membership rosters, personal letters, and census data transformed from mundane materials of everyday governance to instruments of terror.
Figure 3: Identity documents uncovered in the Archives of Terror, Digital image, Información Independiente, 11 July 2012, Web, 29 Oct. 2016.

Although the dictatorship meant unbridled repression for most of society, the financial sector enjoyed unrestricted economic freedom. The University of Chicago educated financial advisors of the military, known as the “Chicago Boys” had the “unparalleled opportunity to undertake far-reaching [neoliberal] reforms in conditions of political impunity” (M. Taylor 1). This led to the implementation of a laissez-faire economic model, based on the principles of free enterprise and widespread industry privatization, known as neoliberalism. Chile has been considered a paragon of neoliberalism since the dictatorship: “The Chilean case is remarkably important in this period of contemporary world history, since it was the first place in which the neoliberal recipe was applied” (Valdes and Martini 29). Although some have deemed Chile an
“economic miracle,” in practice the economic policies of the dictatorship led to an increasingly stratified society with an uneven accumulation of wealth. For the poorest and most vulnerable Chileans, the economic climate of dictatorship was devastating. Marcus Taylor explains that these neoliberal reforms impacted far more than economic policy; neoliberalism is a “state-led project of social engineering” that eliminates social relationships and functions that do not conform to the predominant market model (6). As a result, its influences reach beyond the economic, into the social fabric of everyday life. One of the paradoxes of the dictatorship is that neoliberalism’s free market economic model preaches the end of government intervention in the regulation of the economy; however, it depended on the highly bureaucratic totalitarian government to achieve its dominance.

1.6 Conceptual Art Practices, A Theoretical Framework

The imposition of military dictatorship had a profound impact on Chilean cultural production as censorship limited the ability to create artistic works that criticized the dictatorship or contained overtly political themes. As evidenced by the testimony of Núñez in the first chapter, artists and writers who dared to criticize the military regime faced potential imprisonment, exile and execution. The initial years that followed the dictatorship experienced a standstill of cultural production that has been called the “cultural blackout.” Of all kinds of artistic expression, the film industry was the most severely affected as a film historian writes, “fourteen years later, in this country
there is no true cinema industry; production—which rests on individual independent effort—has not been able to reach the same levels that existed during the years of the Popular Unity” (Mouesca). Yet tenuous artistic production slowly began to resume without the traditional support of institutions. The cultural critic Nelly Richard was the first to write about the “unofficial,” experimental artistic practices created in this milieu, and a movement she deemed “la escena de avanzada.” As Richard explained, the escena de avanzada was a critical grouping of artists that produced experimental art beginning in 1977 and lasted until the end of the dictatorship when Chile transitioned to democracy in 1990. She described the scene as taking place at the “margins” because neither the dictatorship nor the fractured leftist opposition supported it. Although Richard was the first to write about the period, other critics such as Ronald Kay, Pablo Oyarzun, José Joaquín Brunner, Francisco Brugnoli and Adriana Valdés published about the escena de avanzada. Active artists included Diamela Eltit, Raul Zurita, Lotty Rosenfeld, who were all also members of the Colectivo Acciones De Arte (CADA), as well as Carlos Leppe, Gonzalo Diaz and Eugenio Dittborn.

The escena de avanzada, as framed by Richard, consisted of not only artwork, but also an intersection of genres including literature, poetry, performance and criticism.

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* In the collection of writings on the escena de avanzada period called Arte en Chile desde 1973. Escena de avanzada y sociedad, (page 13) Richard proclaims that the term escena de avanzada should be preserved in its original language, Spanish, rather than translated as “avant garde” in English, in order to avoid, “the nostalgic connotations” implied with its translation into “avant garde.” For this reason, for the purpose of this dissertation, I do not translate the term into English and only refer to it as avanzada rather than “avant garde” or “neo avant garde” as some English language critics have done.
While varied, the avanzada works focused on solving a dilemma unique to the dictatorship: how to engage in social commentary within the context of a totalitarian government. Undoubtedly, the atmosphere of political, social and cultural repression of the period “limited conditions of artistic practice” (Richard "Lo político en el arte: arte, politica e instituciones"). The escena de avanzada sought to invent new forms of communication since the military dictatorship had contaminated life to such a degree that no “signifier” was exempt from its reach, as its effects had extended far beyond the realms of public engagement. For this reason, Richard explained that avanzada artists had to not only alter the language from which they operated, but also function from the a place beyond the confines of the symbolic order and representation. Creating a new language also meant shifting the genesis of art to new formats, scenes and sources. As such, the escena de avanzada emanated from new conceptualizations of the “city” and “everyday urban life,” as well as the body and interventions linked to artistic practices that privileged bodily experience and expression.

Although Richard’s art criticism was groundbreaking and emerged at a time when few other critics were addressing the new forms of art that were created under the dictatorship, the topic of bureaucracy was a theme that surfaced in both avanzada works (such as Eugenio Dittborn’s mail art) and in the cultural production of many other genres and regions. Richard’s criticism excluded a broader consideration of artistic currents both within Chile and abroad. With the exception of Eltit whose performance
art and public interventions figured prominently in the *avanzada* criticism, the work of Núñez was not considered to be a part of the *avanzada* scene because Núñez’s initial exhibition *printuras y exculturas* (1975) under the dictatorship took place under the auspice of the French cultural attaché within the institutional framework of the museum. In addition, he created the rest of his work during the dictatorship from exile in Europe. Furthermore, Richard criticized Núñez for the testimonial aspects of some of his series based on his experience of extrajudicial imprisonment and torture. For this reason, while I acknowledge the historical importance of the escena de la avanzada in the revival of art after the dictatorship I prefer to employ a different theoretical framework in my analysis of these visual works that both informs my reading of bureaucracy and cuts across the lines imposed by national borders.

Instead, I have found that conceptual art theory (including writings from both north and south of the equator) offers a theoretical basis to analyze the artistic strategies that Núñez, Eltit, and Larraín employ in the works of this dissertation. At first glance, “conceptual art” is not a label that immediately applies to the works discussed here. First, there’s the issue of genre. Eltit’s *Puño y letra* is literature—a text—is absent of any visual representation. Larraín’s film may be considered to be an “art film,” but it is a film, nonetheless. Núñez’s oeuvre is not usually considered to be “conceptual” by art critics as his paintings contain pictorial representation—albeit abstracted. Yet, within the series of serigraphs he created after his imprisonment and forced exile to France, *Summa*
Arqueológica: Libertad Condicional, we encounter some of the strategies that are characteristic of conceptual art, especially the reliance on the Duchampian ready-made. I argue that not only Núñez, but also Eltit and Larraín, engage with bureaucratic material and aesthetic elements of bureaucracy like a ready-made in their works. In so doing, they appropriate, expose, and subvert the aesthetics of bureaucracy utilized during the period of the dictatorship and in its surviving legacies.

Even before the rise of totalitarian governments in Latin America changed what was at stake in cultural production, global art trends in Latin America and abroad challenged the commodification of art and its relationship to museums and institutions. As response to the political events that began to galvanize the region in the 1950s, Latin American experienced a shift from “craft-driven art” to “the realm of ideas” and language (Camnitzer 1). Although it had commonalities with the development of conceptual art in North American and Europe, art historians acknowledge that Latin American conceptual art took on its own trajectory. Luis Camnitzer refers to this movement as Latin American “conceptualism.” He delineates that conceptualist artists interrupted the dichotomies between themes like subversion (revolutionary art) and construction (development-minded, utopic art) that had been seen in the revolutionary art that had been created in Latin America in the aftermath of the Cuban revolution (Camnitzer 19). Bringing together both formal and institutional rupture (16), Latin
American conceptualism forged a process that was unlike anything seen in Latin American art prior, in that “strong interdisciplinary dynamics” came into play (21).

Even if the works I present in this dissertation are not considered to be “conceptual art,” they rely on strategies devised through conceptual art practices. In his description of North American Conceptual Art, Alex Alberro claims that by appropriating and manipulating “ready-made media forms and structures” the artist is able “to bring their ideology” to the fore. He explains that this artistic action questions the “neutrality” behind everyday, conventional forms. He continues to explain that this re-contextualization—the contrast between the everyday meaning in which we recognize the forms, and the new context in the work of art, produces a new meaning: “The other builds upon the appropriations of the first, compounding the myths and recharging them with a radical and often political content that aims to transform the viewers’ habitual perception of the mythical operation of the mass media and parallel ideological circuits” (Alberro "A Media Art: Conceptualism in Latin America in the 1960s" 151). The presence of everyday materials turned into art objects is characteristic of Latin American conceptualism, the strategy of setting up the “readymade” and “appropriating it into another context” (32). Instead of calling this a “material presence,” Camnitzer reframes this practice as an act of re-contextualization or “using context to give meaning” (33). In this dissertation, I assert that using this conceptual art practice to engage with, appropriate, and intervene in the material, discourses and aesthetic
elements of bureaucracy both detects how the aesthetics of bureaucracy operate in service to the state and unMASKS the instability behind their guise of totality. Furthermore, I affirm that while this practice is related to mimesis—these works integrate mimetic reproduction of bureaucratic documents—it is the practice of intervening in them, dissecting them and re-contextualizing them that generate their new meanings, rather the action of simulating itself.

I have encountered in these theories an incisive artistic practice that underscores and works in opposition to the repressive qualities present in bureaucracy and its logic. Camnitzer describes conceptualism as an “upheaval of classification,” and an “anarchy of knowledge” that cuts through organized systems\(^7\) (academe and art institutions, included) (21). Along these same terms, in his essay “Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” Benjamin Buchloh identifies North American works that “revealed the modernist compulsion for empiricist, self-reflexiveness […] originated in the scientific positivism which is the founding logic of capitalism” (115). The conceptual art strategies that these works utilize bristle against the same undercurrents of scientific positivism and bureaucratic logic that led the state to incorporate bureaucracy as a part of its campaign of extrajudicial crime, and to continue to support its neoliberal dominion.

\(^7\) It can be argued that conceptual art and conceptualism, based on their resistance and critique of systematized classification, are the perfect forms of art to address bureaucracy. Earlier notions of a critique of bureaucracy are present in seminal conceptual art texts, like Benjamin Buchloh’s article titled “The Aesthetics of Administration.”
Alberro writes that in Argentina, a country that experienced a stronger emergence of conceptual art in the 1960s than Chile, the “abstracted appropriation and manipulation of readymade media forms and structures did not last long, as the increasingly repressive social and political reality of the late 1960s made such passive engagements with the prevailing system seem woefully inadequate” ("Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1977" xxvi). Critics have tried to say that conceptual art did not find success, initially, in Chile, or that the escena de la avanzada was Chile’s own form of conceptualism, unique because of the distinct environment of dictatorship. While that may be true, I find that in art produced within the context of dictatorship, these works employ conceptualist strategies effective at both exposing and dismantling the mechanisms behind institutionalized forms of bureaucracy. In her seminal article “Blueprint Circuits: Conceptual Art and Politics in Latin America,” Mari Carmen Ramírez argues that fundamental differences exists between North and South American conceptual art. Most relevant to this dissertation, is her assertion that South American artists did not share the North’s “obsession with facticity” that is enumerated by Buchloh. She writes,

Benjamin Buchloh has suggested that the obsession with the facticity of North American Conceptual art practices can derive only from the concept of an ‘administered society’ typical of ‘late’ capitalism. The absence in Latin America of the social conditions supporting an administered society makes it an unsuitable model, perhaps even antithetical to a Latin American context.” (Ramírez 556)

My dissertation pushes against her argument that the Latin America lacked the “social conditions” for the development of and “administered society” and asserts quite
the opposite. An administered society had been developing in Chile and in many places in Latin America since the Colonial period, and only has only strengthened following the era of military dictatorships, Operation Condor, and a transition to democracy that has failed to shed the bureaucratic vestiges of totalitarian rule. Furthermore, I question the isolation and firm oppositions claimed by critics in their characterizations of a north-south polarity between hemispheres in the development of conceptual art. As Esther Gabara has stated, the creation of art does not adhere to the limits imposed by national borders: “The boundaries between these sites are porous, with scholars and artists traveling, researching and living on both sides of the north/south divide; this can be a matter of choice, political necessity, professional opportunity, or personal obligation” (Gabara “Gestures, Practices, and Projects”).

1.7 Aesthetics of Bureaucracy

In “Works of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin wrote that “[t]he logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life” (Benjamin 305). He continued on to warn that “all efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war” (306). In this passage, Benjamin cautions that aesthetics can function as a tool of societal control and domination. One of the most salient aspects of Hitler’s use of aesthetics was public spectacle, iconography and propaganda. Although they are related, bureaucratic materials and procedures represent a different mode of psychological manipulation. Bureaucratic materials operate in aesthetics, but they do not
utilize the same modes as classical works of art that are hung in peoples' homes and on the walls of museums. Susan Buck-Morss declares, “So little does aesthetics have to do intrinsically with the philosophical trinity of Art, Beauty, and Truth that one might place it within the field of animal instincts” (378-9).

Nor do they function as propaganda, because aside from containing symbols of nationalism, they do not communicate an overtly political message. Bureaucratic documents and procedures cannot even be considered as consumer objects, since, although they are sometimes procured for a fee, they are not subject to the commodification of the market. Instead, the aesthetics of bureaucracy—as employed by the Chilean dictatorial state—circulate in the sphere of the everyday, affirming the power of the state in mundane, daily rituals. What’s more, as Buck-Morss illuminates, they serve the important function—which she identifies as “key to fascist aesthetics”—of giving “the observer a reassuring perception of the rationality of the whole of the social body, which when viewed from his or her own particular body is perceived as a threat to wholeness” (407).

Although Pinochet’s totalitarian dictatorship has been called neo-fascist, the military government utilized the power of aesthetics in a different manner than Hitler and Mussolini during the Second World War. Pinochet, for instance, lacked the same kind of charisma and ability to harness the spectacle as Hitler. While his speeches and commentary have produced a few memorable sound bites, he was no skilled orator, but
instead has been described as an “introverted and grey workaholic with little charisma” (O'Shaughnessy 33). It was actually Allende, not Pinochet, who had possessed the unique ability to connect with Chilean citizens and galvanize politics through his speeches. While Hitler had mastered the public spectacle and harnessed the “emotive power of symbols” (Spotts 50), the Chilean military regime depended on less overt, ingrained methods to maintain public appeal. Even though it can be argued that the regime depended entirely on the same military force that it exercised during the coup d’état, as Carmen Oquendo-Villar points out, “The regime would have been able neither to gain nor hold power so long by force alone. It needed to manipulate perceptions and ideologies” (265). The purpose of this study, accordingly, is to show how the military cultivated an ethos of bureaucratic principles, sourced from both the military culture of discipline, hierarchy and force, as well as the legacy of bureaucratic logic embedded in Chilean culture. The regime harnessed the visual system of bureaucracy not only to enact power, but also to construct a paradigm of all-encompassing, totalitarian control.

When I refer to the “aesthetics of bureaucracy,” I refer, first, to aesthetics as the sensible or how bureaucratic documents, procedures and discourses look, feel and sound. That can mean how text looks on a bureaucratic form, the design of a bureaucratic seal, or the style of legal discourse produced in an official hearing. Second, I allude to how bureaucratic aesthetics can encompass the application of bureaucratic logic in the organization of people, places or space. Works that appropriate and employ
the aesthetics of bureaucracy expose that bureaucracy is not just an organizational system for government entities, but also a logic that can be incorporated into the spaces in which we live. Handelman’s study of how power is condensed into everyday physical spaces and objects has been a crucial starting point for my analysis, which operates according to his assertion that the “most powerful aesthetics are those that are lived mundanely” (“Folding and Enfolding Walls” 74). For the aesthetics with which we have contact in the everyday become so familiar and commonplace that they become “commonsense” or “given” (74). It is these everyday operations that generate bureaucratic power—the ways its aesthetics serve to reinforce its legitimacy and project a sense of authority and sovereignty. In bureaucratic documents and materials, visual elements like signs, symbols, seals, watermarks and signatures hold legal weight and they communicate that a bureaucratic document is “official.” Because we are so accustomed to their presence in official capacities, their presence suggests legality and legitimacy.

The works discussed in this dissertation mobilizes the “aesthetics” of bureaucracy with a different framework. They do not adopt the aesthetics of bureaucracy as their own and mirror them, but instead intervene in, fragments and interrupt their power to both expose it and subvert it. They remind us that the power of aesthetics rests in how they are perceived. Therefore, in appropriating the visual systems of bureaucratic documents, practices and discourses, Núñez, Eltit, and Larraín expose,
recast and undermine the power of the state. By focusing on deciphering and interrupting the symbolic and functional visual systems contained within bureaucratic materials (identifying the effects they have on the senses) Eltit, Núñez and Larraín reveal how bureaucracy operates to administrate national subjects and construct the state’s power. Eltit, Núñez and Larraín demonstrate that this perception is subjective and thus unstable. They create a space for potential resistance by showing that the power of bureaucracy’s symbolic meaning depends on its cultural context. Núñez appropriates the aesthetic elements of state-issued identity documents as a criticism of the military government, and explores what happens when they are used to define one’s individual identity. Eltit performs bureaucratic discourse in order to expose it as complicit with the same institutions that allowed the dictatorship to occur. And finally, Larraín personifies the effect of bureaucracy into a character in one of his films in order to show the ways that everyday bureaucratic functionaries not only harnessed a newfound power in the military regime, but also became agents of the military state’s killing apparatus.

1.8 Chapters

There is no uniform way that Núñez, Eltit, or Larraín represent bureaucracy, but each work I discuss in this dissertation engages with bureaucratic documents, practices and procedures. Núñez’s work contains the material of state-issued identity documentation, photographs, and travel documents as well as the procedures related to his incarceration, parole and forced exile. Eltit appropriates documents from the legal
record of trial that occurred in 2000, which related to state-sponsored crime. These documents include trial transcripts of oral testimony and the archive of documents submitted into evidence like written statements and correspondence. Larraín created his film based on the contested autopsy report of the deceased Allende. His depiction of both the autopsy procedure and the creation of the report suggest that notions of truth, facts, and infallibility may not be so easy to ascertain. While each work acknowledges the power of bureaucracy, it also subverts it, putting its authority into question.

In the first chapter, Núñez brings to the fore of his art the tension between his individual identity and that defined by the state: that of a former political prisoner, survivor of torture, and forced exile. In his work, he detects how state-issued identity documentation assists the military state in enforcing discipline, but at the same time it imprisons the subject within a series of labels, categories and classifications. In his actions of copying, defacing, and deconstructing the identity documentation, Núñez uncovers the mechanisms of not only state control, but also the documents that function in its service.

In the second chapter, we observe that for Eltit, bureaucratic discourse is tried on like a costume and performed for her readers. Eltit recounts her experience of witnessing the criminal trial against a former DINA operative Enrique Arancibia Clavel for the assassination of the former general who had supported Allende, Carlos Prats and his wife in Buenos Aires in 1974. By emulating the legal discourse of the trial that was
overridden with jargon and technical terms that is hardly comprehensible, Eltit disarms it and unveils the emptiness behind its verbosity. Eltit shows how this bureaucratic discourse creates the façade of truth and justice seeking. That is to say it sounds official and thus valid, but when performed by Eltit and presented in the text, she reveals its ineffectiveness, as the words are fraught with elisions and inconsistencies. Furthermore, Eltit reveals that notably absent from the trial are the parties responsible for overseeing the operations, schemes and strategies of the Condor apparatus. They were the ones who issued the orders, and thus assume responsibility for ordering the assassination of Prats. By drawing attention to those absent at the trial, Eltit doubts the ability of the justice system when it operates from within the same institutional framework that allowed the violations of human rights to occur in the first place. She also questions the efficacy of new judicial reforms, which distract the public with a new aspect of mediatized theatricality, discriminate against marginalized individuals, and ultimately protect the interests of the neoliberal capitalist system imposed during the dictatorship, rather than the pursuit of truth and justice.

In the third chapter, Larraín bases his film, *Post Mortem* (2010) on bureaucratic documents that hold significant political and historical weight—the controversial autopsy report and death certificate regarding the demise of Allende. Larraín recreates the early days of the coup d’État from the epicenter of a public morgue that receives the first casualties of the dictatorship. Because constitutional rights had been suspended and
the military assumed the right to kill at will, the film depicts how workers at the morgue and other bureaucratic officials transform into accomplices of the regime. Configured from the perspective of a grim bureaucratic functionary whose role was to transcribe autopsy reports, Larraín portrays how the protagonist begins to blend into the amoralities of the institutional “death-world” as it amasses with more and more with corpses. *Post Mortem* shows that the assumed objectivity and reliability of forensic science and documentation practices may not be as revealing or credible as we may think. I analyze how *Post Mortem* reveals the coming together of the civilian government with the military state, and puts into question the authority behind official documents like autopsy reports and death certificates.

I have sequenced this dissertation so that we engage with each work in roughly chronological order. The introduction of this dissertation provides relevant historical background to the development of bureaucracy in Chile, beginning in the second half of the 19th century, leading up to the coup d'état that installed the military dictatorship that lasted between 1973-1990. Núñez’s series of serigraphs that he created in exile in the late 1970s, titled *Summa arqueologica: Libertad Condicional* is the focus of the first chapter. I also consider the exhibition in 1975 that caused his second imprisonment, and was one of the first art exhibitions to take place under the dictatorship. *Puño y letra*, published in 2005, is based on the trial of Enrique Arancibia Clavel that took place in Buenos Aires in 2000, for the 1975 assassination of the ex-General of the Chilean Military, Carlos Prats, and his
wife Sofía Cuthbert Chiarleoni. *Post Mortem* released in 2010, recounts the events of the coup d’état in September of 1973. In the conclusion I discuss Voluspa Jarpa’s installation *Biblioteca de la no-historia de Chile* as it relates to the recent role of bureaucracy in contemporary Chile, which I argue continues to serve the role of protecting the neoliberal order imposed during the dictatorship, and has combined the state bureaucratic archive with that of financial services. Recent laws that have been passed such as the Preventative Control of Identity in 2016, prove that bureaucratic control has not only survived the fall of the dictatorship, but continues to strengthen with no sign of slowing.
2. Documenting Domination: The Aesthetics of Bureaucracy in the Art of Guillermo Núñez

2.1 Introduction

When Chilean artist Guillermo Núñez (1947- ) was expelled from Chile in 1978, authorities stamped the pages of his passport with the words “Valid Only to Leave the Country” (see fig.4). Under the “observations” section of the passport they added the carefully handwritten letters: “Not renewable, exit option decree of law 81-1973, modified decree of law 684-1974.” The laws signaled within the passport pages refer to an article of the Code of Military Justice in which the government retained the right to cancel the passport of anyone who had engaged in activities that compromised national security. Violators of the law faced expulsion from Chile and were not permitted to re-enter without authorization of the Ministry of the Interior. The same law declared that anyone who entered the country clandestinely, or who attempted to undermine “entrance control” procedures could face a maximum penalty of death. The cold, bureaucratic terms outlined in the passport translated to real-life consequences.

The law cited in Núñez’s passport comprises one example of how during the dictatorship the power of the state was codified into bureaucratic documents and procedures. Núñez’s passport exemplified the labels he carried with him as an exile abroad. His identity was no longer defined as that of an artist; in the eyes of the state he was now a former political prisoner, a subversive, and an exile. The markings are scar-
like traces of a nearly yearlong ordeal of extrajudicial imprisonment by the Chilean military state.

Decades later, the significance of this routine document persists in Núñez’s work; he features an image of his passport in the colophon of his book *Mandala* (2008). The reproduced document is more than an afterthought; it serves as a visual culmination, a reminder of the materiality of bureaucratic documents and their implications. Inserting a copy of the passport into the pages of an art book transforms it from an everyday artifact into an art object. Taken out of their context as mundane bureaucratic procedures or archival materials and integrated into the pages of an art book, documents are transformed into “documents of art” (Gómez-Moya “Blackened-out Secrets” 77).
Figure 4: A copy of the passport Núñez used to leave Chile from Guillermo Núñez, *Mandala* (Concepción: Ediciones del Bío-Bío, 2008; print).

In another section of *Mandala* titled “Dictionary,” Núñez lists entries of pertinent words to delineate a lexicon for the book. One of the entries, “passport,” is defined as a “Dispatch that a sovereign used to give someone so that they could travel freely and safely through determined territories. / Presently, a document that it is necessary to provide in order to travel abroad.”¹ Núñez takes the conventional representation of a passport—understood to be a key that opens the doors of the world for travel and

¹ In *Mandala* and many of his other artist books such as *Alquimia*, Núñez does not utilize page numbers.
exploration, or a talisman that ensures its holder safe passage—and juxtaposes it with the image of the document that, for him, did just the opposite. Under the Chilean dictatorship passports served as instruments of the state in order to deny entry and exits to personae non gratae, providing a means to excise and prevent the entrance of “unwanted” individuals from body of the nation. As we will see, not only in Mandala, but also in the art that Núñez created after 1973, Núñez’s artistic practices undercut the “everyday mythology” surrounding bureaucratic documents that represents them as benign. His art exposes the insidious potential for repression that they contain, and the ways that not just passports, but the aesthetics and logic behind an array of bureaucratic practices codify state control.

After Núñez had been imprisoned and forced into exile during the military dictatorship he created thousands of serigraphs between 1979 and 1982. In six hundred of the prints, Núñez integrated fragments of material from state-issued identity documentation, as well as the documents that had pertained to his imprisonment and parole. He titled the series Summa Arqueológica: Libertad Condicional (1979-1982). The series not only shows the role that bureaucratic documentation had played in his imprisonment, but also makes visible the tension between individual identity and the bureaucratic practices that seek to categorize, sort, and classify citizens in order to fit them together into the body of the nation. Núñez ties banal conventions of social ordering—identity documents such as passports, authorization cards issued by the state,
institutional photographs, and visual elements of bureaucracy like stamps, seals, and signatures—to torture, imprisonment, and surveillance and forced exile. They become the material of an art practice that exposes and subverts bureaucratic power.

One of the most commented aspects of Núñez’s oeuvre is its testimonial nature, with the central theme of Núñez’s history as a survivor of political imprisonment and torture at the fore. Macarena Gómez-Barris interprets Núñez’s body of work as a methodical process to “integrate” the experience of torture into his subjectivity. She writes, “Núñez’s aesthetic politics recuperates the plenitude of meanings of living with and after torture” (Gómez-Barris 79). Although I affirm that residues of Núñez’s biographical experience are present in the Summa Arqueológica: Libertad Condicional series, in this chapter I propose that Núñez’s work critiques not only the violence the state employed during the dictatorship, but also the bureaucratic practices and procedures that enabled that repression. I will explore how Núñez forged—an aesthetic practice that engaged bureaucratic materials related to the Chilean military state. Working with bureaucratic materials as ready-mades, Núñez’s serial process removed them from their “circulations” as everyday artifacts, and acted upon them; he defaced, fragmented, re-arranged them. His practice is more than an act of revenge or destruction. Putting the material of bureaucracy into a new context, it exposes the complicity of documents, procedures and practices with the violence of state. Núñez replicates bureaucratic logic in his work, unmask the mechanisms of its
control, and turns the logic against itself by intervening in and repositioning its signs and symbols. Núñez uses serigraphy to alter the visual symbols of bureaucracy, rather than merely reproduce them. His artistic practice changes his position from that of a passive witness to an agent, and destabilizes the aesthetic components from which it harnesses its power.

2.2 Biography

Before the coup d’état dismantled all forms of political opposition, Núñez had been an active supporter of the Chilean political left, participating in political initiatives such as the Muralist Brigade Ramona Parra, a group of artists that painted political murals in public places throughout the city in support of President Salvador Allende. He had been appointed director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in 1970, a role in which he served for nearly two years. After the events of the military coup d’état unfolded, Núñez suffered health issues and was unable to participate in any coordinated opposition. Yet, when an acquaintance asked Núñez to assist in hiding an unidentified man on the run from the authorities, he agreed. Even though Núñez considered himself to be a supporter rather than a militant, he knew that without his help the man would be killed, and came to his aid in spite of the future risks (G. Núñez Retrato hablado 94-8).
It turns out that the man he helped was Victor Toro\(^2\), a prominent member of the militant group the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR). Shortly after he stayed with Núñez, the military apprehended him and he gave up Núñez’s name under torture. In May of 1974, the DINA arrested Núñez and imprisoned him at the Aviation Academy of War (AGA), a military school they converted into a prison. Núñez remained there for just over 5 months. This imprisonment marked the beginning of a series of points of encounter with the Chilean military state that ultimately resulted in his expulsion from Chile for 12 years. Outside of the prison the military employed bureaucratic controls as a method of identifying, tracking, and controlling the legitimate means of movement of the Chilean population. Inside the military prison they amplified an extreme version of bureaucratic organization.

Núñez’s account of his imprisonment at the AGA reads like something out of the pages of Michel Foucault’s Discipline and Punish. In addition to using tactics of physical torture to extract information from the prisoners, the military assumed complete control over all aspects of theirs lives. Núñez recalls, “We had a sign with a number stuck to our

\(^2\) Victor Toro, the man who Núñez harbored survived his imprisonment and like Núñez was first held at a concentration camp and later exiled in 1977. Newspaper articles, including a NY Times article “Victor Toro, Tortured in Chile, Fights Deportation” dated April 7, 2011 tell that when they expelled Toro to Cuba, the Chilean government declared him legally dead and threatened that if he returned he could disappear. After living in Nicaragua and obtaining political asylum in Mexico, Toro feared that he was too vulnerable to the reaches of the Chilean intelligence operations in Mexico, and chose to cross the Texas border illegally in 1984. Eventually settling in the Bronx area of New York City, Toro has been living undocumented in the United States for over 30 years. An outspoken radical, Toro founded the cultural center La Peña. Although I have chosen not to focus on Toro’s story, his experience in the United States illustrates the primacy of bureaucratic documentation under a different, yet also precarious regime of documentation.
clothing, we lost our names, our qualities as human beings, we were now only numbers like the gardeners of the Queen of Hearts in Alice in Wonderland” (Retrato hablado 94). In Núñez’s case, physical torture was not the predominant mode of control employed by his captors. Instead, they infiltrated his most intimate and bodily functions, the quotidian modes of daily survival. The prisoners were not permitted to bathe and could only use the bathroom facilities at most once a day after waiting in long lines. When it came his turn, Núñez recounts that soldiers watched and pointed rifles at them as they went to the bathroom (95). Another tactic of control was that the officials interrupted their sleep, blasting a radio during the hours of night, waking them randomly, forcing them to remain face down on the floor with their hands behind their heads for hours (95).

Not only did the prison take charge of the minutia of the prisoners’ survival, Núñez’s captors dominated his senses. Even though they enforced strict silence and the prisoners were not permitted to communicate with each other, the prison was anything but silent as they overheard others’ interrogations, beatings and torture sessions. The

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3 At the time of his imprisonment, the father of Núñez’s partner, literary critic Soledad Bianchi, held a high-ranking position within the Chilean Police force. It is believed that Núñez was saved from the most brutal treatment, and even death, because of his connection to his father-in-law. This detail has not been mentioned in many of the books regarding Núñez’s biography such as Retrato Hablado out of respect for Bianchi’s father who was still living at the time of publication. The book emphasizes that it was the international pressure that saved Núñez’s life, however it may have also been attributed to the influence and connections that Bianchi’s father had. Finding out this information resolved many questions that I had as a researcher, since the Chilean military cared seemingly little about international opinions on the human rights violations they enacted during the dictatorship. I have worried that Núñez’s story depicted a lenient and even merciful portrait of the military state, since they spared his life.
goal of the torture— in addition to extracting information— was “to split the human being in two, to make emphatic the ever present [...] latent distinction between a self and a body, between a ‘me’ and ‘my body’” (Scarry 49). To this same end, the atmosphere of the prison replicated the annihilating power of torture dissolving the boundaries between the prisoners and their environment. With the overuse of the sewage system, the toilets broke and never were repaired. As human excrement accumulated, the prison was overcome with flies and the smell of pestilent waste (G. Núñez Retrato hablado 95). Núñez recounts how the prison made him oppressively aware of all points of contact between the body and the outside: “Orifices to look, orifices to smell, to disgust, scream—scream, moan, spit, vomit—orifices to cry or plead, orifices to hear—hear screams, hear moans, hear pleads, hear cries—orifices to empty, orifices to penetrate, wounds to scream, moan, cry” (G. Núñez Alquimia).

For the entirety of his imprisonment Núñez’s captors made him wear a blindfold from 6 o’clock in the morning until 10 o’clock at night, occasionally permitting him to remove the blindfold for short periods. The blindfold not only increased the level of fear, it also kept the prisoners from being able to identify their captors or each other. In contrast to the perpetual darkness in which Núñez remained, during the interrogation sessions officials placed him under a blinding spotlight for questioning. In an attempt to make him confess his interrogators informed him that people had identified him as a political militant. Threatening him with vivid descriptions of the torture methods they
may have used if he didn’t talk, they pressured him to confess to the crime of harboring a militant as well as implicate other guilty parties. For the people that he could not identify by name, they required him to make retratos hablados (police sketches) of their faces and identifying characteristics. He recalls, “Everything seemed to useful to them, including the most banal details” (G. Núñez Retrato hablado 94). They exhaustively questioned Núñez about all of his friendships, colleagues, and connections as well as the routines of his daily life, his movements, the places he went, and the people with whom he associated.

The invasion of Núñez’s life extended beyond the confines of the prison; in the initial weeks military officials took over his house and systematically searched and catalogued his belongings. In addition to seizing his artwork, files, and documents, the officials even stole cooking equipment and consumed his food. Working to petition for his release, his partner, literary critic Soledad Bianchi attempted to go through official channels to find out what had happened to Núñez and where he was being held. She had to participate in the bureaucratic rituals that are commonplace with any attempt to communicate with the government. While waiting in lines with other family members of the detained and disappeared she recalls that functionaries taunted women searching for their husbands suggesting they were not actually missing but most likely had run off with their mistresses (Bianchi 40). The Red Cross told family members of the disappeared to return in 20 days, the mandatory wait period to register their cases (40).
Amid substantial international pressure from artists and political figures, as well as Bianchi’s family connections within the police force, the military agreed to release Núñez from prison. The parole came with the stipulation of libertad condicional (conditional liberty) meaning that Núñez was prohibited from leaving Santiago and was required to present himself and sign his name at the Ministry of Defense once a week. Although he was no longer confined, Núñez recalls that he “continued imprisoned, only now my jail was a little more vast and I could see and speak” (Retrato hablado 96). His days were marked by the bureaucratic rituals of maintaining of complying with the conditions of his parole.

Released prisoners were issued cards certifying their parole, a physical trace of their contact with the state. In the example (fig. 5), an individual who had been interrogated at a Naval base was granted an “unconditional liberty” card that both the prisoner and a military official signed and notarized. The card exhibits some of the visual components contained within routine bureaucratic documentation, a conglomeration of stamps in different shades of ink, the listing of names, dates, and biographical information, and the signatures of both military officials and the released prisoner himself. As we will see, these visual elements became not only inspiration, but also the material basis for Núñez’s future artwork.
While Núñez recovered and complied with the conditions of his parole, it was impossible for him to remain silent about his experience. He began to create artwork in order to process the trauma of his imprisonment and give testimony to what he had witnessed in the AGA. He describes, “That whole cruel experience, those days of conditioned liberty, transformed into drawings, paintings, prints, poems and sculptural forms…” (Retrato hablado 96). Yet, instead of returning to the abstract style of painting or pop art for which he had become famous before the dictatorship, Núñez started to engage with found objects. He used commonplace objects that he acquired from his home and the market and assembled the objects into new contexts so that they formed visual metaphors.

Turning to assembled objects rather than pictorial representations, Núñez’s work reflected the emergence of the “mass-produced Duchampian readymade” (Ramírez 159) in Latin American conceptual art throughout the 1960s. Integrating readymades into
their work, Latin American conceptual artists strove to create new “strategies of signification, in environments where censorship and repression limited the abilities to use realism or language” (159). Núñez’s readymade objects reflected “the fundamental propositions of Conceptual art,” which revealed “the limits of art and life under conditions of marginalization and, in some cases, repression” (159). Although the objects that Núñez utilized were not immediately linked to violence and imprisonment, they created poignant visual metaphors that insinuated their messages. In a letter to a friend, Nunez writes that in the subtext of the pieces

I would speak about the alienated, destroyed, annihilated, humiliated man, with his eyes blindfolded, obligated to look at a distorted reality, going through Alice’s looking glass, one more cadaver with obligated, automatic movements, without time, the cadaver that I had been during 5 months and 6 days. (96)

Figure 6: Surviving photograph of object from the exhibition printuras y exculturas, 1975, from Guillermo Núñez, Retrato hablado: Una retrospectiva (Santiago: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Universidad de Chile, 1993; print 153).
In one piece (fig. 6) he placed a rose inside a birdcage, trapping it. Inside another cage (fig. 7) he enclosed graphic reproductions of the Mona Lisa so that the canonical portrait peered out from within the bars. Other object-metaphors utilized common objects associated with daily life. He took a loaf of “marraqueta” bread and wrapped it in barbed wire. He tied a necktie that he purchased while traveling in New York City and hung it upside down so that it resembled a noose. Manipulating their contexts and assembly, Núñez politicized commonplace objects in order to reveal the intersection of violence and imprisonment within the material of the everyday. The objects served as broader metaphors for how the dictatorship infiltrated the private lives of Chilean citizens, taking hostage something even as mundane as daily bread.

With the assistance of the French cultural attaché Roland Husson, Núñez arranged an exhibition of the objects titled *printuras y exculturas* (1975) at the gallery of
the Instituto Cultural Chileno-Francés. The exhibition was the first of a total of 6 intended cycles to take place throughout Santiago. Even though none of the pieces explicitly criticized the dictatorship, the visual metaphors proved too controversial and censors shut down the exhibition after just 4 hours. Fearing for Núñez’s safety, Husson appealed to military officials to ensure that Núñez would not be detained. His efforts proved futile and the following day military officers arrested him once again at his home.

After this second arrest Núñez was imprisoned in Cuatro Alamos, a section of the larger detention center called Tres Alamos, where prisoners were held in secret without due process and or formal charges. The prison functioned completely outside the official practices of registration—“incommunicado”—meaning that Núñez was not recognized as a prisoner and the military refused to reveal his whereabouts. He was transported between Cuatro Alamos and the infamous secret prison and torture center Villa Grimaldi for interrogations. There, Núñez witnessed some of the worst methods of torture exercised by the military government such as the parrilla where electricity was applied to the bodies of victims. Instead of cells, prisoners were locked into 80x80 centimeter boxes called perreras (dog kennels), a form of torture in itself. Núñez was transported to the center only for the purposes of interrogation only for a day at a time, so he was spared the most barbaric methods of torture, to which other prisoners were subjected for periods of weeks or months. In his final visit to Villa Grimaldi officials
performed procedures aimed at confirming and registering his identity; they photographed him extensively, took measurements of identifying characteristics such as his height and weight recorded his hair and eye color (G. Núñez Retrato hablado 97).

Many held within these prisons were tortured and executed, their bodies made to disappear. The government estimates that in Chile over 3,000 people were killed. While it cannot be certain, I suspect that both the international interest in his case—as the offending exhibition took place under the auspices of the French government—as well as connections that Núñez’s partner’s family had in the police force were the determining factors that saved Núñez’s life. They transferred Núñez the military transferred him to Punchuncaví, a concentration and work camp. With further interventions of the French government, after 4 months of imprisonment, the military agreed to release him under the condition that he would be exiled to France, where he remained until 1987 (G. Núñez Retrato hablado 6).

2.3 Serigraphs from Exile

From his apartment in the suburbs of Paris, Núñez resumed the methods he had employed in printuras y exculturas. He worked with images in place of objects, including old photographs and engravings that he had found in books. Núñez fused together found images and bureaucratic material so that their combinations revealed what he calls “everyday mythologies”—the banalization of violence and the assumption that because something is commonplace it is benign (G. Núñez Mandala). The images
depicted drawings of mannequins, scenes from a visit to the dentist, Rembrandt’s painting *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* and a portrait photograph of Guillaume Apollinaire. Next, Núñez utilized a Xerox machine or a “roto print” to duplicate the symbols from the paperwork he collected throughout his ordeal. He replicated by hand the seal of the AGA, the branch of the military that first detained him and photocopied the image with the Xerox so he could integrate it into his serigraphs.

The serigraph served as more than a means of reproducing already existing artwork, Núñez sought to explore the full capacities of the machine itself as a part of the prints. Núñez played with the colors of ink, sometimes misaligning a print slightly and going over it again. He experimented with different textures of paper for his prints, including graph paper. As he printed each layer on some serigraphs he added pieces of cloth and string, affixing them to the prints using only the ink. Some materials remained fastened to the prints, while others left traces of their textures in their absence. Many of his prints played with negative space, where the only part of the paper that has ink or an image is in the small shape of an “x.” Núñez explained that the shape of an “x” that recurs throughout the series represents the intersection between the state and the individual, the torturer and tortured (G. Núñez Personal Interview). I also observe that the “x” is a symbol utilized in bureaucratic documentation and notary practices to denote the space where one signs their signature.
Figure 8: Guillermo Núñez, *Summa Arqueologica: Libertad Condicional*, 1979, Serigraph and Drawing, from Guillermo Núñez, *Retrato hablado: Una retrospectiva* (Santiago: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Universidad de Chile, 1993; print 37).
In one of the serigraphs (fig. 8), Núñez portrayed a copy of his institutional photograph alongside a faded fragment of a French bureaucratic document. On top of the images, he printed a printed replica of a photograph of the surrealist poet Guillaume Apollinaire with his bandaged forehead. He explained that he selected this image because during his first imprisonment in one of the few moments when he was able to lift the blindfold above his eyes, in his reflection he saw not himself but rather Apollinaire staring back at him (G. Núñez Personal Interview). When converted into a stencil, the image of Apollinaire resembles the graphic print of a stamp. Layered on top of the certificate, it mimics the style of the bureaucratic symbols. This juxtaposition and the ways that the bureaucratic style encroaches on the found images, conflates bureaucracy and art. Themes of imprisonment, torture and repression haunt the images in a way that is spectral, rather than explicit. Combining the experiences of his imprisonment and his exile with fragments of bureaucratic documents exposes the complicit relationship between the bureaucratic procedures and the repressive practices of extrajudicial imprisonment, torture and forced exile.

In his writings that correspond to the series Núñez describes the bureaucratic document as a “horrendous palimpsest,” (Retrato hablado 120). He declares:

passport, horrendous palimpsest; / brusquely wake these everyday documents / not only by the aggression of a pen falling heavily over the initial protocol, / but also proposing with it a different reading, another from the one that it primitively had / been assigned (G. Núñez Retrato hablado 120)
He alludes to not only the original documents that he used to create the serigraphs, but also reworked materials, multiple layers of drawings and vellum—a process of creation, then destruction or erasure.

2.4 Repetition and Mechanical Reproduction

Throughout the process of integrating readymades into the serigraphs Núñez intervened in them, adding a dimension of violence to the work. He defaced his institutional photographs with scribbles of black ink, affixed strips of paper over the eyes in a way that is reminiscent of a blindfold. The imagery running through many of the prints insinuates the ways that the military government enacted a reign of terror onto the bodies of political prisoners. The inclusion of an image of a face, its mouth agape as if to imply a scream, illuminated underneath a lamp recalls the process of interrogation and torture in order to extract information from prisoners. On the one hand, Núñez encountered a ritual the process of making serigraphs. Although it involves a machine, serigraphy requires the artist’s manual interaction in the process: drawing and cutting the stencils, mixing and applying the ink, as well as masking and manipulating a squeegee to run the ink over the paper. Núñez elucidates, “The printing of serigraphs demands a certain physical effort: I let sit and work through these problems inside of me and I draw; searching for a silence that pursues me and yet I lack for a while now” (Retrato hablado 117). On the other hand, because of the element of repetition present in the series, critics such as Nelly Richard have disregarded Núñez’s
work as approaching the topic of dictatorship too directly, failing to transcend
“traditional techniques and genres” (112). Richard criticized exiled artists for fixating on
the “trauma of separation” and the loss of connection with national identity, history, and
traditions. She writes,

[T]he fighting tones of the artists who bore witness or denounced the coup reconfirmed
them as members of that community which had been destroyed by it. By repeating their
symbolic ties to this lost community, by making them into ideological and political
emblems of their struggle, the exiles perpetuated the memory of that History of which
they wanted to become the sole national guardians. ("Margins and Institutions: Art
in Chile Since 1973" 112)

The footnote corresponding to this passage makes direct reference to the “5,000
drawings and 400 paintings” Núñez had created in exile that Richard describes as
“reflecting the deep pain he experienced during his involuntary imprisonment and
confinement” (114). Richard interpreted the repetition of the series as a symptom of
what Freud calls “resistance,” (36-7) the inability to move forward, and a circular
movement of repeating the same painful theme again and again.

These comments were published when Richard released the groundbreaking
special edition of the Australian journal Art & Text. Before the art works outlined in the
publication, Chile had been suffering for nearly a decade under the crushing censorship
of Pinochet’s military regime. The journal was the first major piece of critical literature to
emerge from the country since the military ousted the democratically elected Marxist
president and imposed an indefinite military rule. Though geographic distance and the
broken ties between Núñez and the Chilean military government marginalized his position as an exiled artist, Richard’s decision to not only exclude but also openly criticize Núñez’s work estranged him from the world of Chilean art. Núñez expressed that in France, “when I talk to French comrades about the problems of torture and repression they understand me and I feel that around that there is a strong solidarity” (Retrato hablado 116). At the same time, he questioned their ability to truly comprehend his experience: “[S]ometimes I ask myself if it is really possible to understand that when it is not lived daily” (116). After the art scene in Chile had dissolved and the initial revival was dominated by Richard’s escena de avanzada, it appears that the reverse had occurred in Núñez’s homeland, the fellow artists active in the Chilean avant-garde who were capable of relating to Núñez’s imprisonment, torture, and practice of creating artwork under dictatorship were no longer sources of solidarity.

With Margins and Institutions, Richard carved out a space for art criticism in Chile that had been obliterated by the dictatorship. She asserted that no institution or official entity provided a forum outside of the operations of the state. Artists active in the escena de avanzada had to build alternative frameworks within which their artwork could circulate. The escena de avanzada was critical of art institutions as well as the institution of the museum, as it identified these spaces as both politicized and complicit with government repression. In addition they supported neither the dictatorship nor the former government of the Unidad Popular. Artists had to devise ways to circumvent the
dichotomy between the opposing political factions of the right and left that the dictatorship forced upon Chilean society. She writes, “[N]either the official history of those in control nor the unofficial history of those brought under control, whose mirror of suffering was often just as inverted or righteous, could provide any logical coherence or useful interpretation” (18).

The problem with Richard’s dismissal of Núñez’s work was that in the limiting conditions of censorship, with the closure of cultural institutions and the lack of institutional funding for cultural development, the escena de avanzada—criticism that had initially developed in the margins of Chilean society—became the predominant cultural criticism regarding the dictatorship during the period of transition. Richard’s work directly influenced other scholars who have been at the forefront of Latin American art criticism such as Luis Camnitzer and Mari Carmen Ramírez. Within Chile, in the decade that followed Núñez’s return to Chile, art historians had trouble determining where Núñez fit within their theoretical frameworks so strongly influenced by Richard’s criticism.⁴

Undoubtedly, the experience of prolonged imprisonment, interrogations and torture—in addition to forced exile—had a traumatic effect on the artist. Unresolved

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⁴ In addition to Núñez’s slow reintegration with his native country after exile, reception of his work has slowly made progress. In 2007, Núñez was awarded the National Art Prize in 2007, recreated his printuras y exculturas exhibition for the inauguration of the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in 2012, and had a retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in 2015 called Núñez 85. Dibujar con sangre en el ojo.
trauma can unconsciously emerge over and over again in a subject, and results in a “compulsion to repeat,” where the subject may reenact or “act out” repressed past trauma (Freud 36-7). The objective of the psychoanalyst is to aid the subject in working through the “resistances,” to get at the root of what is causing their compulsion in order to stop the cycle (37). However, Richard loses sight of the movement present in Núñez’s series. As we witness Núñez’s process, we observe not only the reenactment of torture but also an accusation against the institutional bureaucratic systems that enabled state terrorism. Flattening Núñez’s work to see only the qualities of repetition overlooks the ways that Núñez intervenes in, destroys, and fragments the original material. Diana Taylor argues that the reenactment of trauma works against the original objectives of torture as a method of state control, which aim to “isolate” and “paralyze” its “victims and survivors” (“Trauma as Durational Performance”). She perceives that torture “produces the opposite of witnessing—it silences, breaks personal and social bonds, and guts all sense of community and responsibility.” Manipulating the found images creates movement, Núñez’s artistic practice returns him to the role of agent and reassembles a voice. It testifies to the state violence enacted not only through torture, but also in everyday life under the dictatorship.

The fixation of Núñez’s serial process does not operate as immobility but rather as the reproduction of two different aspects of bureaucracy: bureaucratic logic and aesthetics. Bureaucratic logic is “a way of invoking, shaping, and organizing existence”
More “pervasive” than bureaucratic institutions, bureaucratic logic is “ingrained and implicated in our daily lives” and “shapes much of the ordering of social life in the modern state” (5). Bureaucratic logic converts the world into series of data, inputs to classify, organize, separate and visualize. Handelman explains that “bureaucratic aesthetics” “shape the exactness of categories, borders, cleanly demarcated in relationship to one another, demonstrating difference” (112). While logic determines the lines that divide, aesthetics reflect the “feeling” of the divided world. Núñez’s serial process fragments and re-assembles the signs and symbols of bureaucracy in order to unmask how these two modes of bureaucratic control operate.

Mechanical reproduction became increasingly common and efficient throughout the span of the 20th century as photocopies or “Xerox” prints provided an accessible medium for replicating or disseminating images and text. Despite its reliance on a machine rather than a human to render the images, theorists have attributed psychic characteristics to this form of printing. Scarry describes machines like the printing press and Xerox as “materializations of the elusive embodied capacity for memory” (283). Ronald Kay compares the shutter release of a camera to the “exteriorization and materialization of the tic of a mechanical metaphor of a compulsive act of repetition” (22). Associating the serigraph as only a form of mechanical reproduction, it is possible to ascribe the same analytical pitfalls to the process, seeing only its capacity to repeat an original image, rather than create a new one. I reiterate that the function of the machine
to create *Summa Arqueológica: Libertad Condicional* was not to merely reproduce already-created images as a sign of psychoanalytical repetition.

Instead, same series repetition simulates the process of bureaucratic logic as utilized by the state. Reproductive technology—the serigraph, rotoprint, and Xerox, provided a means through which Núñez could not only duplicate the visual symbols of authority but also contest them. The act of reproduction extends beyond the creation of a duplicate. Instead, the machine becomes the mechanism through which Núñez generates the series of his work. As artist Mel Bochner explains, serial art is a “method, not a style” (23), and like all series, the “output” of title is dependent on the “input.”

Data—the fragments of bureaucratic documents, the institutional photographs and found images—become the parameters of the process. They shape the prints, or outcome of the series, creating variations based on the input. Núñez, however, reverses this logic so that he disassembles rather than assembles the documents, compromising rather than affirming their integrity.

Appropriating visual material from bureaucratic documents allows Núñez to emulate their aesthetic power. This strategy of mimesis serves to undermine the power of the state’s authority. The mimetic faculty, as Michael Taussig points out, harnesses the “power to represent the world, yet that same power is a power to falsify, mask and pose” (42-3). By reproducing this material, Núñez demonstrates that the material behind the state’s power can be copied or forged. As Walter Benjamin has declared “[t]he
presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity” (299). In Núñez’s series the “original” – the bureaucratic document or the found image— has been adulterated. Through his serial process, the original has been fragmented, copied, intervened in and/or overwritten; Núñez strips the found images and materials of their everyday significances and subverts their authenticity and authority. His process reveals that when taken out of their original contexts and dismantled, it renders the symbols of bureaucracy unstable. Núñez refers to the bureaucratic elements of the “seal” and “visa” in his work as an “inventory of terror,” but at the same time, states that after he “takes them out of their limbo and organizes their new portrait” they become “icon[s]” that are “always unfinished” and “never definitive” (Retrato hablado 120).

2.5 A classificatory system: Text, Photographs & Fingerprints

Bureaucracy has gone hand-in-hand with sovereignty, surveillance and the “control of legitimate means of movement” throughout the course of modernity (Torpey The Invention of the Passport 1). As Foucault has enumerated and Torpey reminds us, “humble modalities and minor procedures” are central to the state’s ability to “discipline” the populace (Discipline & Punish 170). These legacies of bureaucracy solidified during the dictatorship into the practice of requiring that all Chilean citizens carry identification documents when moving through international and domestic spheres. Reminiscent of the policies enacted in Germany during the period leading up to the holocaust and World War II in the 1930s, it was commonplace for soldiers or other
officials to stop citizens on the streets or while using public transportation to inspect their documents. *Summa Arqueológica: Libertad Condicional* (see fig. 9) re-assembles the components of identity documentation into the serigraphs, drawing attention to the institutional photographs, fingerprints, certificates and signatures, each with a long history of use for the identification and control of populations.

Each aspect of identification procedures views different aspects of the body as data; even these early “biometric technologies regard the body as information” (Lyon 112). In Chile, bureaucratic identification practices originated long before the dictatorship; a law created in 1884 required the registry of vital statistics such as births, marriages, and deaths at the central authority of the Civil Registry Service (“Fechas importantes en la historia de nuestro Servicio”). In much of the world, paper documents (for example, letters authorizing travel) had existed for centuries. Official documentation only had materialized after the First World War when the modern passport emerged and became a routine practice of international travel. At the end of the 1960s, the Chilean *carnet de identidad* had morphed from a document resembling a passport book, with a cover, to a card with only a front and a back. The change to a laminated card from a booklet was not only more cost effective but also easier to inspect and manipulate (Salinas Personal Interview). This change demonstrated that identification practices and contact with the state were no longer reserved for life events, but rather daily practices.
Over the course of the 19th century the registry of life events and biographical data was supplemented by “scientific” methods which strove to make the practice of identifying and proving identity even more precise. The idea of transposing individual characteristics into identifiers initially spread to South America during the second half of the 19th century through the practice of anthropometry. Originally devised by a French police officer named Alphonse Bertillon, anthropometry involved the measurement and categorization of physical characteristics as both a method of identification and a predictor of criminal behaviors. The Bertillonage system arrived to the Southern Cone by way of Argentina through the flow European immigrants and the knowledge they brought with them. Argentina figured at the forefront of innovative policing techniques, and Chile soon adopted the same techniques being utilized in Buenos Aires (Laval 9).

In this sense, identification practices arose out of criminological practices; from their arrival on the continent they were associated with criminality. Marcos León writes, “It was in the prisons where the first archives began to form for the use of the police, the civil guard and judges. In fact, it would be in those spaces of punishment where the first cabinets of identification would begin to incorporate the most sophisticated techniques” (313). The physiognomic and phrenological theory that shaped Bertillonage focused almost exclusively on the “head and the face” (Sekula 12) and converted the body into a system of descriptors and signs. These systems promised a method for “distinguishing the stigmata of vice from the shining marks of virtue” and “for quickly assessing the
character of strangers in the dangerous and congested spaces of the nineteenth-century city” (12).

An integral component of the Bertillonage system, photographic portraits became an indispensable aspect of the criminal justice during this same period. The early use of photography in Chile was tied to the sphere of criminology and policing and was used in order to prove the identity of criminal delinquents and enforce the purge of unwanted individuals from the national body. As Sekula enumerates, from its advent, photography has served as a means to document, inspect, and index criminals and even analyze their characteristics in order to attempt to predict criminal offenses; photographs are at once a “socially ameliorative” and “a repressive instrument” (8). Fingerprints were another form of identification and forensic evidence adopted at the turn of the 20th century when Argentine Juan Vucetich disseminated his fingerprinting system throughout police forces in Latin America. Since then, fingerprinting has remained a perennial method for the identification purposes of not only criminals, but also the larger national population. Featured on passports, identification cards, and sometimes even notarized documents, bureaucracy has adopted fingerprinting as a standardized practice.

The bureaucratic material present in Núñez’s serigraphs makes reference not only to Núñez’s personal experience of being “processed” by the state disciplinary system, but also draws attention to the conventional bureaucratic practices and
procedures that the military regime imposed on all citizens, even those located outside of the prison system. Núñez’s work intercepts our position as external observers of his experience of torture and reflects it back out into the realms of quotidian life and mundane practices. He shows how the same mechanisms of control that operate in the prison exist in smaller doses in everyday life.

Figure 9: Guillermo Núñez, Summa Arqueologica: Libertad Condicional, 1979, Serigraph and Drawing, from Mandala (Concepción: Ediciones del Bio-Bio, 2008; print).
Núñez’s inclusion of his passport in the colophon of Mandala (recall fig. 4 at the beginning of this chapter) demonstrates that during the dictatorship, passports were one way that the military government utilized identification systems to sort and expel political opponents. In the existing passport system, officials added different kinds of notations and markings to flag the identity documentation of individuals deemed a danger to national security. The example of a dictatorship-era passport (see fig. 10) exhibits how officials marked an individual’s passport with a letter “L” for “limitado para circular” (limited circulation) at the end of their identification number to prohibit the entrance back into the country without soliciting further authorization. The formation of the photograph, fingerprint and seal in Núñez’s serigraph above (see fig. 9) resemble the photograph page.
Figure 10: An example of a passport with an “L” amended to the passport number, Digital Image, Biblioteca Digital, Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos, Web, 29 Nov. 2016.

All of these forms of identification present in the bureaucratic archive—anthropometric measurements and descriptions of bodily characteristics, institutional photographs, fingerprints, and biographic information—create the foundation for a surveillance database, as mechanisms of state surveillance rely on systems of identification (Lyon 90). Bureaucracy’s power is harnessed through both the proliferation of information and the ability to access that information—the ability to sort through, recall and organize the information contained within the archive. The
“knowledge of the files” or the “mastery of information” is what makes state surveillance powerful (79).

### 2.6 The Digitization of the Bureaucratic Archive

In order to increase efficiency and coordination, the military regime incorporated digital computing technology for the purposes of information processing and record keeping. The regime was not the first to use computer technology for administrative purposes, but their adoption of digital technology for intelligence and administration was the first successful integration of digital technology as a part of governance. Chile’s entrance into the digital era—the moment when computer technologies reached a tipping point—is directly linked to the dictatorship. The decade that preceded the dictatorship saw the importation of burgeoning computer technologies for the purposes of private enterprise, universities and government. *La Tercera* newspaper reports that Chile’s first digital computer, the IBM 1401, arrived at the University of Chile’s Department of Science and Computation 1961. The computer system took up an entire room, had only four kilobytes of memory and could take up to 12 hours to perform complex calculations. Immediately the Chilean government explored the possibilities of integrating computer technology into its activities, and the Valparaíso Customs Service rented the machine from the university. In 1962, the university upgraded to the country’s first scientific computer. Coincidentally, Professor Juan Alvarez recalls that in 1975 (two years after the coup and the year after the Chilean government formed
Operation Condor) the original 1401 computer being used by customs “was downgraded and no one else saw it again” ("La historia del primer computador que llegó a Chile").

In an assessment of Chile’s computational capabilities for the Allende administration, British cybernetic visionary Stafford Beer sought to utilize computers “to form real-time communication networks to permit rapid flows of information and data exchange and encourage the making of quick, informed decisions” (Medina Cybernetic Revolutionaries 62). The project was intended to reimagine how Chile used computer technology, from its prior usage of mainframes “as giant, expensive calculators” to multifunctional “communication networks” (62). Computer networking had been developed only just recently in the late-1960s in the United States, when researchers at universities in California discovered the potential to use computers not just for calculations, but also for communications. Yet, this capacity was not realistic for Chile at the time of the Allende government as Chile possessed only four mainframe computers, not enough processing power for the system Beer designed (64).

Beer’s vision for the Allende administration was called Project Cybersyn and was meant to aid the Marxist government in making informed decisions regarding labor and production. The goal was to rescue the declining economy and prevent opposing factions from overthrowing Allende. Beer imagined the system to be decision-making tool; a decentralized, “antibureaucratic form of management” (Medina Cybernetic
Revolutionaries 93). Just before the project was set to be announced to the public, news of the computer network leaked, and a British newspaper published an article that started a chain reaction of negative publicity in Chile (173). Feeding into the public’s already rampant fears about the objectives of the Allende Government, Chileans were led to believe that Project Cybersyn would be an all-knowing, “Orwellian” system of control (174). Along with the pressure of the failing economy and the trucking strike that paralyzed domestic distribution, it became clear that the Allende government would be coming to an end. Although components of Project Cybersyn had been up and running at the time of the coup d’état, it was never fully realized and Project Cybersyn died along with Allende (209).

While the objectives of Project Cybersyn were misaligned with those of the Chilean military state, they implemented Operation Condor in 1974 with the goal of facilitating information processing and network communications. After the coup d’état, officials interviewed the Cybersyn team and other computer scientists about the technology Allende had been developing. Medina hypothesizes that either the military did not understand Beer’s “decentralized, adaptive approach to control” or “saw little use in it” (Cybernetic Revolutionaries 211). However, information released after the declassification of key CIA documents shows that the military government was interested in not only using but also implementing computer technology into their operations. Whether or not the Cybersyn project had any influence on their initiatives is
still not known. Unlike Project Cybersyn, Operation Condor entailed a multinational bureaucratic communication network—everything Beer had wanted to avoid. The Chilean secret police force, along with military and foreign partners adopted the latest computer technologies available at the time to process and share information from the bureaucratic archive, to optimize their “mastery of the files.”
Figure 11: Guillermo Núñez, *Summa Arqueológica: Libertad Condicional*, 1979, Serigraph and drawing, from Guillermo Núñez, *Mandala* (Concepción: Ediciones del Bío-Bío, 2008; print).

In one of the prints in *Summa Arqueológica: Libertad Condicional* (see fig. 11), Núñez took his institutional photograph (an image repeated from other serigraphs) and
superimposed a square-shaped image over the head of the portrait. Both images have been converted into a stencil, so the print is so saturated that at first it is difficult to make out the details of the geometric patterns within the square. He printed the square over a piece of string so that after the string was removed, its negative imprint remained, leaving traces of its shapes and textures. It is difficult to discern where the circular shapes of the original image end and the imprint of the string begins, as the shape of the imprint mimics the wires from the image. Upon further inspection, the image that Núñez superimposed over his institutional photograph is a type of electrical panel called a breadboard, an electronic component of early computers. Núñez explained that he found the image in a magazine, a picture of an early computer that took up an entire room (G. Núñez (artist)). Its geometric patterns and protruding shapes of wires and strings resemble a contraption that could be a cage, electrical wires, or a medieval torture device. The serigraph evokes the image of one of Núñez object-metaphors from *printuras y exculturas*, a birdcage without a bottom that Núñez encouraged viewers to pick up and place over their heads (see fig. 12).
Substituting the square of the computer for the face and head of the photograph implies an identification system based on data rather than anthropometrical descriptions. Integrating the image of the computer into the “summa” of the work—incriminate digital technologies in the dirty work of the dictatorship. Though Núñez was not aware of the full extent the military involved computers in their operations, his instinct to implicate these emerging digital technologies in state terrorism was correct. Pulling back the curtain on the Chilean dictatorship’s surveillance apparatus and its bureaucratic counterpart reveals far more than a musty file-based archive of papers, fingerprints and photographs. On the contrary, Núñez’s instinct to examine the Chilean
bureaucratic system detected the monumental shift that had been occurring regarding how the government collected, processed and utilized bureaucratic information. Even before the dictatorship, the state bureaucratic archives provided a scaffolding to support the Condor apparatus. The creation of the Rol Único Nacional (RUN) system in 1973 (which had occurred under the Allende administration) converted each individual Chilean citizen and resident into a number, transforming the population into a numerical series. The RUN was standardized across government entities as prior to the nationalized system each bureaucratic document had used its own numbering systems according issuing agency. The RUN allowed the government to distinguish between individuals and assigned identification numbers uniformly across all levels of government.

Turning individual identities into a series of numbers not only helped to differentiate identity across government platforms but also enabled that centralized databases interface identification numbers with an individual’s biographical information. The Chilean Civil Registry and Identification Service claims that this information was officially transferred to computer systems in 1984. However, the Chilean intelligence may have digitized the bureaucratic archives for their own use a decade prior. An investigation by J. Patrice McSherry revealed that the secret police force DINA, had participated in a transnational coordination of intelligence sharing between Chile Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and Bolivia as early as 1974 (78).
the exact date is not known, McSherry asserts that the United States’ Central Intelligence Agency exported cutting-edge modern computer technology to Latin America, which were capable of functions and processes that the existing computers in the region were not (9). The intelligence archive that McSherry describes was based on the bureaucratic data that the state already had on its citizens, but expanded to include a “database of thousands of individuals considered politically suspect” (9). Computerized files of biographical information complemented physical archives of “photos, microfilms, surveillance reports, psychological profiles, reports of membership in organizations, personal and political histories, and lists of friends and family members” (9).

The new digital technologies allowed the military government to process, access and share the information contained in its bureaucratic archives, in addition to information compiled by surveillance activities, with unprecedented power and efficiency. Chile’s first successful entrance into the digital era was linked not to the public spread of knowledge and freedom of information, but instead to programs of domination in service of the imposition of neoliberal totalitarianism. Thereafter, the military government approved Law 1130 in July of 1974, which lowered tariffs for approximately 150 imported goods—including computers—to a mere 10 percent of their purchase price” (Medina “Big Blue in the Bottomless Pit” 35). The new computers ordered by both government and businesses arrived in 1975 (35) and the number of computers in Chile after this point grew exponentially.
Despite the idea that the involvement of computers in human rights violations in Latin America was revealed after the dictatorship had been dismantled, Laurie Nadel and Hesh Wiener published an article in Computer Decisions in 1977 regarding the use of computer technologies in clandestine DINA operations in Chile. The article contains detailed information including names of parties, possible government entities and multinational businesses involved in the implementation of computing technology as a part of the DINA surveillance mechanism. Eyewitnesses described that when individuals were detained by police, they were required to “surrender their identification cards” (Nadel and Wiener 25) and the cards were cross-checked against lists of suspected subversives. Then “suspects [were] separated from the detainees and ID cards [were] soon returned to those freed” (25). Nadel and Wiener infer, “The rapid checking of names against police files requires an online computer facility. Other stories from individuals detained by police corroborate the rapid checking of dossiers” (25). The adoption of digital technology boosted the power of bureaucratic practices, putting information at the fingertips of authorities.

Traces of computer technology in clandestine operations have surfaced from other sources, as well. Amongst the 4-5 tons of dictatorship-era documents unearthed in 1992 in Paraguay from the “Archives of Terror” were fingerprints, mug shots, and surveillance reports. The mounds of documents produced some of the most telling evidence of the military regimes’ utilization of digital technology in their surveillance
activities. Included in these files was official correspondence between the head of the DINA Coronel Manuel Contreras and the Paraguayan Head of Police, in which Contreras extended an invitation to attend a working meeting in Santiago in 1975. The invitation explained that the meeting would include the respective heads of national intelligence from several countries in the Southern Cone and held from November 25th to December 1st. Contreras attached an outline of the content that would be covered in the meeting and a description of Condor’s mission:

In order to confront this psycho-political war, we have decided that we need to count on the International world, not with a centralized command in internal action, but instead with an efficient coordination that permits the opportune interchange of information and experiences, as well as with a certain degree of personal acquaintance between the leaders responsible for security. (National Security Archive)

The document explained that three main components of the “proposed security and coordination system” included a database, information center and ongoing working meetings between the participants with the objective of processing and sharing information. They described the database as a “centralized archive of information on people, organizations, or activities connected directly or indirectly with subversives” (National Security Archive). Diagrams (see fig. 13) illustrated the structure of the intelligence apparatus and laid out the flow of information and the responsibilities of each branch.
These glimpses into the archives of Operation Condor reveal how bureaucratic logic ordered both their transnational operations and prison systems. Returning to Núñez’s image of the digital cage, computers not only facilitated government activities, but also formed a tool of repression akin to imprisonment and torture. Digital technology optimized the efficiency and functions bureaucratic networks; Weber observed that bureaucracy develops best the more that it is perfectly "dehumanized" (975) and digital technology achieved the ultimate level of dehumanization.

Handelman asserts that the central mechanism behind state bureaucracy is "lineal classification," which enables the application of bureaucratic logic. Classification is the way that the state creates, reproduces, legitimates, changes, and sanctifies itself
Through everyday practice” (Nationalism and the Israeli State 7). Linear classification is the mathematical logic behind the “classificatory drive” that Foucault identifies at the heart of modern rationality (The Order of Things xix). In broad strokes, linear classification serves to classify “items that have similar feature values, into groups” (Niu 174). With the power of machine technology to process sets of information, a linear classifier automates the process, allowing for a system that is completely rational, devoid of human emotion and influence. What is more, linear classification not only processes the data, it makes a “decision based on the value of the linear combination of the features” (174) and decides where a particular set of data belongs within the bigger picture. Computers enable the performance of intricate statistical calculations where characteristics such as political affiliation, biographical data and location are converted to numbers and these numbers can predict whether or not a certain individual can be placed within certain demographic groups. Linear classification is both a tool of classification and visualization with the capability of mapping an individual’s location within a larger set of data. In Núñez’s serial process he produces a series of variations that are similar yet unique. This emulates the bureaucratic logic that determines where individuals fit within the larger whole. His series illustrates the mechanism behind the classificatory drive, exposing the trifecta of bureaucratic logic that supports the operations of state repression: identification practices, information processing and the
sharing of data across networks. The integration of machines into government functions provides a way classify and discriminate.

Núñez’s serial practice exhibits at once the duality of traumatic repetition and an accusation of how the state orders its citizens and shapes the body of the nation. It shows how bureaucratic functions convert citizens into serial numbers in an attempt to determine who belongs to the nation and who does not; as well as which individuals should remain and which should be removed from society, either through expulsion or execution. Susan Buck-Morss discusses that in the 20th century the “surface pattern as an abstract representation of reason, coherence and order, became the dominant form of depicting the social body that technology had created” (407). Nicholas Mirzoeff calls this process of visualization and domination “visuality” (2). Modern manifestations of visuality create a “doctrine for the preservation of authority by means of permanent surveillance of all realms of life” (34). Nonetheless, Mirzoeff also offers a counterpoint to visuality, which he deems “the right to look.” This concept—the right to look—refuses visuality the sole privilege of seeing. Mirzoeff explains, “The right to look claims autonomy, not individualism or voyeurism, but the claim to a political subjectivity and collectivity” (1). Núñez’s serigraphs claim this right to look, and encourage other artists and activists to do the same.
2.7 Conclusion

When suspected “subversives” were forcibly detained, held in secret prisons and never seen again, a group of their family members began to gather and circulate through the streets, clutching black and white photographs of their missing loved ones. They demanded that the government acknowledge their existence and answer their repeated questions, ”¿Dónde están?” (Where are they?). For the family members of the disappeared, the photographs were valuable to them not just as memorials, but as evidence that their loved ones once existed.


The photographs came from their identity cards or from family photographs that were cropped to standard dimensions to resemble institutionalized photos. These
images of the disappeared were taken by the very same state that disappeared the victims (Giunta 330). Makeshift memorials cropped up in different sites in the city where people left collections of these photographs in public places (Gómez-Barris 9) and the number of photographs multiplied over time. Because of the quality of reproduction when blown up and printed onto posters (see fig. 14) the images took on a stylized, graphic appearance. In the years since the end of the dictatorship, the institutional photographs of the victims have remained as charged cultural symbols of state violence, a reminder that persists through recent history. As Chile transitioned to democracy and convened truth and reconciliation commissions, survivors, family members and politicians called for justice and meaningful acts of remembrance. The photographs of the disappeared that once accumulated in marginalized spaces have moved from sites of protest and informal memorials into museums and onto the walls of institutions.

The images associated with the disappeared have become emblems of remembrance, or what Gómez-Barris calls “cultural mnemonics” (6). Nevertheless, any kind of emblematic representation carries the risk of being considered reductive. Taylor and Richard suggest that the images of the disappeared have transcended the realm of the familiar to that of the iconic. Taylor questions if the metonymic substitution for the victims with the trope of disappeared somehow eclipses the true materiality of the thousands of bodies and the horror of their experiences (Disappearing Acts 142). Richard suggests that when the iconic visual representation of the disappeared is appropriated
into other contexts it passes from a place of veneration to commercialization (*Políticas y estéticas de la memoria* 170). She argues that translating the photographs of the disappeared to graphic icons in other works of art they become subordinated to and “accomplices” of the neoliberal social engineering that the dictatorship implemented:

> The photographic portraits of the victims appear in the same plane of technical equivalence together with the other icons of present Chile, being as such all the images of work “translated” to the same standard language of computational graphics. These computational graphics function, for us, like a language executively complicit with the economic and publicized modernity of neoliberal Chile. ("Imagen-recuerdo y borraduras" 170)

In 2010, conceptual artist Alfredo Jaar used photographs of the disappeared as inspiration for *Geometry of Conscience* (2010), a permanent installation at the Museum of Memory and Human Rights. Housed in a subterranean space outside the main museum building in the middle of an outdoor patio, the entrance to the installation resembles a crypt. Visitors descend the stairs into a small waiting area and a guide encloses them inside the darkened room to wait for the installation to begin. After 3 minutes, a wall covered from ceiling to floor with 500 silhouettes lights up, illuminating the previously pitch-black space. Then, without notice, the lights shut off abruptly, and the viewer is left with the retinal afterimages left by the contrast of darkness and bright light. Once again, the light behind the silhouettes returns and once again with the wall of silhouettes confronts the viewers.

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5 This analysis is from a critique of the appropriation of the images of the disappeared in the work of Carlos Altamirano. Throughout her criticism, Richard has disapproved of art she views as too literal or direct in its representations or accusations against the state.
To create the silhouettes, Jaar intermixed photographs of both the disappeared and present-day Chilean citizens. Adriana Valdés observes that this strategy avoids the marginalization of the victims, presenting the dictatorship as a “loss suffered by all—by both the dead and the living—as a result of the crimes committed” (Valdés). Although they are all composed the same way—a figure cut out of a black background—each silhouette is unique, created from a real photograph. Although the installation is meant as a sensorial experience to contemplate the memory of the victims, the computer in Núñez’s series has influenced my interpretation of Jaar’s work. The light projected through the silhouettes is reflected by mirrors on both sides of the wall creating the
illusion that the rows go on to infinity. Each silhouette is arranged side by side, stacked one upon the other, so that they are ordered into a grid.

*Geometry of Conscience* fleshes out the spaces between two aspects of history at odds in the Museum of Memory and Human Rights and within any institutional reckoning that occurs with mass murders. One side is the personal histories of family members and the pain that they experienced, the material effects that remain of the victims, the psychic scars left on the survivors of imprisonment and torture that have no possible quantitative expression. The other is the cold, bureaucratic calculations that occur with reckoning: the statistical accounts of the numbers of victims, which analyze the personal testimonies of family members and victims themselves and distill them down to figures, categories, and exact amounts of reparations. One of the goals of the Truth and Reconciliation commissions after the dictatorship was to definitively determine whether or not those who testified were actually victims and the amounts of money the government owed them on this basis. Jaar’s installation enacts a visualization of loss, yet one that uses the mechanisms of the bureaucratic, classificatory gaze against itself, in a way that is unquantifiable, as infinity is a number that cannot be counted. With the contrast between the black background and the light emanating from the silhouettes, the installation almost resembles a sequence of binary code, except the variations of the silhouettes refuse to ascribe to binaries. We do not know if they are men or women, victims or perpetrators, residents or exiles, or if they are dead or alive. I see
in Jaar’s work a continuation of Núñez’s series, an artistic practice that appropriates the bureaucracy of the state and recalibrates its settings so that it implicates the true architects of state crime. At the same time, it illuminates the commonality of loss that exists for the entire population, regardless of their experience.

Mobilizing the idea of the “right to look” that is excavated by Núñez’s *Summa Arquelógica: Libertad Condicional* changes the dynamics of who is seeing whom. Núñez’s artistic practice replicates the aesthetics and logic of bureaucracy, informing our understanding of Jaar’s repeated silhouette. The stylized figures that are organized into geometric patterns illustrate not just the continual tally of victims of the dictatorship, but also the dangers of the state’s classificatory drive that is unmasked in Núñez’s work. It reiterates the significance of the institutional portrait, signaling it not as a reinforcement of suffering and repeated victimization, but rather an accusation. It provides a forum through which the families and survivors of state violence can launch charges against the state in the face of the reality that the state still withholds legal immunity for the perpetrators. Furthermore it denounces the ongoing practices of state surveillance that continue to convert national subjects into data, to be visualized and organized into databases of information.

In contemporary Chile as well as the rest of the world, the boundaries between statist use of bureaucratic data and surveillance have eroded and blended together with financial services. The national and international corporations that comprise these
“shadow bureaucracies” (Garavaglia 37) compile bureaucratic and financial data into intricate databases that profile individuals not just as citizens, but consumers. In Chile, the RUN serial number continues to serve as the central anchor from which bureaucratic and surveillance practices emanate. Identification cards and passports now contain microchips; The RUN number associated with bureaucratic identity documents is required for not just banking and credit card purchases, but also the payment of utilities, mobile cell phones, and providers of internet. What is more, with the implementation of Transantiago, the nationalized public transportation system, as of 2007, all users are required to use an electronic card with a Mifare chip called “Tarjeta Bip!” When associated with a credit card it generates identifying statistics regarding traffic patterns and peak transportation usage, it can also determine the financial profile of its users. In all major supermarkets and department stores, cashiers ask that customers provide their RUNs to keep track of points for the businesses “loyalty clubs.” Yet, this information also allows businesses to know exactly who buys what.

When the dictatorship came to an end and the military retreated from its active role in governance, enterprise replaced the military in the fusion between bureaucracy and the state. The augmentation of the classificatory drive marks this partnership where bureaucratic practices and digital technologies have only proliferated. Bureaucracy, paired with the ever-expanding power of technology, appears to be more powerful, and at times invisible, than ever. Yet, Núñez’s artwork encourages its viewers to resist the
stupefaction of the “technological sublime.” It shows that systems of bureaucracy and surveillance draw their power from their own constructions as uncontrollable—unregulated—supreme powers of authority. It makes the aesthetics of bureaucracy visible in order to expose both how they operate and undermine their power.

Furthermore, the story of Núñez’s exile and the difficulty of fitting his artwork into critical conversations of academe, reminds us that bureaucratic logic is not limited to the government and exists in any attempt to categorize, classify or fit individuals into a larger whole. By reintegrating Núñez into the history of Chilean art during this period we gain a testimonial articulation of the experience of imprisonment and exile that both exposes and erodes the mechanisms of its power.

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3. “Lo “anti-literario”: Mediatized Performance and Legal Discourse in Diamela Eltit’s *Puño y letra*

**3.1 Introduction**

In Spanish, the concept of writing something out by hand, or “handwriting,” can be expressed in the words “de puño y letra,” translated literally to “by fist and letter.” Yet, its connotation in Spanish differs from handwriting, which can also be translated to “escritura a mano” (writing by hand) or simply “escritura” (writing). “De puño y letra” is most closely translated as “in one’s own writing,” putting emphasis on the personal agency performed in the act of writing something oneself. “De puño y letra” possesses the connotation of an act of legal significance. For example, a “testamento ológrafo”\(^1\) is a legal testament that—when written out by hand, and is dated and signed by the “testator,”—carries legal weight as a testament (Renjifo 364). Diamela Eltit used these words, “puño y letra” for the title of her book, *Puño y letra: juicio oral* (Handwriting: Oral Trial, 2005), which portrays the prosecution of Enrique Arancibia Clavel for his involvement in the 1974 assassination of the former General Carlos Prats González and his wife Sofía Cuthbert Chiarleoni. Arancibia committed the crime as a part of a coordinated effort on behalf of the Chilean National Directorate of Intelligence\(^2\) (DINA)

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\(^1\) “Holographic will” in English.

\(^2\) The National Directorate of Intelligence was the secret police force that operated in both Chile and abroad from 1973 to 1977.
in Argentina. Eltit attended the trial in its entirety, along with journalists and television news crews. When the trial came to an end, she walked away feeling perturbed, despite the outcome that the judges had sentenced Arancibia to the maximum sentence of “perpetual reclusion” (Eltit 34). Eltit states that the experience left her with a lasting sensation of “malice” (34). In an effort to sort through the “sum of problems” (13) that the trial brought up, Eltit “exhaustively” read and re-read the legal documents, transcripts and evidence pertaining to the case (15). She also repeatedly listened to audio recordings of the proceedings and witness testimony. Based on this close examination of the trial, Eltit put together Puño y letra and published the text in 2005. I use the words “put together” to describe its creation because the text is a compilation of real-life documents related to the Prats case.

It is tempting to presume that the title Puño y letra refers to the process of putting Eltit’s experience as observer “into her own words.” But the error in that interpretation is that, other than the brief narrative that frames the text, the majority of the words in the book come from legal documents and court transcripts. They are not Eltit’s words; she presents them to the reader unedited with no interventions and sparse commentary. It is difficult to encounter a term that adequately describes Puño y letra’s genre. Part testimony, part a collage of documents, the text is a non-fictional account that weaves together the trial documents without explicitly digesting or summarizing them for the reader. By including both documents and transcripts, Eltit sets up the tension between
the two aspects of the trial, depicting it as, on one hand an archive, a generator and repository of bureaucratic documents; and, on the other hand a repertoire, a live event that is performed in real time. Unlike other nonfictional accounts of procedural justice that analyze court material in order to uncover compelling evidence of guilt or seek to establish the “truth” behind a case, in Puño y letra Eltit’s attention shifts away from an exhaustive examination Arancibia’s guilt or a discussion of the evidence. Rather, as Michael Lazzara writes, the book leaves us, with a picture of that which “remains once the gavel has come down” ("Justice and Its Remainders: Diamela Eltit's Puño y letra" 91).

Taking a trial and distilling it down to the bare text exposes the inconsistencies and tensions it contains; Puño y letra unearths uncertainties, rather than answers.

Evoking the image of the physical act of writing a manuscript, the title Puño y letra creates the image of a hand in the act of writing, curled into a fist. The raised fist, at least in contemporary Western culture, is a symbol of solidarity and resistance with contemporary ties to symbols of communist ideology (Cushing). Yet, the image of a fist clenching in anger, or striking downward, inverts that symbol, and can be interpreted as a gesture of violence or a display of might. Both “puño” (fist) and “letra” (letter) can represent different, but related sources of state power embodied by two faces of the Chilean dictatorship: military and bureaucracy. In the 1970s, the military government was considered a real-world example of modern “bureaucratic authoritarianism” (O’Donnell 2); a marriage between bureaucracy and the military state.
The images of “puño y letra,”—visual material representing both the military and the state—are present in the graphic used for the official DINA logo. Displayed on all written documents and correspondence produced by this clandestine branch of the Chilean police force, the logo featured the image of a fist striking downward, surrounded by the title of the organization (see fig.16). This logo reminds us that bureaucracy is reflected not just in procedures and organizations; its traces appear in visual registers in elements of design.

![Figure 16: Official seal of the National Intelligence Directorate of Chile. Digital Image, Wikipedia, 16 Feb. 2013, Web 29 Nov. 2016.](image)

In this chapter, first I will explore the two sides of authoritarian power that Eltit puts on display in Puño y letra: the military and the bureaucratic, the “letter and fist” of the law. As Puño y letra depicts, during the dictatorship the boundaries between the military and the government disappeared, and the two spheres fused together. Toward
the end of the book, Eltit makes clear this connection between the military and bureaucracy. Regarding the officials instated after the military assumed power of the government, she writes, “Those officials, supported by the high functionaries appointed to the system, came to take charge of the civil spaces, applying there the only thing they knew: the management of military power” (Eltit 186). The control of the military dictatorship was pervasive; no branch of the government could avoid its influence. Yet, it is important to note that this process was not one-sided, but instead, reciprocal. As bureaucracy became influenced by the military, the military also increasingly used bureaucratic methods of control. Even though the military government eventually ceded power and Chile is now considered to be a democracy, the effects of the exchange between the armed forces and bureaucratic officials still can be detected in state institutions today.

_*Puño y letra*_ demonstrates that lasting ties persist between the military government and post-dictatorial institutions, still influencing current practices in the legal system. They even continue in spite of the legal reforms instated after the dictatorship in an effort to establish a lasting democracy. By examining the bureaucratic documents and procedures utilized in Chile’s modern judiciary, Eltit exposes the enduring relationship between the military government and the legal system. In her creation of _Puño y letra_, Eltit utilized the practice of performance to engage with the material that the trial generated and process the experience of the trial as a live event.
Through an embodied practice where Eltit senses rather than describes the effects of bureaucratic discourse on the body she exposes how bureaucracy functions not only as an instrument of state terror, but also an opaque discursive atmosphere that serves to reinforce the symbol of state power, rather than seek justice. *Puño y letra* shows how bureaucratic aesthetics are present in the court of law, manifesting both on paper and in the event of the trial itself through legal discourse and court procedures. Yet, they also occur in the spectacular, theatrical elements of the crime. Linking the role that bureaucracy played in the state crime, as well as its presence in the discursive atmosphere of the trial, Eltit uses the lens of performance to present how the legal system protects rather than dismantles the legacies of the military dictatorship.

### 3.2 *Puño y letra*: An “Anti-Literary” Text

*Puño y letra*, as a text, can be described as a disjointed compilation of authentic bureaucratic documents, legal transcripts, and Eltit’s sparse interjections of narrative. The book resembles an appendix, a collection of primary source material that is attached to the main text; yet, in the case of *Puño y letra* this material comprises the main text. Separated into two main sections, the first, “Presentation,” is the longest and contains a narrative about how and why Eltit created *Puño y letra* and her reactions to the trial. Following her narrative, she presents the documents related to the case. In the second section called “Transversal-mente,” Eltit integrates her subjective account of the political and cultural climate of 1974, the year when the Prats assassination occurred. Unlike a
non-fictional account, the text does not include a table of contents or index through which to orient the reader, instead, the text submerges the reader in its non-existent plot, in the same way a reader engages in a sequential reading of fiction.

In “Presentation,” the section that follows her initial narrative, Eltit explains the difficulties she faced in assembling the book. She presents—as her own kind of textual evidence—a copy of a letter written to Prats from Pinochet merely 4 days before the coup d’état. In the letter, Pinochet thanks General Prats for his guidance and extends his appreciation and friendship. This document begins the novel with a sense of irony, since the rest of the book demonstrates the insincerity of Pinochet’s words and exposes his lies. The section contains two more documents; the first is “Poder Judicial de la Nación” (see fig. 17) an unaltered legal document that records the names, identification numbers and professions of the parties involved in the trial, as well as the charges brought against Arancibia. In this section, Eltit preserves the bureaucratic language of the documents, complete with redundant numerical references to fojas and other legal documents. The references serve solely an aesthetic function, because the documents to which they refer are not included in the book, and thus, the references are meaningless. By integrating the documents directly into the text of her book—as there are no graphic elements such as textboxes or sidebars that set them apart from her narrative—the documents are presented in the same format as her narrative. The effect of this technique is jarring, as the novel abruptly switches from Eltit’s narrative to bureaucratic language from one
section to another. The objective behind including this “dry” and “anti-literary” language, was in order to “recover […] the discursive atmosphere of a trial” (16).

Figure 17: Reproduction of pages 18 and 19 from *Puño y letra* (Santiago, Editorial Planeta, S.A, 2005; print, 18-9).

Inserting documents in the work, Eltit signals that the trial generates transcripts and registers as much as it presents letters and other printed evidence. Eltit uses these raw documents to show the kinds of discourse that the trial produces through performances of oral testimony and court procedures. The legal documents that Eltit includes function not as material evidence to prove or disprove Arancibia’s guilt, but
instead integrate their aesthetics into the text. In other words, Eltit does not analyze the material from bureaucratic documents that she inserts into her novel; she inhabits their aesthetic and discursive style. Eltit uses embodied practice to inform her writing, devising a literary strategy allows readers to “transverse” the text. She cuts through the through words within the bureaucratic discourse to communicate everything about a trial that is lost in the written records—the implicit, subjective response viewers have about an oral trial. As a part of her process, which I will argue in this chapter derives from her practices as a performance artist, Eltit replicates the effects that the “aesthetics of bureaucracy” that operate in the space of the court.

3.3 The Aesthetics of Bureaucracy

The performative practice that Eltit employs in Puño y letra exposes a judicial system still enmeshed in the bureaucratic legacies of the dictatorship, one that falls short in the pursuit of justice. When Eltit attended the trial of Arancibia for his role in the assassination of the Prats, it was the experience of being there in the trial’s atmosphere—rather than the crime itself—that inspired her to write the text. While most accounts of the trial focus on the names, dates, places and information that the trial exposed to the public, Eltit uncovers the inconsistencies, tensions and absences that she felt undermined the effectiveness of the trial. The act of not only attending, but experiencing the event of the trial allowed Eltit to both act as witness, and use her body to process the aspects of the trial that may not otherwise have been detected through the lens of news.
reports and fact-based narratives. Eltit begins her book with a reminder of her own physical presence in the audience of the proceedings. She writes, “I could not subtract myself from an inexcusable fact; I had been there. I had passed my body through the oral hearing” (15). Being present— or what performance studies refer to as “embodied praxis” —became an important facet of the writings and art that Eltit had created during the period of the dictatorship in Chile.

Prior to Puño y letra, Eltit utilized embodied practice in other artistic interventions in both her collaborative and individual works. Eltit was known for her participation as a member of the interdisciplinary artistic group Colectivo Acciones de Arte (CADA). The collective was active in the experimental art scene known as the escena de la avanzada during the dictatorship. As a member of CADA, Eltit participated in urban interventions and public performances that voiced opposition to the repressive climate imposed by the military government, as well as the neoliberal economic policies that it had instated. Because of the stakes involved in criticizing the dictatorship, the group utilized obscure language and experimental artistic strategies to hide their messages from military officials.

Using these same methods of artistic inquiry in her individual projects, Eltit’s work often blurred the lines between performance art and literature. In 1980, she performed a three-part performance called Zona de dolor (Zone of Pain), where she self-inflicted cuts and burns onto her arms and legs, washed an area of a sidewalk outside of
a brothel in Santiago, and then went inside to read selections from the manuscript of her novel *Lumpérica* in front of a small audience. In this performance, Eltit utilized her body to channel the collective trauma of the nation, and represented the effects of the atmosphere of the dictatorship through performative gestures. Kristine Stiles has defined this art as more than just body art—“destruction art”—art “about open wounds—those caused by the institutions and practices that develop and deploy weapons of destruction, that engineer the reproductive technologies of gender and class domination…” (*Survival Ethos and Destruction Art* "31). In the case of *Zone of Pain*, the wounds are literal. Stiles elucidates:

> The body in destruction art bears such a witness and thereby offers a paradigm for a ‘resisting body,’ that private, complex, signifying system of the self, a person who acts on behalf of both the individual and the social body” (Stiles "Survival Ethos and Destruction Art ”41)

Eltit’s physical wounds are symbols of the trauma experienced in the external world mediated through the body. Cleansing the sidewalk in a public, but marginalized, space of the city acted out the process of healing, demonstrating the extension of Eltit’s body into the public sphere. As Stiles emphasizes, destruction art “bears witness” through the body (emphasis mine) and embodied practice becomes the filter through which Eltit mediates the external world.

Eltit explains that from the year of the assassinations, going forward, she sensed the effects of the dictatorship through the body. Even if not all of the effects produced physical scars, they created psychic ones. She writes: “My chronic body, from that year
forward, could no longer be cured. I carry the scar that hides the moral wound that tore through my soul irreversibly” (Eltit 189). Muscle memory, ritualized movements or gestures, scars, marks or wounds are all ways of remembering through both the physical and psychological. The mind can forget (either consciously or unconsciously) but the body stores memories; they become embedded. As Elaine Scarry puts it, “What is ‘remembered’ in the body is well-remembered” (109). Eltit frames Puño y letra as a corporal experience of witnessing, using her personal experience of trauma to engage a larger cultural experience, rather than a solely individual one. An embodied, performative practice connects not only the artist—Eltit—to the trial but also the viewer, or in the case of Puño y letra the reader. As Stiles enumerates, performance art “reengage[s] the artist and spectator by reconnecting art to the material circumstances of social and political events” (“Performance Art” 679).

Puño y letra erodes the borders between the individual and the collective as well as the body and text. Eltit mediates the external atmosphere of the trial through the body. Eltit’s body becomes a register that mirrors the function of a text, serving as a place to process the experience of attending the trial, and distill the experience into narrative. Puño y letra disarticulates two of the mechanisms of power at play in the trial process: the written bureaucratic record the and as a ritualized performed event. Approaching the trial through the lens of performance reveals that bureaucracy is not limited to the realm of the archive. Although documents and files comprise the
cornerstones of rational-legal bureaucracy (Weber 957), Eltit’s performative practice expands our reading of the trial. It shows that bureaucracy does not just exist in paper form; it also organizes physical (and more recently digital) spaces, and can influence the sequence and format of everyday public events outside of the theater. Diana Taylor has asserted that the boundary between the written and oral is not as defined as it seems, and this false dichotomy is contested in performance studies. Her work on the “archive” and the “repertoire” describes how whether verbal or non-verbal the repertoire “transmits live, embodied actions. As such traditions are stored in the body, through various mnemonic methods, and transmitted ‘live’ in the here and now to a live audience” (The Archive and The Repetoire 26).

Eltit uses the word “juridical stage” many times throughout her description of the trial, conflating the concept of a theatrical stage with that of the court. Eltit’s textual performance reveals that in the courtroom, the aesthetics of bureaucracy are performed through both the order and format of trial procedures and the discourse that is enunciated. When performed inside a courtroom, legal trials rely on a highly controlled atmosphere where the participants are organized through space according to their roles. The order of a trial is predetermined and the judges preside over a rigid sequence of events. Although each trial varies, it is carried out in a ritualistic format. Handelman calls these kinds of events “events of presentation” which he considers to be “icons of social order open to public inspection” (Nationalism and the Israeli State 103). Bureaucratic
order assumes a live form such as a parade, a nationalistic event, or a memorial service. These events take place in front of the public and project the ideals of symmetry and synchronization. In addition, we can analyze performance and theatricality in events and situations outside of the sphere of the theater, events that bleed into daily actions. Looking at these events through the lens of performance shows how “many practices and events—dance, theatre, ritual, political rallies, funerals—that involve theatrical, rehearsed or conventional/event-appropriate behaviors” (D. Taylor The Archive and The Repertoire 3). Bureaucracy as an aesthetic practice can manifest beyond the sphere of offices, files and organizations, and can infiltrates daily life through the experience of being in a space that is ordered by bureaucratic logic. Handelman describes bureaucratic logic as a force, the “fitting together of people, things, [and] worlds through practice” (75) that can exist in across space and time.

Taylor explains that the performance artist functions as the intermediary to the archival experience of facts and knowledge and translates it into embodied practice: “The intermediary looks to her body as the receptor, storehouse, and transmitter of knowledge that comes from the archive [...] and the repertoire” (81-2). In her creation of Puño y letra, Eltit used her physical, embodied experience of attending the trial to shape the text. Using Puño y letra as a lens, Eltit reframes our reading of the trial to expose not only the ways that the aesthetic of bureaucracy operate in the trial, but also as a mode of repression during the dictatorship and in the execution of the crime itself.
3.4 The Crime: Documents and Dynamite

Performance is not limited to the world of performance art. One of the most powerful tactics during the dictatorship was to embody state terror, enacting torture, detentions, and disappearances on the space of the body. As Taylor cautions, “The modes of storing and transmitting knowledge are many and mixed and embodied performances have often contributed to the maintenance of a repressive social order” (22). Seeing not only the trial, but also the crime through the filter of Puño y letra unmasks the ways the aesthetics of bureaucracy both enabled the assassination of the Prats and enforce state sovereignty with the spectacle of lethal violence. At the time of his assassination, Carlos Prats and his wife had been living in exile in Argentina, under the protection of Argentine President Juan Domingo Perón. Prats was one of the key military figures still loyal to Allende at the time of the coup d’état in Chile. The military junta, headed by Pinochet, feared that Prats could have organized a formidable opposition to the military regime from across the Andes. Even though the Prats had been warned that their lives were in danger, they were not able to flee from Argentina because they no longer possessed valid Chilean passports. The diplomatic passport that Prats had used to enter Argentina (see fig.18) was no longer valid after his resignation. Prior to the assassination, the Prats had been trying, repeatedly, to procure new passports through the Chilean consulate in Buenos Aires. For a reason unknown before the time of their deaths, the passports were never issued. On the same day that four
pounds of dynamite detonated from beneath their vehicle and instantly killed General Prats and his wife, the Chilean government issued a chillingly impersonal response to their requests, which stated, “Inconvenient to grant passports to the indicated persons” (Dinges 71).

Figure 18: General Carlos Prats Gonzalez’s diplomatic passport, Digital image, Biblioteca Digital, Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos, Web, 29 Oct. 2016.

Arancibia, one of the agents who assisted behind the scenes of the assassination, possessed two specialties that made him an attractive candidate for the Chilean secret police force: expertise in dynamite and documents. Nicknamed the “dynamiter,” he was the person whom authorities suspected to have devised the explosive device that
another agent, U.S. citizen Michael Townley, had placed and detonated underneath the Prats’ vehicle. In addition to explosives, Arancibia’s role in the Chilean secret police, based in Buenos Aires, was to attain and fabricate fraudulent government identification to facilitate the travel of fellow undercover operatives. It was these documents rather than the dynamite that implicated him in the assassination of the Prats. The initial reason that investigators learned of Arancibia’s involvement in the crime was because of files that they had confiscated from his apartment when the Argentinean police force had arrested him under suspicion of espionage in 1978. During their search, the police also had made several key discoveries that tied Arancibia to not only the assassination but also the disappearances of Chileans who had been living in Argentina, as well as numerous high profile operations. First, they discovered the identification cards of five Chilean citizens who had fled to Argentina and had never been seen or heard from again. Second, Arancibia possessed several letters that made references to blank identity cards that had been passed back and forth between Arancibia and a man named “Andres Wilson” (the pseudonym for Townley) for falsification (Carrió 40-1). Third, they encountered reports and correspondence pertaining to high profile operations like

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3 Although Chile and Argentina had cooperated with one another as a part of the Operation Condor Network in the detainment and elimination of political opponents beginning in 1975, tensions between the two countries had been mounting in 1978 over during the Beagle Channel Conflict.
Operation Colombo—a massive international press cover-up for the disappearances of 119 Chilean political opponents—that had been exchanged between Arancibia and the DINA. The files also contained correspondence with ongoing tallies of how many people had been detained and “eliminated.”

Despite the chilling evidence they found in his apartment, Arancibia was held prisoner in an Argentinean jail, but never faced formal charges for his activities. Because of the tensions between Chile and Argentina at the time, he still remained prisoner, and was finally used as a bargaining chip in 1981 when Arancibia was traded as a part of an exchange for Argentinean prisoners who being held in Chile (Eltit 31-2). Despite the groundbreaking revelations contained within the seized materials, an Argentinean judge quietly took charge of the documents and buried them in storage in his office. They remained there, all but forgotten for decades, until investigative journalist Mónica González received a tip from an anonymous legal clerk and got access to them in 1989 (Dinges 232-3).

Once the case files were uncovered and Chile had begun the transition back to democracy, authorities in the now-democratic Chilean government were able to use the

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4 Operation Colombo was an intricate, international cover up for the deaths of 119 political opponents. The Chilean DINA got foreign newspapers in Argentina and Brazil to publish false news stories reporting that Chilean militants had killed each other in internal conflicts and their bodies had been found abroad.

5 The repressive tactics that the government used included forced kidnappings, extrajudicial imprisonments, torture, and executions; were all violations of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations. The military argued that these sacrifices were necessary in order to reverse socialist reforms that had been implemented by the Unidad Popular and to eliminate all influences of Marxist ideology.
files to charge Arancibia for his role in the Prats assassination. The case against Arancibia was unique because even though all former government officials had been granted immunity for the crimes committed by the state during the years of the dictatorship, the crucial difference between this case and others was that the crime had occurred in Argentina. The international nature of the operation created a legal loophole. While it was not possible to charge Arancibia within the Chilean legal system, it was possible to prosecute the under the jurisdiction of the Argentinean courts. As such, Arancibia was arrested in 1996 and charged with double aggravated homicide and illicit association.6 In his book about the case Los Crímenes del Condor (The Crimes of Condor 2005) one of the prosecuting attorneys named Alejandro Carrió explains that the documents that the Argentinean police originally seized were important because they not only implicated Arancibia, but also revealed the inner-workings of Operation Condor and the international flow of intelligence information through channels both within Chile and throughout the military governments of the Southern Cone (44-5).

For investigators, uncovering these documents was like finding forensic traces of the victims themselves. Because disappeared victims, in many cases, meant the absence of physical evidence or remains, the documents became the only forensic material that connected Arancibia to the disappearances or hinted at their fates. They also provided physical proof that implicated the involvement of Chilean state. This was important

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6 Known in English as “organized crime.”
because one of the premises behind the use of disappearances of political opponents was that the state could repeatedly deny involvement or knowledge about the missing. In addition to their legal significance, the documents produced what Kirsten Weld calls a “paper cadaver,” a symbol of the dead, which can stand in for a body in the case that it is not recoverable. She asserts: “[T]o exhume a paper cadaver or rescue a document is to stave off oblivion, to look backward, to prevent stories and lives and traumas from being forgotten, and to accord dignity to the dead, disappeared and displaced” (Weld 256).

The disturbing aspect about Arancibia’s files is that even though the crimes had occurred years prior, he had maintained these documents in his home in spite of the danger that they could be discovered by someone else and potentially implicate him in the crimes. This kind of recklessness insinuates that he held onto them because he took a certain degree of pride in his role in their deaths. It was something he wanted to remember. Eltit observes, “There, many years later, in his house, in a twisted type of collection, he possessively saved the identification cards, photographs, like trophies” (31). By retaining the documents, even after their disappearances, Arancibia still exercised power over the disappeared. He guarded information regarding their fates and possessed sensitive, protected documents that represented their identities and lives. The Chilean identity card—even after the death of its owners—is considered to be unique, protected property of the individual to whom it corresponds, which is reflected in the Chilean Civil Code by Law 19.628 that protects “information of personal
character.” This protected information includes “numeric, alphabetic, graphic, photographic, acoustic” among other kinds (Consejo para la transparencia 47). As Eltit points out, because the identity cards became extensions of the victims themselves, possessing the identity cards was like holding onto a trophy of war—the cards are not unlike a body part or an article of clothing.

Simon Harrison explains that in the 20th century trophy taking occurred most often when an element of racial distance separated the perpetrators and the dead. He states,

The bodies of those whom one accepts as members of one’s own ‘race’ therefore appear in certain key respects sacrosanct, even when they are one’s enemies in war. These co-racial enemies may certainly be fought and killed in battle, but after death it seems their bodies become inviolable. (5)

Arancibia’s collection testified to the powerful purpose of these document-trophies that extended beyond simply a way to account for the number of subversives that had been eliminated, demonstrating the level of dehumanization and objectification that had taken place in the ideology of military officials. In order to kill thousands of fellow citizens, military officials and secret police officers had to think of their targets through the lens of bureaucratic logic, to think of “subversives” and “militants” as categorically different.

Beyond affirming that the government had something to do with the disappearances of the five citizens, Arancibia’s files shed light on the vast international operation that was much more sophisticated than just false documents and dynamite.
Bureaucratic documents and procedures played an integral role in the success of Operation Condor’s information sharing capacities. As I established in the first chapter, countries participating in Operation Condor used identification documents to crosscheck the identities of foreign nationals in their countries against lists of suspected subversives. Once determined to be enemies of the state, “prisoners were transferred across borders without passports, on unregistered flights, and like the other disappeared, their detention and imprisonment was denied by the state” (McSherry 9).

The governments of participating members avoided waiting for legal orders of extradition; they could simply transfer suspected subversives back and forth at will. In this sense, they circumvented bureaucracy by operating their own bureaucratic network under the radar.

The paper trail uncovered during the investigation into the Prats murder exhibited how Chilean operatives orchestrated state violence through the use of bureaucratic documents, practices and procedures; these documents were transformed into instruments of state control and weapons. As Eltit’s performative text implies, identity documents have corporeal consequences. First, by denying General Prats and his wife access to their passports, it restricted their ability to cross the border after they

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7 In the case of Chile, these categories of citizens included political activists, former supporters of the Allende government, as well as their family members, associates and acquaintances. The list of victims also included persons located beyond the confines of Chile’s borders. In addition to the assassination of Prats, intelligence operatives also attempted to kill Bernardo Leighton in Rome in 1975, and succeeded in assassinating Orlando Letelier in Washington, D.C. in 1976.
had arrived in Argentina so they were unable seek refuge in another country.

Withholding identity documentation—either by seizing passports or refusing to issue documents to certain individuals—sequestered individuals from “exchange with the rest of the world” (Stiles "Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies" 55). Whether or not the Prats had access to their passports led to fatal consequences. By restricting their movements the government was able to use methods of surveillance to keep them in the crosshairs and to find the opportune moment to stage an assassination. For political opponents identified through bureaucratic documentation, these procedures provided a way for states to track individuals both domestically and abroad, so that they could later detain them, extract information through torture, and make them disappear.

Within the context of the dictatorship, bureaucratic documents not only granted the power to prove one’s identity and citizenship, but also determine whether or not a person was protected within the framework of the law. The moves the military government made to enact power through bureaucracy not only served as a logistic strategy, but also constructed the image of the symbolic power enacted by the state. Exercising the “exclusive right to authorize and regulate” what we consider to be “legitimate means of movement” (Torpey “Coming and Going” 240) functions in accordance with the state’s arbitrary ability to control identity documentation at will.

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8 In her essay “Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies,” Stiles discusses the retention of passports in Romania during the height of repression during the Soviet occupation.
Torpey explains that “the monopolization of this authority by states emerged only gradually after the medieval period and paralleled states’ monopolization of the legitimate means of violence” (240). In other words, controlling a person’s ability to migrate goes hand in hand with a state’s right to enact lethal violence against its subjects. Taking control of both of these aspects not only enforces the power of the state, it codifies its power.

The climate of terror that was instated after the Prats’ deaths paralyzed Chilean society, rendering citizens into bodies, or what Giorgio Agamben calls “bare life.” Agamben identifies how this right of the state to kill and not kill at will is the greatest expression of sovereignty. He uses the term “homo sacer” to refer to a person considered to exist outside of society, and therefore outside of the protections of the law. Agamben also refers to the “homo sacer” as “bare life” – a being that is alive, and yet, not considered to be equal to the rest of the members of a society. He explains that “bare life” refers to a being that is not fit to be sacrificed, yet, at the same time, whom it is not illegal kill (Agamben 12). Taking away a person’s access to their documents, denying them proof of identity, and stripping a person of their nationality has the potential to render them stateless, make it difficult to cross borders, and can transform a person into bare life. The goal of extrajudicial state violence is not just to eliminate political opponents, but also to enact sovereign power. Agamben writes, “Placing biological life at the center of its calculations, the modern State therefore does nothing other than bring
to light the secret tie uniting power and bare life” (11). Using Agamben’s theory to frame the power of bureaucracy, exhibits a contradiction inherent in bureaucratic documentation. The same documents that are supposed to identify, recognize and protect members of a nation—and effectively make citizens into the opposite of bare life—can also be turned against us by the state at will.

The Prats assassination also exemplifies the symbolic effect of state-enacted terror. Eltit’s performative practice in *Puño y letra* allows us to grasp the full effect of the spectacle of violence. She writes that beginning in 1974, the year of the assassinations it was as though “the landscape had been petrified and the only perceivable movement was of bodies” (Eltit 183). The assassination not only completed the objective of eliminating an opponent; it sent a message. By staging the Prats assassination in a public place, the state takes the opportunity to not only exercise its sovereign power, but also create a spectacle. The Chilean military government killed Prats without a trial and they committed the act on foreign soil, nonetheless, in the middle of a residential area of Buenos Aires. The assassination delivered the message that no one—not even a former military general—could escape the grasp of the military regime. It threatened not only Chileans, but also Argentineans and reminded them that the state could enact the power of death at will at any time, anywhere. When a government retains the sovereign power to subject its citizen to the power of death on a daily basis—as in the case of the dictatorship—it turns into a form of power that Achille Mbembe calls “necropower”
Building on the theoretical foundation of Michel Foucault’s biopolitics—or the control of the national body by the modern state—Mbembe asserts that the concept of bio power is no longer adequate to describe the way that the power of death infiltrates everyday life (12). By using spatial constraints, Mbembe posits that sovereign powers enable the creation of “death-worlds,” where humans dwell in a state of the “living-dead” where they are alive but disposable. In this state of necropolitical power, the “sovereign may kill in any way at any time.” The assassination of the Prats, as well as the extralegal disappearances of citizens, exemplified this sovereign power⁹; where by imposing spatial constraints bureaucratic procedures became tools of necropolitical control. Furthermore, in the case of the disappeared, identification provided a means through which the military government could keep suspects in a state of surveillance that exceeded the confines of national borders.

The public assassination of a political figure in the middle of the city asserts the state’s sovereign, necropolitical order. It communicates that the military state could disappear whomever it wanted, leaving (almost) no documentary trace. What’s more, the documents its utilized in its operations proved just as effective as the dynamite.

Zygmunt Bauman once wrote, “Perhaps it is true that each soldier carries a marshal’s

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⁹ Agamben refers to case of extralegal sovereignty as the “state of exception.” By suspending legal protections, the government allows “for the physical elimination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system.” See page 2 of Agamben, Giorgio. State of Exception. Stato Di Eccezione. English. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Print.
baton in his knapsack, but few marshals, and few colonels or captains for that matter, keep soldiers’ bayonets in their briefcases” (99). As Eltit’s book allows us to see, Bauman could be right. Based on the rare glimpses that we have of the inner-workings of Chile’s military government, we can suspect that their briefcases didn’t need anything more than documents.

3.5 The Spectacle of Bureaucratic Discourse

Eltit describes Arancibia’s demeanor during the court proceedings as “deliberate” and “stupidly theatrical” (21). She recounts, “Yes, he knows that beginning at this very moment he will be observed incessantly. He knows it and he enjoys it. It is evident that this twisted prominence that he achieved matters to him enormously” (21). She explains that the way that the trial is set up—“for him, by him,”—centered Arancibia as the focal point of the proceedings (22). In Eltit’s opinion, Arancibia’s behavior in front of the court looks as if he is playing a role from a play or a movie. She writes, “It seemed as if he were acting out the cinematographic fiction of a captured soldier that was subjected, in an unfriendly land, to a war tribunal” (21). These lines suggest a reference to Hannah Arendt’s report, Eichmann in Jerusalem, published in the The New Yorker in 1963 (Lazzara “Justice and Its Remainders 91). Like Eltit, Arendt attended the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a former member of the German Nazi S.S., for a different version of a state-sanctioned crime. Captured in Argentina and extradited to Israel, Eichmann faced a very public tribunal in 1962 for his role in the holocaust.
Arendt’s report on the Eichmann trial also connects the scenes of the courtroom with the theater. She writes that despite the judges’ efforts to prevent the trial from turning into a “show trial,” due to the very public nature of the proceedings and the fact that they take place in front of an audience, it is not always possible to avoid aspects of “showmanship” in the court. Making reference to the symbolic, theatrical elements present in the justice-seeking process, Arendt comments, “A trial resembles a play in that both begin and end with the doer, not with the victim (Arendt “Eichmann in Jerusalem”). In the court tribunal, the spotlight is fixed on the accused, and this way, the attention becomes skewed toward his persona. Yasco Horsman explains that the Eichmann trial held symbolic value for society beyond its legal implications. Public leaders viewed it as important because it provided a didactic space to create act out a lesson for the nation (6). In his analysis of the Eichmann trial, Mark Osiel also reveals that this pursuit of justice through the event of a public trial had the potential to produce a form of collective therapy. Using Victor Turner’s term of “social drama,” Osiel suggests that these “secular rituals of commemoration” contribute to “social solidarity that is enhanced by collective history” (17). Through a performance of legal rituals and procedures, society in a broader sense—not just the plaintiffs—have a space for reckoning with the crimes of the past. This event takes place through this sieve of bureaucracy—it influences the discourse and format for the trial, the aesthetic aspects of the courtroom, as well as sets the parameters for notions of justice and punishment.
Like the theater, the trial opens a didactic space where society can watch moral dilemmas play out in real time. Eltit describes the central people in the trial as theatrical protagonists. She writes, “From the literality of the main figures in the room, a symbolic territory is opened, made possible by the numerous and evident presence of the women: the Prats sisters, the Arancibia sisters” (Eltit 26). Eltit makes the connection between the female presence and the tropes of Spanish theater when she writes, “The constant figures of the mother and the sisters of Arancibia evoke, vaguely, the atmosphere in which certain theatrical works of Federico García Lorca are read. Works saturated by the historic subsidiary charge of the dramatic feminine obligations” (26).

Eltit implies that theatrical depictions—ranging from Federico García Lorca’s theater to Sophocles’ Antigone, demonstrate the obligations of “feminine” characters to negotiate the consequences of “masculine” violence (Oviedo 113). Mother-daughter dyads are a “recurring element” from the beginning of the text when Eltit dedicates Puño y letra to her mother and her “pulverized memory” (Eltit 26; Oviedo 113). Eltit positions women as the stewards of memory, history and justice, an observation that rings true to many of the efforts in both Chile and Latin America of mothers and women to revive the memory of their disappeared family members. On one hand, these theatrical representations show feminine characters as powerful agents of cultural practices of remembrance and reconciliation. One of the most cogent examples of how women act as agents of memory are the practices of the Chilean group, Families of the Detained and
Disappeared, and the Argentinean group Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Yet, on the other hand, this focus on the maternal aspects of memory, at least in the environment of the trial, covers up the fact that there is no Eichmann present at this trial. Arancibia was author of neither the crime, nor the other violent campaigns of Operation Condor.

Eltit views the presence of these women through the lens of theatricality: the women are the ones who represent their loved ones in the courtroom, they are the individuals who inherit the consequences of the violence of the former regime, the ones who must symbolically pick up the pieces. Even in the case of Arancibia, it is his sister, not any member of the Chilean military or secret police who supports him in court. In contrast the court-system is enmeshed within its bureaucratic discourse and structure, functioning within the same dispassionate, dehumanized rituals and hierarchies as the military. The prominent Chilean newspaper El Mercurio published a profile of the matriarchs of the two “dueling” families involved in the trial, the same article mentioned earlier. Titled, “The Drama of Two Women: Sofía Prats Cuthbert and Violeta Clavel,” the article spotlights neither the crime nor the intricate web of Condor revealed in the trial but instead the personal lives of the two families involved. The problem with focusing on these archetypes—positioning them as opposing forces—is that it prioritizes the aspects of the trial that appeal to soap-opera like drama.

For Eltit, despite the presence of dramatic material, the trial is marked by absence. The key figures of the military that ordered and orchestrated the crime are not
present. She calls this a “material absence of the military hierarchies,” as none of
Arancibia’s fellow secret police or military officers attended the proceedings. Elizondo
Oviedo points out, “The women are there alone. The true authors of the crime are
absent” (113). Eltit refers to this as the great “failure” of the trial, what she considers to
be “juridical asymmetry.” She writes, “The omission is flagrant. The others are not there.
Their bosses. Not there, among other protagonists, are Augusto Pinochet or the, the
Major, at the time, Raúl Iturriaga Neumann or the former Coronel Luis Barría Barría.
The true soldiers are missing. They are absent bodies and, nonetheless, crucial to
construct a definitive scene” (30). In the hierarchical organizational structure of the
military structure, the top officials were able to distance themselves from the crimes they
commanded. As a result, people like Arancibia—the low hanging fruit—take the fall.
Also missing is the United States citizen Michael Townley, who planted and detonate
the bomb. In contrast to Arancibia, in exchange for his testimony, a United States district
court granted Townley immunity for the murder and refused to extradite him to
Argentina. It raises the question of how many people in the upper levels of the military
Arancibia could have implicated—if he had been offered a deal. Even though the former
head of the DINA Manuel Contreras spent decades fighting legal charges in Chile prior
to the Arancibia trial, the Chilean government refused to extradite him to Argentina to
face charges for his role in coordinating the Prats murder.
There is one person who was associated with Arancibia at the time of the assassination who is not only present, but also figures prominently in the trial. The heart of Puño y letra comprises 94 pages of the serpentine oral testimony of Hugo Zambelli, Arancibia’s former partner. Eltit includes the transcript of Zambelli’s testimony in its entirety; she even transcribes the “filler” words that Zambelli uses in the pauses between his statements capturing the live aspect of the oral witness testimony. Live testimony is a “performance of memory retrieval” (Auslander 360) that takes place in front of the accused, the judges, the lawyers, and the audience. The official recording of the testimony generates an important legal (bureaucratic) document, referred to in English as “the record.” When trials take place in open court, it is open to the public and, consequently, the news media. This means that individuals from outside of the realm of the judiciary observe the trial’s events can witness the proceedings, take notes, or sometimes record with audio and television cameras. Within the oral hearing, the trial and testimony have the potential to become mediatized events that can be consumed by the audience, media and spectators.

Zambelli’s testimony took place in front of the audience of the court and reached the international public. As it starts off in Puño y letra, Zambelli’s testimony established what he was doing at the time of the crime as well as the nature of his relationship with the defendant. He explains at the beginning of the interrogation that he met Arancibia some time before the Prats assassination and they lived together for several years up
until Zambelli’s first arrest. Unlike his former partner, Zambelli claims that he was “apolitical” and completely uninvolved in the operations of either the political left or right. At the time of the crime, Zambelli worked as an actor, dancer and performer. He states, “I do not read anything political, eh… my life always was based in theater, theater, theater” (Eltit 39). His devotion to the theater shows through in his testimony, as the chronology of his memory is anchored to the theatrical shows in which he was working during that time period. Throughout his testimony he interjects irrelevant details about the different well-known show business personalities with whom he was working at the time.

In the eyes of the prosecutors, Zambelli is a crucial witness for their case. Arancibia’s primary defense is based on his sister’s statement that he was in Chile at the time of the Prats murders and therefore couldn’t have possibly been involved in the crime. However, in preliminary interviews with Zambelli, the prosecutors discovered that his account did place Arancibia in Buenos Aires at the time of the murders (Carrió 98). Therefore, the stakes are high and the result of the trial hinges on getting Zambelli to speak the truth in open court. Before Zambelli takes his oath to “tell the truth,” one of the judges advises him: “Starting this moment, you cannot lie, omit, or cover up that which you know and about which you are asked. If you do, you commit the crime of false testimony for which penal law prescribes up to 10 years in prison” (Eltit 37). In response, many of Zambelli’s statements begin with the redundant words, “I don’t want
to lie,” (40) or he qualifies them with “I don’t know, truthfully. If I told you why... I would be lying...” (81). Yet, the point of the interview when Zambelli’s memory becomes most problematic is when the prosecutor attempts to pin down the exact time period in which year Zambelli remembers that he met Arancibia.

A key moment in the text comes when the prosecutor realizes that Zambelli testifies that he met Arancibia in 1975, not 1974. He uses the transcript of an interrogation conducted in 1978 to call attention to the inconsistency (Eltit 60). In the responses that Zambelli gave in 1978, he stated that he began to live with Arancibia in 1974—the same year as the assassinations. In order to corroborate his assertion that Zambelli is contradicting himself, and potentially committing perjury, one of the judges locates the record of Zambelli’s previous words and points out, “You say here that in the year 1974 you starred as the first dancer in the Astros Theater, along with Susana Giménez and at the end of that year you meet Enrique Arancibia Clavel” (69-70). Then, he asks the judges and the prosecutors locate the exact page numbers in the testimony where Zambelli had signed his name: “We show you the page 1064 to see if the signature is that of Mr. Zambelli” (70).

Throughout Zambelli’s testimony the attorneys threaten him with his previously recorded words in an attempt to prove that he is lying. Their access to the written language becomes an arsenal with which they attack Zambelli’s credibility. Zambelli, futilely, tries to further support his memory with other recollections, explaining that he
knows that he had to have met Arancibia in 1975, not 1974, because of a trip that he recalls taking during that time period. He attempts to emphasize his certainty with his speech when he mentions repeatedly: “In fact, I, in 1975, in November of 1975, I go to Venezuela. I remember perfectly, in 1975, I go to Venezuela” (Eltit 71). When the prosecutor catches him in his lies, he threatens Zambelli with the recording of those words—even though it is already presumed that he is being recorded: “Let the record show that, your Honor, please.” (71). They continue to press Zambelli about the years, and the interrogation about this point goes on for 10 more pages. Frustrated, Zambelli persists, “I swore then and I swear now, and I am Catholic, Apostolic, Roman, I met him in the year of 1975 and I don’t know why that other date is there. I would be lying if I told you why it says that date” (81). Despite the prosecutor’s persistent efforts to get Zambelli to testify to the fact that Arancibia was in Buenos Aires at the time of the assassination, Zambelli refuses to give in. In addition to being a hostile witness, his oral testimony is riddled with inconsistencies, questions and gaps. Despite Zambelli’s refusal to cooperate, the questions keep coming. In her decision not to edit the transcript of Zambelli’s inconsistent testimony, the reader experiences the confusion first hand. What becomes clear in Eltit’s presentation of the interrogation is that it is almost as though Zambelli, the witness, transforms into the defendant. It is unclear if Zambelli is lying, has a faulty memory, or is simply confused by the line of questioning, but throughout his witness testimony, but the questioning ends with everyone in frustration.
Philip Auslander writes that in the live environment of witness examination, memory can be manipulated and “policed” by the court: “[T]he legal system subjects memory to surveillance, adjudicates its operation, and presses it into service as an agent of legal procedure” (360). Although the live court testimony is recorded into writing and makes references throughout to previously recorded documents, live court proceedings generate spoken communication or discourse. Because of the specific etiquettes, procedures and conventions that this discourse contains, legal proceedings operate using what I considered to be bureaucratic discourse. In his theory of the four discourses, Jacques Lacan proposes that discourse is a “necessary structure that goes well beyond speech” (12) and can “clearly subsist without words” (13). He continues, “Through the instrument of language a number of stable relations are established, inside which something that is much larger and goes much further than actual utterances [énonciations] can, of course, be inscribed” (13). These structures, however, do not simply describe the kind of language that a speaker uses, but instead, discourse “constructs reality” and creates a “social link” (Boucher 274). The four discourses he illustrates—the discourse of the master, the university, the hysteric and the analyst—are “hegemonic articulations” that “link discourse to power” (274).10

10 For the purposes of this paper, I am interested in Lacan’s theory on university discourse, rather than examining the nuts and bolts of how the structures are formulated. For an exhaustive study on the four discourses, see The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: Other Side of Psychoanalysis and Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis: Reflections on Seminar XVII.
Lacan’s theory on discourse underscores the connection between the bureaucratic discourse and power that Eltit makes in *Puño y letra*. Enunciated speech forms an important aspect of the event of an oral trial, where judgment is based on the presentation of testimony. Lacan considered bureaucracy to be “the perfect realization of university discourse” (Boucher 277). Although the predominant discourse of modernity has been that of the master, beginning in the 13th century, institutions increasingly depended on the “discourse of the university” for legitimation through, “disinterested knowledge” (276). University, or bureaucratic discourse consists of “systematic knowledge [which is] is the ultimate authority, reigning in the stead of blind will” where “everything has its reason” (Fink 132). (University discourse is, unsurprisingly, the predominant discourse of academe.) Boucher reveals that the “speech acts that constitute the discourse of bureaucracy” are “not claims, propositions, and so forth (i.e., assertives)” but rather, “judgments, evaluations, summaries, and assessments” (286). In other words, university discourse deals with certainties and makes proclamations and determinations. Boucher calls these speech acts “assertive declarations,” and explains that they are acts “whose principal difference with normative declarations is that the sincerity condition is full. In other words, these are declaratives that suture the subject” (286).

The problem with this kind of language in the legal system is that there is no space for ambiguity, nuance, or subtlety. It deals in suppositions of facts or truths.
During Zambelli’s testimony he is confronted with the bureaucratic discourse of the court—a discourse that is supposed to be objective, certain, based in documentary evidence and exact. Yet his retrieval of memory doesn’t fit within this paradigm. His testimony is overridden with vacillations, confusions, and inconsistencies and is both unraveled and pulverized by the bureaucratic discourse being utilized in the court. The deconstruction of Zambelli’s testimony in open court can be viewed, to some, as a legal triumph of an oral trial. Despite the fact that the prosecuting attorneys were unable to make Zambelli crumble under the pressure of their interrogation and use his testimony to directly place Arancibia in Argentina at the time of the murders, their performance of cross-examination undermined Zambelli’s credibility. Their official discourse—a performance of the bureaucratic language of the court—annihilated Zambelli’s uncertain testimony.

Even in oral tribunals, legal proceedings privilege concrete, documentary evidence over testimonial accounts and testimonies. Testimony is only worth something if it is deemed credible or corroborated by evidence. By simply erasing all evidence of a crime, the state circumvents potential prosecution, making the proof of a crime rely on competing witness statements. Credibility is a highly subjective evaluation—one that operates outside of facts and in the realm of judgment. Attempts to discredit witnesses can put them on trial and play on prejudices and biases. As Eltit’s performance of the testimony reveals, the presentation of Zambelli’s cross-examination communicates much
beyond the words of the trial, the way that he testimony colors Arancibia’s character.

What Eltit reveals in her presentation of the Zambelli transcript is that the interrogation of witnesses in a trial is vulnerable to prejudices, biases and societal inequalities.

Although it seems possible that Zambelli could is lying in his testimony (and I believe that he most likely was) at the beginning of the text Eltit explains that aside from the contradictions that Zambelli’s testimony presents, she is concerned by how his testimony introduces implicit bias into the trial.

During his questioning, although the court does not make Zambelli directly elaborate on the nature of his former relationship with Arancibia it is still assumed. At the beginning of the transcript, when the judge asks Zambelli if he knows Arancibia and requests that he clarify whether or not “they have any relationship of friendship or enmity,” Zambelli responds, “We were friends” (Eltit 38-9). However, throughout the course of the transcript, it becomes clear that Zambelli and Arancibia were more than friends; they were partners that were intimately involved with each other’s families, they lived and owned property together; the nature of their relationship is more than implied.

For Eltit, this is one of the most unsettling aspects of the trial. She writes:

The sexual choice of Enrique Arancibia Clavel is entirely his own, but over the course of the trial his homosexuality was turned into evidence when all parties involved in the process (including the defense council of the accused) called to the stand the Argentinean citizen Hugo Zambelli, who was his companion during various years. Without a doubt, it is tremendously delicate to introduce his homosexual partner, especially on the horizon of appropriation with sensational connotations, on the part of the market, of the legitimate differences that these subjectivities carry.” (Eltit 15)
For comparison, Carrió’s account of the topic of Arancibia’s sexuality fails to question its presence in the trials and presents it as relevant evidence. Before the prosecution questions Zambelli, they asked Arancibia’s sister whether or not she “knew that her brother was a homosexual” (95). Carrió recounts that the defense objected to the question, stating that the question was irrelevant and completely outside of the realm of the case. The prosecutor argued that the witness couldn’t claim to truly know her brother if she “ignored aspects so central to [her brother’s] personality” (95). This argument appeals to the rational logic embedded in the legal atmosphere—the need to establish facts and judgments— but fails to recognize the implications of this evidence in the subtext of the trial and the dynamics of power that this testimony introduces.

Undoubtedly, in 2000, Chile and Argentina were still countries influenced by the values of the Catholic Church, which prohibits homosexuality. This was especially true in the case of Chile, where as of one year before the trial had taken place, homosexuality was still illegal. The prejudice was so much that in an interview published in El Mercurio, while defending her son’s innocence, Arancibia’s mother felt compelled to deny the insinuations that her son has been in a relationship with a man more vehemently than his involvement in murder with the DINA. She declared:

Enrique is absolutely normal. And for that reason, when he is freed we are going to go over the presentation of legal actions against which they have defamed him. They have no right to do something like this. Usually when they can’t find someone guilty they saddle them with qualifiers like thief, drug addict or homosexual. (Díaz)
She continues, “Everyone has had at one time intimate friends. Zambelli’s mother, now deceased, used to wash [Arancibia’s] clothing, who, at the same time, was dating Hugo [Zambelli]’s sister” (Díaz). From a legal standpoint, the testimony of Zambelli was unnecessary to the prosecution’s case. The prosecutors had documents—issued by the Bank of Chile, the corporation that had provided Arancibia’s cover while he lived in Buenos Aires—that proved that he was living in Argentina at the time of the murders. His contract even listed the exact date of the bombings as his first day of work (Gonzalez).

What Eltit both and Carrió emphasize is that in addition to Zambelli there was a long list of witnesses directly implicated in the crime against whom the court did not have the ability to make a case. Former police and military officials Carlos Labarca Sanhueza, José Zara Holger and Víctor Barría Barría were all compelled to testify but their interrogations took place in Chile since they were Chilean citizens (Carrió 61). Without the ability to interview them in Argentina, Carrió explains that they were unable to confront them with the physical evidence that proved their connection to the crime (62). Furthermore, everyone involved in the clandestine operation utilized a codename. Carrió comments that when interviewed, Labarca Sanhueza “appeared to be a victim of an amnesia attack,” refusing to admit any knowledge of Arancibia or related to the assassination and Zara Holger and Barría Barría and also denied any involvement or knowledge (62). Carrió comments that his testimony, like the other two, “is a clear
example of the ease with which these witnesses there in Chile, distanced themselves from any incriminating before the lack of evidence that served to corroborate the truth of their assertions (63). Yet, because these men were not on trial, they were protected from testifying in open court, and thus they were not cross-examined. Instead, the focus shifted to Zambelli and the sensationalized topic of Arancibia’s sexuality.

### 3.6 Mediatized Theatricality

While browsing the Associated Press’s archive of news videos recorded during the proceedings, I stumbled upon footage that recorded the “event” of Eltit’s presence at the trial. Prior to seeing these images on the screen, my only perspective had come through the medium of words. The short clip shows Eltit in a mass of people congregating outside the courtroom. Blurry heads float into and out of the foreground of the camera, blocking the view. Accompanied by her partner, Chilean politician and attorney Jorge Arrate, Eltit solemnly approaches and embraces Sofía Prats, one of the named plaintiffs in the case and a daughter of the victims. The photographer struggles amongst the crowd to capture the brief moments of Eltit’s non-verbal exchange. The gesture appears to be ceremonial, like the ritual of offering condolences to family members of the deceased at a wake. As Eltit turns away, for a split second, the camera captures her gaze. Her eyes meet the camera, and Eltit observes that she is being observed (see fig.19). This scene makes us aware that unlike Eltit, who witnessed the event of the trial firsthand, our perspective of the trial is mediated, or filtered through
someone else’s lens. In contemporary culture, the most common way that the public witnesses significant events is through the lens of the news media. This moment captured by the film crew allows us to observe Eltit observing the trial. But at the same time, Eltit is observing us while we observe her.


In the text, Eltit confirms that she was aware of the large presence of the media at the trial: “The entirety of the Chilean news media made a huge professional effort to cover, with efficiency, this trial” (27). She is also aware of the privileged perspective that the news cameras have, not only due to their physical position in the court, but also as reporters of the “official” news broadcast disseminated to the public. With this privilege
comes a certain degree of power because the media can influence the public with how they portray public events—what they choose to focus on, what they leave out. The news teams select the questions they want to ask as well as how they film, frame and edit and footage of events. From Eltit’s perspective as a third party, the role she describes as a “mute, ocular witness,” she perceives that established, surviving relationship between the journalists covering the Arancibia trial and the dictatorship.

Eltit mentions that she saw an encounter between a news reporter and Arancibia in the hallway outside of the courtroom, writing,

I see (I am a mute ocular witness) how the old, well-known and unavoidable news reporter from the Catholic channel of Chilean television, before the beginning of one of the sessions, animatedly converses with the accused in the hall of the tribunal. (27)

Eltit continues on to describe how she observes them embrace and that later she overheard a conversation between this same journalist and Arancibia’s sisters making plans to go shopping together in the afternoon (27). She points out that while these vignettes seem, at first glance, to be insignificant that they are a striking contrast to the “overwhelming legal battle” within the courtroom and make visible the old alliances between the Chilean upper class, the media, and the military-government (27). It turns out that Eltit’s observation of the relationship between the news reporter and the accused is true. Included in the same news footage, the AP cameras record Arancibia during a break in the proceedings, turning his attention over to the news team, and giving them a “thumbs up” (see fig.20).
From Eltit’s point of view, in the mediatized environment of the public trial, the accused is also aware that both the audience of the court and the news cameras are watching him. It’s worth noting that the AP footage shows that for most of the trial, Arancibia is hidden from the view of the audience—presumably full of the family of the victims—as he is seated in front of a column, protected from their view. Long wooden panels, a few feet in height, separate the courtroom audience from the legal proceedings. Security guards stand in front of the audience, facing them, also blocking their ability to see. The “audience,” in fact, comprises only a few rows of seats. In contrast, the news
cameras record from a position at the front of the courtroom. They capture Arancibia’s profile and are able to zoom in on his facial expressions, as well as the faces of the judges and lawyers. It is clear that the media have access to a point of view that someone seated in the audience of the trial does not. They are embedded into the spatial format of the trial. Microphones, as well, appear in nearly all of the frames of the footage. While the microphones amplify the volume of what is said during court, they also serve the function of a recording device that documents the discourse the proceedings produce.

When the main actors of an event are aware of the gaze of the media and it—either consciously or unconsciously—affects their behavior, it is an example of what media studies theorists call mediatization. The scene where Eltit observes that she is being observed demonstrates that the media no longer functions merely as a channel for the exchange of communication (Strömbäck 231). Instead, as a political and cultural event, the trial shifts from mediated to mediatized. Defined as a “process-oriented concept,” (232) mediatization describes the increasingly powerful effects that the media has on political, social and cultural spheres, meaning that “political and social actors” are aware of the influence that the media has on both what we see and how we see it. We both internalize it and change their behaviors and actions to suit (239). So much so, that public figures operate according to “media logic” (240), always wary of how the media may interpret or depict them in the public eye.
Part of the danger of this highly mediatized trial is that the pomp and circumstance of the proceedings, the obtuse legal language, and the theatrical elements of the format of a publicized, oral hearing constructs a veneer of justice seeking. It creates the image that something is being done, but as Eltit reveals it falls short of justice. The theatrical aspect of the trial creates drama and attracts attention, but its consequences and goals are not always devoted to seeking or enacting “justice.” Instead, the theatrical operates by producing and manipulating desire. Taylor reveals that the theatrical is a system of communication activated by desire as well as one that transmits and shapes desire. The exchange between consumers and producers of desire takes place in the sensual sphere, which is particularly manipulated, unstable and mass-produced (Eltit 30). This kind of manipulative spectacle can manifest in the context of a formalized theater, or can operate through public spectacles in order to manipulate the emotions of society. In Spanish the word “espectáculo” refers to both shows within the scope of the theatre, as well as more generalized public productions that are simply conducted in the public eye. Taylor points out, “those who control the spectacle, whether theater or public display, control its meaning and impact to a significant degree” (The Archive and The Repertoire 225-26). Yet, by stripping the trial documents down to bare text and performing the bureaucratic language of the trial, Eltit exposes all the extraneous elements at play, the mechanisms that serve to generate a spectacle, rather than seek justice.
In Chile, as well as other capitalist countries, an entire industry exists revolving around the creation of spectacle and the evocation of desire on the level of mass-communication. During the trial this operated on the level of news coverage and mainstream media. In Chile, this sensationalistic form of journalism is called farándula. In its entry in the Real Academia Española dictionary, the word farándula comes from the Provençal word farandoulo, traditionally referring to Spanish troupes that traveled around performing folkloric dances, then evolved into groups that performed the Spanish comedias. As such, farándula has its earliest roots in the ambit of the theater. Farándula today stays true to its origins of providing entertainment but has moved into entertainment industry, reports news of celebrity gossip, and encompasses reality television.

During the dictatorship, censure and closure of mainstream news channels restricted the accessibility of diverse perspectives and coverage of current events. The news sources that thrived during the dictatorship were those with conservative ties that appeased the dictatorship, as well as those that fed capitalist interests, like farándula (Arroyo). Figueroa Ramírez and Valdés Ávila explain that the main goal of farándula television is to generate capital through entertainment (220). Therefore, it is no coincidence that farándula-influenced news formats proliferated during and after the

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11 The Spanish word farándula can be translated to “celebrity gossip” or more generally “show business.” However, I prefer to use the Spanish version of the word because I feel that farándula has developed a specific cultural connotation in Chile that cannot be encompassed in an English translation.
dictatorship. Not only was farándula shaped by the dictatorship, the producers of farándula had personal connections with figures in the military dictatorship; people in the industry of the farándula were married to military officials. Pamela Jiles writes, “In those years, that seemed eternal, the intimate closeness between the famous and military agents from the regime was daily bread” (87).

Eltit portrays the farándula as a corrosive force in the presentation of the Prats case to the Chilean public. In her opinion, the development of farándula is a direct consequence of the dictatorship’s culture of neoliberalism and was an oblique form of repression and the control of information. She writes, “The complicit cross between farándula and repression seemed strategic to me, even more, I estimate that the these complex, confusing, and in the beginning, surprising zones, obliquely maintain their validity in the current systems” (Eltit 15). Figueroa Ramírez and Valdés Ávila call this phenomenon the “commercialization of private space” in Chilean society (230) that functions to create capital by satiating viewer’s thirst for voyeurism. Farándula capitalizes on drama, controversy and conflict. They write, “They have developed the profession of scrutinizing the hidden and exposing with great efficacy the private, for the entertainment of the curious and voyeurs” (230). Unlike the principles of ethical

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12 It is worth noting that Chilean farándula was derived from celebrity gossip and sensationalist programs created in the United States. The term refers to television shows that utilize a talk-show format and invite guests to come on screen and speak about the lurid details of their lives, and the lives of others, regarding divorce, adultery and gossip. Even for newspapers and website that are not considered to be farándula, this style of reporting has bled into how news is presented and portrayed to the public in order to generate viewership.
news reporting, farándula also takes part in the spreading of rumors and false reports. The goal of farándula is not to accurately represent the “truth,” but instead, to sell spectacles regardless of their veracity.

The larger discussion of the Prats case is that aspects of farándula had contaminated both the media portrayal of the case and the trial itself. Since the trial had been mediatized the media present at the trial because they knew that they were being watched inadvertently influenced the actions of the parties involved. As a result, instead of focusing on the crime, the media homed in on Arancibia’s sexual preferences and the archetypal figures of the Prats and Arancibia families. According to Eltit, farándula is a cultural byproduct of the destructive forces of neoliberalism, where entertainment takes precedence over justice. She writes, “Simply put, the mediatized farándula (the preferred site of ultra-capitalism) continues not only present, but also on the rise, operating multiple violences that produce, in a symbolic or literal manner, the destruction of human bodies and experiences” (15-6).

One of the consequences of the mediatization of the trial and the cooptation of its theatrical elements into material for seduction is that it immerses television viewers and media consumers into the field of bureaucratic discourse. But this obtuse discourse is not transparent, but appears to be almost mystical when taken at face value. This creates the illusion that justice is being served simply through the theatricality of the court. The mediatized environment opens the door to distraction, rather than objective
news reporting that could expose the holes in the justice-seeking process. Performing bureaucratic discourse in front of news cameras and home television audiences creates the illusion of transparency, as well as progress. But the true objective is not truth, but rather seduction. Aníbal Quijano reveals that seduction is just another manifestation that reinforces colonial power. As he puts it, “Beyond repression, the main instrument of all power is its seduction” (23). Even if the repressive climate of the dictatorship has ended, the seductive power of neoliberalism continues to exist. It is through Eltit’s practice of performance, rather than the theatrical, that Puño y letra uncovers how seduction continues to operate as a mechanism of state control.

3.7 Conclusion

Eltit’s depiction of the Arancibia trial not only involves the circumstances surrounding this particular case, but also grants a glimpse into how the legal reforms that had been instituted after the dictatorship went into practice. She emphasizes the oral aspect of the trial through both the subtitle of her book, “oral title,” and her textual performance of the language that the transcripts contain. Puño y letra questions both the effectiveness of the legal reforms and whether or not the newly reformed system has provided a more transparent legal framework through which justice can be achieved.

At the conclusion of the proceedings, the court found Arancibia guilty of illicit association and issued a sentence of “perpetual reclusion” or life behind bars (Eltit 34). At the close of the book, she contrasts the highly visible assassination of the Prats with
the unsolved murders of painter Santiago Aviles and his assistant, Nicolás Flores, whose bodies were found in a ditch in 1974 with multiple gunshot wounds (183). Unlike the Prats, these two men had been forgotten because they lacked fame or notoriety. Their deaths were not high profile, but rather a mundane event during the early period of the dictatorship. They represented the thousands of bodies that were found and not found during these years, homicides that were never prosecuted.

Although Puño y letra was published in 2005 and Eltit had no idea of what would later ensue, her intuition about the case predicted Arancibia’s fate. In 2007, much to the chagrin of the Prats family, Arancibia was paroled and freed from prison (Olivares). However, five years later he was found stabbed to death in his apartment. Although there have been rumors that the killer was a “taxi boy” who worked for him, his death has gone unprosecuted. In another strange turn of events in the case, Guillermo Osorio, the official who worked in the Chilean consulate in Buenos Aires in 1974 was found dead of an apparent suicide in 1977 under highly suspicious circumstances (Dinges 78). The questionable nature of the deaths of the people involved in this case—people who presumably knew too much and could potentially implicate others—poses the question about the efficacy of justice-seeking efforts in post-dictatorial Chile.

Legal efforts to prosecute human rights cases in the Southern Cone have gained some, albeit slow, traction. The University of Diego Portales Human Rights Observatory states that as of 2015, 777 cases have been prosecuted of former agents of the military for
violations of human rights (Instituto de Investigación en Ciencias Sociales). The recent progress stands in stark contrast to the lack of judiciary momentum that had occurred before the turn of the century when the trial had taken place. Only a small number of cases were prosecuted before 1998 when “judicial accountability…was at a virtual standstill” (Collins 1). One example of a successful trial occurred in 1995, when the former secret police chief Manuel Contreras was sentenced to jail for the assassination of Orlando Letelier in Washington D.C. (1).

Aware that one day they could face potential prosecution for the violations of human rights once democracy was restored to Chile, the military regime took action to ensure amnesty for the crimes against humanity that they had committed. They also took these steps in order to render their government legitimate. In 1978, the military dictator General Augusto Pinochet issued a decree of amnesty for state-enacted crimes beginning with the coup d’état in 1973, lasting through the same year (Sznajder 141). Yet, the self-granted legal absolution went even further, and became ingrained in Chile’s governing documents when the government passed a referendum to write these protections into a new constitution (141). The implications of the new version of constitution extended beyond the 1978 decree of amnesty; it granted Pinochet “sweeping” political power protected by law and affirmed the regime’s characteristics as a legitimate, “legal-rational authority” (141).
The goal of the 1980 constitution was to establish a “new institutional order” (Couso 410) that declared Chile to a protected democracy, while, at the same time, afforded totalitarian rights to Pinochet and the military regime. For example, Article 19 of the constitution “assures all people” the “right to life and psychic and physical integrity,” as well as “equality before the law” and the “right to judicial defense” (Constitución de la República de Chile). Yet, these legal norms are contradicted by Article 32, which states that the President of the Republic can, at will, “declare states of constitutional exception,” and “assume supreme governance of the military in times of war.” As such, the constitution enabled “President” Pinochet—a change in the nomenclature from “General”—to apply and suspend the rights of the constitution as he saw fit. One of the original authors of the 1980 constitution, Jaime Guzmán, was a fervent conservative ideologue who was as anti-democratic as he was anti-communist. He envisioned the new constitution to establish Chile as a country “in which patriotic bureaucrats, backed by the heavy hand of military might” could rescue Chile from decades of “flawed economic policies and general decay” (Couso 397).

Because of this constitutional history, the period of post-dictatorship reckoning in Chile has devoted much attention to attempts to seek justice for the violations of human rights in spite of these protections. Contemporary human rights narratives have focused on the importance of legal retribution for the crimes of the state. In 2012, in a presentation to the United Nations Human Rights Council, Pablo de Greiff reflected...
these values, stating that true institutional “redress” for massive human rights violations, “cannot be achieved without truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence” (4). The predominant idea behind legal efforts to circumvent the decree of amnesty and the power granted to the government in the constitution is that once a truly democratic legal system could be implemented and properly exercised in Chile, it would provide channels for the prosecution and punishment of past crimes, as well as the guarantee that they would not be repeated.

At the time that the trial against Arancibia took place, newly restored democratic governments in not only Chile, but also countries like Argentina and Uruguay, sought to correct the previous failures of the courts to prevent widespread violations of human rights during the dictatorship by instituting radical reforms to the format of their criminal justice systems.¹³ Before the reforms, both Chile and Argentina utilized the inquisitorial legal system that traced back to the Colonial period when Spain governed region of the Southern Cone. Based on continental civil code, the inquisitorial system implemented during this time was also known as “bureaucratic justice.” In this system, judges conducted all aspects of the trial, including the investigation, judgment and sentencing. Proceedings mostly took place through writing and behind closed doors. In

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¹³ Chile has achieved the most progress in putting these legal reforms into practice. Argentina’s progress has been slower and less comprehensive. Both countries are seen as “hybrids” of common law and civil codes.
contrast, the adversarial legal system, which Chile and Argentina\textsuperscript{14} both incorporated after the legal reforms, is the system used by common law legal traditions such as those practiced in England and the United States. In the adversarial system, a judge presides over a trial in which two parties advocate for their positions. The trial proceedings take place in front of a jury and, often times, are open to the public. Therefore, a trial that uses the adversary system has the opportunity to become a not only legal, but also cultural event.

Criticisms of the inquisitorial legal system that had been practiced in both Chile and Argentina, have claimed that from its origins, it was “influenced by Spain’s tradition of religious-cultural warfare, rewards for conquest, military privileges, and fusion of military and government authority” (Fensom). As shown during the dictatorship, appointed judges were seen as sympathetic to the military governments, accused of protecting its interests and failing to stop violations of human rights. Furthermore, because of its reliance on the production of lengthy documents, the inquisitorial process was viewed as time-consuming and inefficient. Viewed as “bureaucratic” at its core, Weber had the continental inquisitorial legal system in mind when he claimed that bureaucratic organization was the most effective system for legal "adjudication" (McCoy 683). Many have associated the transition from the inquisitorial

\textsuperscript{14} The administration of Carlos Menem, elected as President of Argentina in 1989, introduced the adversarial process into the criminal court system with the goal of modernizing the country and making the judicial process more efficient. The Menem administration has been criticized for instituted free-market, neoliberal policies that led to the economic crisis in Argentina in 2001.
to the adversarial system as a demonstration of a new commitment to democracy in the Southern Cone. Governments instated the reforms with the goal of improving judicial efficiency, independence, and accountability (Prillaman). In shedding the excessively bureaucratic traditions of the inquisitorial system, the implementation of an adversarial system promised “transparency” and “assumed impartiality” which would “provide greater protections for the integrity of the process, defendants rights and the timeline for a decision” (Andía).

Yet, while the adversarial legal system may not be tied to the tradition of Spanish colonial rule, as Eltit exposes in Puño y letra the visibility of an oral trial and its ability to be coopted by the media, also produces inequality in the face of the law. Weber writes that the adversary system developed in order to benefit the “merchant” and “lawyer classes.” Furthermore, he explains that “the nature of the court constitution and of the trial procedure up to the modern period amounted in effect to a far-going denial of justice to the economically weak groups” (977). Thus, the adversary system is considered the legal system to be most compatible with capitalistic enterprises. Patrick O’Malley also affirms the connection between adversary justice and its capitalistic origins, explaining that “adversary justice” exists as a “free enterprise model of dispute settlement” (291).

Bureaucratic discourse, as framed by Lacan, also serves in our analysis of the adversarial trial format. Fink writes that university discourse serves as both an “arm of
capitalist production” and the “military-industrial complex” (132). Therefore, while the inquisitorial legal system best served the format of the military regime, the new adversarial system is a more fitting organization for the widespread, neoliberal policies that the military dictatorship implemented in Chile. Even if the legal process is transformed from a written, archival system to one that is performed—as Eltit’s enactment of bureaucratic discourse proves—bureaucratic logic still functions, and ultimately prevails. Evidence of the enduring legacy of the military government is embodied in the very document that determines how law is performed. Pinochet’s 1980 constitution is still the basis of the law in effect today. After Pinochet ceded power in 1990 and democracy was restored, the governments that have followed have attempted to ratify and revise the constitution, in order to strengthen its democratic ideals. As Eltit demonstrates in Puño y letra, we are left to wonder if justice for the victims of human rights violations can truly be achieved through a legal system that still supports both the letter and the fist behind the law.
4. Bureaucratic Fictions in Pablo Larraín’s Post Mortem

4.1 Introduction – Autopsy

Fifteen minutes into the Chilean film Post Mortem (2010) viewers witness the scene of a female cadaver laid out on an autopsy table. The shot is composed looking directly at the crown of the cadaver’s head (see fig. 21). The image resembles a perspective drawing out of an anatomy textbook; the brown-hair, tops of the shoulders, and bridge of the nose, comprise the foreground of the frame. Two pairs of ungloved hands move through the motions of the autopsy. The pink tones of their hands directly contrast with the ghostly grey of the cadaver’s skin and the metal table.

![Figure 21: Autopsy of Nancy Puelma, performed by Dr. Castillo. Screenshot from Post Mortem, dir. Pablo Larraín (Kino Lorber, 2010; DVD).](image)

The doctor performing the autopsy—Dr. Castillo, as we will later learn—is suturing the chest cavity with a large needle and a thick, colorless string. As he dictates his findings the string forms momentary loops over the body until as he pulls each one
tight. “Cadaver of female sex, identified as Nancy Puelma Olivares. 41 kilos. The cause of death is acute caloric-proteinic malnutrition and severe dehydration. Date of death at the time of the necropsy is 6 or 7 days.” With this statement, we discover that the identity of the deceased is none other than one of the protagonists of the film, a cabaret dancer named Nancy Puelma, a character that we have only just met in the opening sequence. The interjection of this flash-forward into the otherwise chronological sequence of the plot informs viewers that just as we were getting to know her Nancy is already dead.

We cut to a view of the other main protagonist, a morgue employee named Mario Cornejo, seated at a writing desk recording the dictation of the doctor’s findings. As a low-level functionary Mario’s responsibility in the morgue is to record autopsy dictations onto paper (see fig. 22). As Mario performs his task his eyes remain fixed on the page.

Figure 22: Mario records Nancy’s autopsy report by hand as Dr. Castillo dictates, Screenshot from Post Mortem, dir. Pablo Larraín (Kino Lorber, 2010; DVD).
He is visibly unaffected by the sight of the corpse that, as we have just seen in the previous scenes, is the body of his neighbor and love interest. His icy objectivity is both suspicious and jarring; he acts as though Nancy is just another anonymous body in the morgue. We are left to wonder about the nature and manner of Nancy’s death by starvation and dehydration. Was it accidental? A homicide? We know her cause of death, we have the words “acute caloric-proteinic malnutrition” and yet we know nothing at all. The action of suturing the body is symbolic. It likens the autopsy—the always-insufficient attempt to represent the cadaver through signifiers—to the attempt to close up the Y-incision that will never heal. Citing Lacan, Elizabeth Klaver summarizes that autopsy “attempts to suture the (impossible) Real into discourse and attempts to fix meaning at the center (marked by the corpse) in a discursively sliding structure” (107). Language cannot adequately encapsulate the body into a neat package of terms; it is inept, slippery, and incomplete.

Even though Post Mortem is marketed as a film about Allende’s autopsy, the mystery of Nancy’s death haunts the film until the final scene when the true cause of her death is revealed. In the initial autopsy scene, her female body is examined and then clumsily hauled off screen not to be seen again. We see the live Nancy again, as the rest of the film recounts the events that led up to her death. Yet her dissected body—like the thousands of others that passed through the morgue in the months following the coup d’état—is not revisited, her recorded cause of death seals her fate. In its modern usage,
forensics is a scientific field of inquiry “pertaining or connected with, or used in the
courts of law” (Oxford English Dictionary) the application of science for the purpose of
solving crime. In Post Mortem, director Pablo Larrain creates a “documentary fiction”
(Gabara Errant Modernism 199)—that is to say in this context a fiction based on real-life
bureaucratic documents—in order to question the reliance on forensic inquiry and the
bureaucratic documents it generates. Basing Post Mortem on the true story of the Medical
Legal Service morgue in the days before and after the 1973 coup d’état, Larrain
embodies the aesthetics of bureaucracy in the figure and surroundings of the protagonist
Mario Cornejo. This depiction, as I will argue in this chapter, emphasizes how
immediately after the coup d’état, bureaucracy became an instrument of the military
government, one that served to organize people and space rather than to record a factual
register of history. Although we privilege bureaucratic documents and view expert
opinions as authoritative voices in the reconstruction of history, Larrain’s film
demonstrates that bureaucratic documents, as much as people, have the potential to
serve as unreliable witnesses to the past.

Even though it is a film based on historical documents, Post Mortem does not
belong to the documentary genre, which has dominated Chilean film since the
beginning of the dictatorship. Even in the most repressive early days of the dictatorship
documentaries such as David Bradbury’s Chile: Until When? (1985) and Patricio
Henriquez’s Images of the Dictatorship (1999) recorded journalistic accounts of everyday
life and interviews with both supporters and opponents of the regime. Experimental filmmaker Raúl Ruiz turned to documentary to chronicle the lives of exiles outside of Chile in 1974, and Patricio Guzmán compiled La Batalla de Chile in 1975 from footage taken during the rise of the Unidad Popular. The reels were smuggled out of Chile during the dictatorship and later used to create the documentary about that footage called Chile: Obstinate Memory (1977). During the post dictatorship period The City of the Photographers (2006) profiled the journalists and photographers who contributed to the end of the dictatorship, Elizabeth Farnsworth and Patricio Lanfranco’s The Judge and the General depicted the narrative of a formerly conservative judge who attempted to legally charge Pinochet for the human rights violations committed during the dictatorship.

Guzmán’s Nostalgia for the Light (2010) and The diary of Agustín (2008) figure amongst the documentary films that take up the topic of the excavation of the past (Pino-Ojeda 170). These films rely on fact-based narratives and testimonies, they are films that “carry out a meticulous process of forensic memory” (170). An overarching theme in these documentaries is that they depict forensic professionals as “objective witnesses” “who must interpret, compose, and communicate intelligible messages about this traumatic past” (171).

Larrain’s films about dictatorship are fictional. Tony Manero (2008), Post Mortem (2010), No (2012) comprise a trilogy that take place against the backdrop of the dictatorship. Fiction has been a more controversial medium for the portrayal of the
dictatorship in Chile. Nike Jung writes that “after an initial peak in the early 1990s, the recent past all but disappeared from Chilean fiction films, while the topic continued to thrive in the documentary format” (120). Jung may have forgotten the international success of Andrés Wood’s fictional Machuca (2004), which addresses the same time period as Post Mortem: the fall of the Unidad Popular, the military coup d’état and brutal violence at the beginning of the dictatorship. Yet Machuca is configured from the innocent perspective of children. I believe that part of the film’s popularity comes from this configuration. When confronted with the brutality of the history of the dictatorship, like children viewers can imagine themselves as innocent. Larraín’s films portray characters that are ambivalent; for Larraín, as well as other younger citizens who were born after the coup, the events of those initial days have always been something reported second-hand, a mixture of facts, fictions and conjecture, imagined rather than lived. Some believe that historical fiction amounts to “sacrilege” as it “transgresses the boundaries between documenting history as verifiable truth” (Jung 118). But, as Jung points out, “fictionalizations can play an important part in the process of understanding the past in emotional and sensual terms” (121).

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1 Even the 2015 film Colonia starring Emma Watson about the Colony of Dignity, directed by Florian Gallenberger struggled to find distribution in Chile. It finally debuted in the Centro Arte de Alameda, but did not screen in national commercial cinemas.

2 Although I did not include a discussion of television series in this chapter, it is important to mention that two Chilean teleseries have portrayed topics relating to the dictatorship. The bicentennial program Los Ochenta (2008) was a smashing television success and ran for 7 consecutive seasons. Los archivos del Cardenal (2011) was not as successful and ran for just 2 seasons.
Like Eltit’s performative practice in the previous chapter, Larraín’s fictionalized account of the days following the coup exposes the gaps that exist in bureaucratic documents and questions the ability to ascertain facts from the supposedly “objective” perspective of bureaucratic accounts of the past. Larraín puts into question the creation and performance of forensic investigations collected into autopsy reports, death certificates and the paperwork of forensic investigations. He posits bureaucrats as accomplices of the dictatorship (though sometimes acting unknowingly or unwillingly). The film destabilizes the notions of “objectivity,” “truth,” and “science” in histories that are constructed from bureaucratic and forensic documents. What is more, by fictionalizing bureaucracy Post Mortem raises the question of what other fictions exist within the bureaucratic archive.

4. 2 An Autopsy of History

Post Mortem was inspired by the autopsy report of Salvador Allende, the most contested autopsy in Chilean history. Larraín became fascinated with a small but significant detail that he noticed while examining the report sometime after the public release of the document in 2000. Amongst the names listed of the prominent doctors who had conducted and attended the autopsy—Dr. Carlos Ybar, José Vásquez and Dr. Tomás Tobar Pinochet—Larraín spotted the name “Mario Cornejo” in the first few lines (see fig. 23). It was the only name within the entire document that he didn’t recognize. Intrigued, Larraín discovered that Cornejo was once a bureaucratic functionary at the
morgue who happened to be present on the day that Allende died. The original Cornejo was no longer living but his son (also named Mario Cornejo) held the same position at the morgue as his late father. Larrain used this initial investigation as basis for Post Mortem, which he explains is a fictional exploration of the anonymous, everyday people who bear witness to monumental historical events (Lucca).

For Larrain, the report that inspired the film was about more than just Allende’s death. He remarks, “I read Salvador Allende’s official autopsy, and I found it to be an autopsy of Chile itself” (Lucca). On the one hand, autopsies serve as a way to analyze what happens to a body after death. On the other hand, “autopsy is also a way of looking at one’s own self […] the subject as subject of death” (Klaver 92).
During the dictatorship and for nearly a decade thereafter, sparse information regarding Allende’s death was available to the public. Immediately after the coup d’état, the military prohibited public funerals or any kind of public mourning for Allende. Officials interred the body of the deposed leader in his family’s crypt in the coastal town of Viña del Mar. The burial took place under the close watch of top military officials and in the presence of only his widow, Hortensia Bussi, who was promptly exiled to Mexico afterward. The first official document released after Allende had died was a death certificate. It took one year and ten months before someone—presumably the family’s attorney—completed the formality of registering the death at the civil registry service office on July 7, 1975. The cause of death was stated in obtuse medical terms as “cervical oral encephalitic cranial gunshot wound.” Until 1990, this document remained suppressed and only the military’s official statement that Allende had killed himself had been released to the public.

The official discourse of the state and eyewitness accounts of people who were in the Moneda Presidential Palace during the coup d’état insist that Allende killed himself. Yet, Allende’s supporters and friends were convinced he had been killed. Considering the number of potentially faked suicides and suspicious deaths related to the dictatorship, conspiracy theories are not unfounded. (Recall that in the second chapter we learned of the suspicious suicide of the bureaucrat Guillermo Osorio who processed the request for Carlos Prats’s passport and the unsolved stabbing of ex-DINA agent
Enrique Arancibia.) Chileans are split roughly 50-50 on the topic and political views shape peoples’ opinions on the topic. When a survey was administered in 2000, 81.8% of those interviewed on the political “right” thought that he had committed suicide, whereas 35.5% of those interviewed who considered themselves to the political “left” thought that he had committed suicide (Benítez 31). Former military officials resisted releasing documentation related to Allende’s death, even after the transition to democracy. Because of the military regime’s lack of transparency, both in the years during and after the dictatorship Chileans speculated about whether or not the official account of events represented the truth. Finally, in 2000 journalist Mónica González (the same journalist who uncovered the files related to the Prats case in Buenos Aires) published in her book Chile. La conjura. Los mil y un días del Golpe photographs of the autopsy report alongside an additional report that had been produced by police investigators (Benítez 117). Although both reports contained detailed information about the scene and body—down to the cataloguing the items that Allende had had in his pockets—they did little to provide definitive answers. In ambiguous terms, which I will repeat here in the original Spanish that reflects the uniquely passive grammatical statement, the conclusions stated: “El disparo ha podido ser hecho por la propia persona” (The shot could have been made by the person himself) (141).
4. 3 Corpses and the National Corpus

The thematic locus of Post Mortem is the morgue, the space of forensic inquiry where autopsies are performed, dictated, and recorded. In the days following September 11, 1973 the morgues of Santiago received an influx of corpses, the initial victims of the military raids. In an effort to maintain a semblance of order and to prevent the spread of disease (and the collective affect of dis-ease) the military needed to promptly remove the corpses from public view. Although the regime frequently utilized spectacles of military might and specters of death to instill fear of rebellion, to leave bodies decaying in the streets would have communicated a kind of barbarism and chaos that the regime purported to combat. The corpse is such a terrifying cultural image, not only because of its decay, smell and fluids, but also because of what it represents. “[R]efuse and corpses” serve as uncanny specters of death, abject is reminders of what we “thrust aside in order to live” (Kristeva 3). If one corpse sends a message, thousands of them sound an alarm.

In both the film and after the 1973 military attack, bodies were dumped at the morgue by the truckload. Estimates approximate that these sites—which had been accustomed to receiving an average number of 10 bodies per day—nearly quadrupled that number in the immediate aftermath of the coup (Bonnefoy). By the end of October, 1973 the Servicio Médico Legal had received over 1,177 bodies, nearly one third of the estimated number of the victims of the entire 17 year of dictatorship (Bonnefoy). To add to the confusion, family members and friends of the missing gathered outside of the
Santiago’s morgues (see fig. 24) seeking identifications of loved ones. Because of the increased workload that the carnage of the military overthrow put on the workers of the morgue, everyday bureaucrats from the Civil Registry Service had to provide additional support in order to process and identify the bodies (Bonnefoy). Whether or not they agreed with the politics behind the coup, by just performing their jobs these government officials became accomplices to the initial campaign of death and “social cleansing” that the government had performed.

4.4 Undercurrents of political tensions, residues of violence

In crafting *Post Mortem*, Larraín insinuates, rather than overtly illustrates the polarized political climate and historical spectacles of violence that characterized September of 1973. Although Larraín depicts the materiality of the victims by showing the physical bodies in the morgue, the film manifests visual spectacles of violence—such as the actual killing of the victims and the dramatic bombing of the Moneda palace—indirectly, off screen. Instead, Larraín relies on traces of violence to suggest, rather than overtly depict the action. In the same mode, the escalating political tensions between Allende and military supporters are portrayed as existing just under the surface of the action of the film. Using objects such as papers as visual stand-ins for the bodies of victims, Larraín immediately draws a connection between real bodies that were once lived in and the documents and material effects that survive them. In some cases these materials are the only remaining remnants once connected to their lives.

The beginning of *Post Mortem* opens with a shot filmed from underneath a tank as it rolls through the streets of Santiago (fig. 25) as it bulldozes over the material destroyed in the process of the coup such as scattered and shredded papers, trash, and debris. This shot recalls a famous photograph taken by Dutch photographer Chas Gerretson outside the Moneda presidential palace the morning of the military coup d’état (see fig. 26). Gerretson captures detained Allende officials who were lined up in a
row on the streets in front of a tank in order to threaten them with a crushing, obliterating death if they were to disobey.

Figure 25: Opening sequence, Screenshot from Post Mortem, dir. Pablo Larraín (Kino Lorber, 2010; DVD).

Rather than show characters that are steadfast in their political inclinations, Larraín makes them confused, ambivalent, or contradictory. During the conversation that takes place amongst coworkers before the government takeover has occurred, Mario overhears Dr. Castillo declare his support for Allende. Dr. Castillo declares: “The president doesn’t agree with me, but the solution is in weapons. We need to arm the village.” He starts to chant “Ho Chi Minh! Ho Chi Minh! Fight ‘til the end!” and the entire lunch table except for Mario joins in. Then, later in the film when the military takes over the hospital, this same character agrees without hesitation to support the military officials who oversee operations at the morgue following the coup d’état. This portrayal of ambiguity contrasts with nonfictional accounts of the period that often portray people either in support or opposition of the dictatorship or foreground political tensions. Post Mortem resists the tendency to need to classify its protagonists as belonging to one group or another.

In another scene that takes place before the bombing of the Moneda on the day that Nancy is fired, Mario gives Nancy a ride home from the theater. As they drive through the city, they happen upon a large group of leftist protestors marching in support of President Allende. The crowd moves directly toward Mario’s car, and before he is able to back up and change direction, the protestors engulf Mario’s vehicle. Mario idles his car and waits for the crowd to pass by and Mario and Nancy are sealed off in
the vehicle, both literally and figuratively, from the current of moving protestors⁵ (see fig. 27). When Nancy recognizes one of the protestors (who later turns out to be a love interest, Victor) and he encourages her to join him. Nancy objects at first but then she joins him in the march. As she joins the crowd she removes her blonde wig to reveal her dark hair, and tosses it through the open window into Mario’s car. As she moves from one space to another, she morphs her appearance to match the environment, demonstrating a duality and inability to fit within one political group or another.

Figure 27: Victor pulls Nancy out of Mario’s car into the crowd, Screenshot from Post Mortem, dir. Pablo Larraín (Kino Lorber, 2010; DVD).

The purpose of this march in solidarity with Allende right before the coup was to create a visual display of support for the government and show, through the presence of

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⁵ This scene is one of several visual and thematic references to Bernardo Bertolucci’s 1970 drama, Il Conformista, about a fascist bureaucrat named Marcello Clerici, turned undercover agent. At the end of the film, when Mussolini’s fascist government falls, both Clerici and his fellow friend Italo, a fellow fascist sympathizer, are walking through the streets when they get caught walking the wrong way against a crowd of anti-fascist demonstrators. Marcello uses the opportunity to turn on his friend and accuse him of a murder that he actually had committed, and Italo gets physically swept away by the wave of moving bodies.
a mass of bodies, their collective strength. Soon thereafter, however, this group of political activists and everyday citizens that simply exercised their right to engage in the democratic political process became the same group that the military regime hunted. This scene directly precedes the shot of Nancy deceased and laid out on the autopsy table. Because the viewer knows that the coup d’état is right around the corner, this unraveling of the plot suggests that perhaps Nancy died as a result of her involvement in this leftist movement, or simply being present at the wrong place at the wrong time.

On the day that the anticipated coup d’état takes place the action occurs off-screen, just beyond our view. Instead of seeing recreations of the images that have been encrusted into the collective memory of the country and pictured in historical documentaries such as the bombing of the Moneda palace and scenes of large groups of people being rounded up, squeezed into the backs of trucks, and being carried away. In *Post Mortem* the viewer only sees indirect results of the military overthrow and traces of the aftermath. Mario had slept very little the night before the coup, as he spent almost the entire night peering out his window waiting for Nancy to arrive home. Engrossed in his worries and the rituals of his daily life, when planes fly through the sky and noises echo through the streets, Mario is busy in the shower, brushing his teeth. The actual event of the coup d’état registers on the screen as relatively ambiguous far off noises, rumbles, and vibrations.
At this moment, the perspective of the camera shifts, filmed from the exterior of his apartment, showing Mario through the window of his house. We hear the sounds of military planes in the sky and hear the sounds of commotion, shouts, and gunshots coming from across the street. The sounds of a dog’s cries—Nancy’s family dog Pituca—finally attract Mario’s attention, and he promptly gets dressed and walks across the street to see what has happened. He finds the house of Nancy’s family in complete disarray with furniture turned over and surfaces covered with strewn clothing and belongings. Both Mario and viewers observe the violence of the coup d’état through the indexical traces of the mangled metal remains of cars crushed in the streets, smoke rising from their still hot engines. Larraín represents the coup d’état as a residual force inscribed in matter—much like the quiet way that bureaucracy operates, dwelling in symbols, procedures and papers.
Witnessing this historic moment through the lens of Mario’s life is not unlike the experience of an everyday person alive at the time of the event. While the people involved in politics, the military, or present in the Moneda on the day of the siege tell captivating and harrowing testimonies about their experiences, most people living in Chile at the time were going about their everyday lives on a Tuesday morning. Because of the advisories to stay in their homes and the curfews that the military imposed once the coup d’état took place, most Chileans experienced that day without knowing of the damage that had taken place in the downtown until they discovered it through the filter of the radio and television news. Furthermore, if Mario is our bureaucratic filter, many times monumental historical events are experienced as ellipses in bureaucratic archives. When catastrophic events occur, the creation of bureaucratic documents comes to a halt, or a change is detected in documents and records in a way that operates in silence. As I will discuss, the coup d’état translated into a breaking of bureaucratic protocol. When disasters strike, the archives become disheveled, and paperwork is either never created or goes missing.

4.5 Bureaucratic Aesthetics of the Everyday

After discovering that Nancy is dead, the film resumes its chronological plot and we find out more about Mario and the morgue in which he works. In addition to character development and plot, Larraín uses technical aspects of the film to depict the bureaucratic atmosphere of the morgue that can be sensed through aspects such as the
color palette, pacing, quality of the images, and sounds. As a fictional film created in a highly controlled atmosphere, *Post Mortem*’s aesthetic and technical aspects cultivate a bureaucratic mood to the film that becomes a character in itself. Like the visual and literary artistic practices we have seen in Núñez and Eltit, to create a film is to make visible certain images in deliberate and strategic ways. These filmic strategies produce a film that encompasses the mundane experience of history, the side that is not always emphasized in nonfiction.

*Post Mortem* displays characteristics of the critical term “slow cinema” that has been delineated in recent decades by the criticism of Michel Ciment, Ira Jaffe, Tiago de Luca, and Nuno Barradas Jorge. While some of the qualities present in *Post Mortem* serve the superficial purpose of creating a film with an “art house” aesthetic, there is critical meaning to be gleaned from slow film. Slow films create a “contemplative aesthetics of ‘presence’ that provides a springboard for an ethics of seeing based on the principles of recognition, reflection and empathy” (Luca 19). Furthermore, they appear to capture an aspect of unfiltered, unedited “reality.” As de Luca points out, slow films cut across “the boundaries of fiction, documentary and experimental film” (3). Although they have been screening in cinemas for decades, describing film with the critical term “slow” traces back to the just the early 2000s (1). Films with slow pacing, long takes, and a noted lack of editing have been created all over the world, with examples from “Argentina, China, Iran, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and the United States” (Jaffe 3). Jaffe notes that
“several of these movies and their directors remain largely unknown to the general public” in the United States (2). The term “slow cinema”—ironically slow to catch on in the otherwise action-packed commercial cinema of the United States—did not even appear in English language film criticism until 2010 (Luca 2).

Beginning just days before the September 11 military coup, the main focus is not the turbulent political events and tensions that were building at that time, but rather the stale routines of Mario’s everyday life and the strange love story between Mario and his neighbor Nancy. Before the coup d’état takes place, Mario’s world is marked by the solitary routine of moving between his sparse lower-middle class apartment and his place of employment. Devoid of voice-overs or narration, we get to know Mario through the lens of his actions, which in the beginning of the film consist of his daily routines. Larraín includes even the most banal details in his depiction of Cornejo’s solitary life, scenes of him brushing his teeth, showering, preparing a fried egg. When he arrives at work, he turns on the light switch and is greeted not by his coworkers, but the hum of fluorescent lights. In the relative silence of his workplace, our attention is drawn to the sound of Mario’s echoing footsteps as he shuffles down the corridor.

In Post Mortem the qualities that render a film “slow” also insinuate the languid pace associated with stereotypes of government bureaucracy; Mario reflects the parallels between a lack of emotion and dispassionate objectivity, repetitive procedures and mundane life. His character embodies the characteristics that are usually attributed to
bureaucratic spaces, materials and discourse. Personifying bureaucracy portrays the abstract concept as a dynamic agent of history. It gives life to the documents, the processes that generate them, and brings our attention to their makers. Neutral, nondescript and bland—described by a film reviewer as looking “half-embalmed” (Scott)—Mario has a grey pallor to his skin, lifeless silver hair and a drab wardrobe featuring muted shades of beige, brown, and blue. Another distinct quality about Cornejo’s character is his “flat affect”—a diminished capacity for emotional expressiveness. Throughout Post Mortem, Cornejo speaks in a monotone voice and shows few signs of emotion. In the few instances when he breaks into a smile, it barely registers on his face as more than a smirk. Even in the scene when he asks Nancy to marry him, he does so in the same nonchalant tone that he used to order his restaurant meal. Mario’s narrow emotional range, is just one of several examples that show that “[t]he main characters in these movies usually lack emotional, or at least expressive, range and mobility” (Jaffe 3).

The repetitive monotony of Mario’s life reflects the procedural nature of his bureaucratic work. As Mario’s primary responsibility is the transcriptions of autopsies, he is present when the director, Dr. Castillo and the director’s assistant, Sandra, perform the formulaic procedure on human cadavers. We witness the examination of the bloated body of a morbidly obese woman in front of a small audience of students. As Dr. Castillo dictates his observations in specialized medical discourse barely comprehensible
to the uninitiated observer, the sounds of the scalpel cutting through subcutaneous tissue fill the room as Sandra makes an incision in the woman’s chest. For a moment in this scene, Dr. Castillo breaks from his script of the autopsy protocol, stating with empathy, “Poor woman, she was beaten to death,” but promptly instructs Mario to strike the humanizing, emotional comment from the record and returns to his rehearsed, “objective” discourse. This action reminds us of what is “struck” from the record of history when dehumanized objectivity takes precedence over empathetic emotional responses.

Larraín immediately cuts from the autopsy scene to a scene of the employees sitting around a communal lunch table, mechanically chewing their meals. This juxtaposition of a dead body laid out on a table with the meal is nauseating, but encapsulates the reality of working with death while still living daily life. As Mario and Sandra eat in relative silence, their flesh-colored clothing blends into the beige tile behind them (see fig. 29). The fusion of the characters with their surroundings suggests an erosion of the boundaries that demarcate the living characters and the atmosphere of death that dwells in the morgue, of death “encroaching upon the living” (Kristeva 3). After the meal, Larraín shows the characters as they use the restroom and brush their teeth side by side (see fig. 30) to further emphasize the filmic focus on mundane, seemingly insignificant activities. This scene also portrays the human ability to compartmentalize and to grow accustomed—complacent—to death and violence when
exposed on a regular basis. This scene reminds me that the perpetrators of the dictatorship—not only the torturers and executioners—but also the doctors who observed the torture sessions in order to oversee the amount of trauma that the body could withstand while under torture—returned to their lives and families at the end each day.

Figure 29: Sandra and Mario eat lunch in the morgue break room, Screenshot from Post Mortem, dir. Pablo Larraín (Kino Lorber, 2010; DVD).

Figure 30: Mario, Sandra, and Dr. Castillo brush their teeth after lunch, Screenshot from Post Mortem, dir. Pablo Larraín (Kino Lorber, 2010; DVD).
As in the examples of hearing footsteps, the opening and closing of doors and the hum of fluorescent lights, the soundtrack of the film consists of everyday sounds usually considered to be background noise. Void of any non-diegetic music until the closing credits, the sounds further amplify the dull, repetitive nature of the characters actions. Underscoring the everyday sounds present in “silence” (which is really not silent at all) is a technique used by “directors who wish to foreground visuality, temporality, and slowness in their films” (Lim 120). Even if Post Mortem projects the appearance of a lack of editing in its inclusion and emphasis of banal details and background noise that are usually edited out of footage, the technical aspects of the film are highly controlled and deliberate.

Larraín and cinematographer Sergio Armstrong were meticulous in their technical approaches to shooting films that took place during the dictatorship. Larraín and his team have become known for their use of technology that is authentic to the historical period in which their movies take place. For example, when they filmed No (2012) set in the late 1980s they used the U-matic videocassette and 4x3 aspect ratio to deliver a quality of filming that was true to the era (Marlow). They recorded Post Mortem using 1960s anamorphic lenses from Russia, the same kind that had been used by Andrei Tarkovsky. The result is an eerie, dimly lit appearance on film. Even the bright

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4 No (2012) is the third and final part of Larraín “dictatorship trilogy. The first movie is Larraín’s Tony Manero (2008) followed by the second, Post Mortem (2010).
red colors seen in articles of clothing, stains of blood, and Mario’s car appear muted, tempered by a green-grey filter. The slightly blurry images appear murky as if they were visual metaphors for the distorted lens of memory itself.

In addition to constructing an image that is authentic to the time period and draws on the types of technology being used during the 1960s and early 1970s, this type of lens allowed Larraín to achieve an exceptionally widescreen aspect ratio of 2.66. Compared to the 1.375 aspect ratio considered to be the “academy standard,” *Post Mortem* is almost twice as wide. The widescreen format “dramatically shifts the possibilities available to the filmmaker in relation to the mise-en-scène, framing and composition” (Kuhn and Westwell 452). Furthermore, widescreen technology exemplifies the intersection of technologies of “visuality” for the both theaters of war and cinema. Originally intended for shooting aerial surveillance recordings during World War II, when used in the movie theater widescreen technologies can be used to trigger “sensorial responses [in] audiences” (G. Taylor). Viewers “feel more fully immersed in the story world, with multiple actions taking place across the frame and within a shot” (Kuhn and Westwell 452). The original Hollywood blockbusters that utilized these widescreen aspect ratios were usually films that featured complex action

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5 Widescreen aspect ratios became commonplace starting in the 1950s, when the proliferation of televisions in everyday households caused the motion picture industry to seek new innovations to bring paying audiences back into the movie theaters. The United States’ version of the technology called “Cinerama,” premiered in 1952 in United States theaters, a technology that had been derived from a multi-camera, multi-projector system invented by the military during World War II.
sequences or expansive shots of landscapes. Conversely, in *Post Mortem*, the vast space of the screen captures quiet, mostly indoor scenes, in which little action actually happens. The wide aspect ratio in which *Post Mortem* is recorded makes viewers even more aware of the attention the film grants to the minor details of the everyday, portraying mundane actions like intricate action sequences.

Larraín pairs this wide aspect ratio with the long-take, so that certain shots are drawn out longer than those with the cutting rates to which everyday viewers are accustomed. The result is a film with a slow pace, so slow, in fact, that it feels languid and monotonous. For example, in the initial scenes of *Post Mortem*, when Mario watches for Nancy out of the window of his drab apartment, the scene lasts for almost a minute and a half. Instead of using the camera to follow Mario’s movements or zoom in on action, the camera remains stationary, so that it is Mario who moves throughout the composition of the shot. Film theory explains that a “longstanding technique for intensifying a viewer’s affective experience” is to cut each shot at a faster rate (Blondal and Heft 2). In turn, a slow rate of cutting builds suspense (2). In *Post Mortem*, the film builds suspense, but the long-awaited “action” never occurs. Instead, viewers are left with an uneasy sensation, and the film denies the viewers the kind of advancement of the plot.
The longest shot contained in Post Mortem goes on for an excruciatingly 3 minutes and 40 seconds of Nancy and Mario sitting at the dinner table in relative silence, inexplicably sobbing (see fig. 31). This eruption of misplaced emotion remains unexplained throughout the film. This is the only scene that depicts Mario showing any overt emotional response at all. What is surprising is that even though the film seems to utilize long cutting-rates from time to time, most of the film is edited using a rate that is more on par with mainstream movies and television shows. The difference is that in Post Mortem, the long-takes are significantly longer than the other takes in the film. Compared to the fast pace of news programs that disseminate the facts of a story in an objective, efficient and compelling way Post Mortem delivers unregulated, misplaced emotion which provokes a sensation of fatigue, discomfort and boredom.
4.6 Partitioned Space

The second sequence of the film—the moment we are introduced to Mario—depicts him as he looks out his window, constantly checking the street. He steps out of his house to occupy himself with the task of watering down the sidewalk in front of his home while he waits. The camera remains stationary, and instead of following Mario’s action, it continues to shoot from the same perspective as Mario walks off camera to go out the front door, and appears again on the other side of the window. As he reaches for the hose and turns on the water, he moves through yet another area of divided space, onto the other side of the fence. Looking through these architectural divisions we are made aware of the partitions that divide up the filmic space of Post Mortem. A recurring visual motif throughout the film, Larraín frames his shots looking through windows, doorframes and fences so that these partitions are a part of the shot. Although sometimes framing is simply a method of making a shot more interesting, this technique makes the viewers aware of the visual planes in which the action occurs, and emphasizes how the characters move throughout the space of the camera. The partitioning of space, or the “closing up of space, dividing it into determinate intervals, establishing clear cut breaks” is one of the aspects of society that is shaped by the “aesthetics of bureaucracy” (Handelman 75). Partitions organize space, categorize people, and denote which people belong in which area. Foucault traces partitioning to
the imposition of order during the spread of the plague in medieval Europe (Foucault *Discipline & Punish* 195).

![Image](image1.png)

**Figure 32: Mario looks out window, Screenshot from *Post Mortem*, dir. Pablo Larraín (Kino Lorber, 2010; DVD).**

The repeated representations of partitioned, closed and enclosed space on screen alludes to some of the rhetoric being utilized in relation to the Cold War at the time of the coup d’état. One of the predominant geographical military strategies used during the 20th century was known as “containment.” First introduced by French Prime Minister George Clemenceau and adopted by United States President Woodrow Wilson, the term *cordone santaire* (that Wilson translated as quarantine), was a theory that aimed to “contain” the spread of communism by creating a physical buffer zone, treating the eradication of political ideologies like a disease. This concept played out after the coup d’état in Chile when the military government enacted campaigns to physically round up, detain and imprison any opposing political activists—physically separating them from the rest of society. Furthermore, regardless of an individual’s political affiliation,
with the restriction of constitutional rights such as the freedom of assembly and the dismantling of unions resulted in more social fragmentation. Yet *Post Mortem* focuses on the micro, rather than macroscopic effects of this segregating rhetoric. The film communicates a personal perspective that a viewer can relate to their own personal experience that reveals the ways that bureaucratic ordering and logic are enacted through everyday space.

The use of partitions also emphasizes the act of looking in which Mario engages frequently, as he observes what happens in the space of the street, or in the space of his neighbors’ home across the street. We are made aware of Mario’s ocular function—as both witness and voyeur—as he is filmed looking through the thresholds of windows and doorframes. Looking through the threshold of windows or doorframes also produces the sensation that, as viewers, we are on the outside looking in, observing action or hearing dialogue from an intimate space. Since the viewer is separated from this space, the acting of witnessing or watching these scenes can imply a voyeuristic or invasive gaze.

Larrain has stated that he considers Mario’s gaze to be that of the “camera, a point of view” (Lucca). I take this statement a step further and see in Mario the bureaucratic point of view, from which the state visualizes the nation. If at the heart of each gaze is an “exercise of power and control” (Denzin 5), *Post Mortem* reminds us that being able to see something—visualizing it—is a prerequisite to domination.
Throughout the film, Mario’s character moves through the world in a way that barely registers with the other characters—as if he were invisible. Undetected, Mario penetrates the intimate spaces of others and observes their actions, conversations, and emotions. While many iterations of the notion of the gaze operate in the film, the three versions that Mario replicates include the gaze of the voyeur as he watches Nancy, the investigative (or clinical) gaze he practices in the morgue, and the surveillance-oriented gaze of the state that becomes present when the military takes over the morgue and the bureaucratic apparatus following the coup.

### 4.7 Anatomical Theaters: The Autopsy and the Cabaret

At first glance, Mario and Nancy’s respective places of work are polar opposites. Seated at a desk, Mario deals with the dead and transcribes other people’s words onto paper. Nancy performs choreographed dance movements in front of live audiences. Yet, Giuliana Bruno illuminates the role of the female bodyscape in the convergence of anatomical body exhibits and fin de siècle movie theaters in an arcade in Naples (240). Bruno identifies a “corporeal form of visuality” common to both the exhibition and the movie screen (241). She compares the geometric arrangement of bodies on screen to the function of anatomical dissection: “Constructing spaces of light and shadow, obscurity and visibility, the filmic text transforms the human body and the body of things into a geometry of shapes, surfaces, volumes, and lines” (241-2). Larraín contrasts two different kinds of theaters where anatomical displays take place in front of audiences,
the cabaret and the autopsy. Using Bruno’s analysis as a critical bridge, we can draw connections between the cabaret theater where Nancy works called the Bim Bam Bum, and morgue where autopsies are performed.

This historical theater in downtown Santiago was considered the “heart” of the Bohemian sector of the downtown and reached the height of its popularity in the 1950s. Described as a “a piece of Europe” (La Cuarta) the venue—reminiscent of French cabarets at the end of the 19th century—hosted some of the most affluent members of Chilean society before its decline. At the time of the coup, the theater was struggling to maintain the image of a “decent” establishment, and its portrayal in Post Mortem foreshadows the socioeconomic transformation that will occur in this sector of the city both during and after the dictatorship due to the strict curfews imposed during the dictatorship and the migration of wealth to the outskirts of the city.⁶

In the film, when Mario walks up to the ticket window and attempts to buy a ticket he discovers the cashier and the owner engrossed in an argument. Even though he makes repeated requests to buy a ticket, Mario goes completely unnoticed. Although their conversation is taking place in a hushed whisper behind a pane of glass, the viewer

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⁶ Aside from the strict impositions of censure that took place during the dictatorship, The Bim Bam Bum suffered during the initial dictatorship period because of the curfews put into place that limited travel at night. As the more wealthy members of Santiago moved to the outskirts of the city, closer to the mountains, Santiago’s downtown became known as a dangerous area where “undesirable” member of society such as homeless people and thieves circulated. Today, the downtown serves mostly as a business district, peppered with a unique kind of Chilean business that emerged at the end of the dictatorship called “Cafés con piernas.” These businesses combine the concepts of a European café and a strip club, where semi-naked waitresses serve coffee to a clientele of mostly male businessmen. Some of these venues also operate as off-the-books locations for prostitution.
watches over Mario’s shoulder as he is forced to overhear their conversation. The owner berates the cashier for letting “perverts” into the theater because they “masturbate while watching the show” and “fill the seats with semen.” The cashier emphatically objects, explaining that these customers had paid for their tickets like everyone else. As their discussion suggests, the type of entertainment that the theater was meant to provide negotiated a fine line between capitalizing on the theatrical desire of the audience and performing erotic, or even pornographic subject matter. But the real of the body—the abject bodily fluids of anatomical dissections—contaminate the cabaret theater.

Although the dancers’ bodies are only partially naked and the show refrains from displaying more than glimpses of nudity or graphic sexual content, the theater owner struggles to exercise control over carnal impulses.

The type of dance performed at Bim Bam Bum is reminiscent of synchronized movement in symmetrical formations first made famous by the “precision dance” British troupe called the Tiller Girls. Siegfried Kracauer describes this kind of dance as “the mass ornament,” a “visual formation of bodies moving in unison” (67). The visual appeal of these dances comes not only from the physical attractiveness or movements of individual female bodies but also from the organization of these bodies in synchronized movements throughout space (see fig. 33). Kracauer points out that in addition to the elaborate formations created on stage, the so-called “masses” or audience is also organized in a hierarchical spatial pattern, “arranged in row upon ordered row” (67).
Kracauer wrote his essay on the mass ornament in the vividly modernist atmosphere of Weimar Germany in 1927. Although separated by nearly 50 years, the perennial visual appeal of the mass ornament—perfectly coordinated bodies arranged in mechanized formations—foreshadows the efforts of the military state to craft its own, ideal national body. Like a visual representation of bureaucratic order, the mass ornament is spectacular for its organization of bodies in space. This fascination with a system that functions like well-oiled machine further reflects how the ideals of an optimized capitalist production process eroded into the aesthetics of entertainment and defined what was considered to be a visually pleasing spectacle on stage.

In both the mass ornament and the dissection theater, the body commands a central role in entertainment, theaters and cinema alike. Comparing early cinemas to anatomical lessons, Bruno writes:

Their common terrain is a discourse of investigation and the fragmentation of the body. The spectacle of the anatomy lesson exhibits an analytic drive, an obsession with the body, upon which acts of dismemberment are performed. Such “analytic” desire is present in the very language of film. (241)

Whereas lives bodies moving in unison comprise the mass ornament, in autopsy the dead body is dissected and sectioned off into parts. Foucault emphasizes that in the 18th century death was viewed as “that absolute beyond which there was neither life nor disease, but its disorganizations were all morbid phenomena” (The Birth of the Clinic 141). Pathological anatomists dissected corpses in order to analyze death and its effects on the body and gain mastery over death through knowledge. While the cabaret stage arranges otherwise fragmented individual bodies in organizational designs across a visual field, dissections attempt to fragment the body in order to organize it into the semantic field of knowledge.

Even if the mass ornament is created through the unity many collective bodies, the creation of the ornament relies on discrimination. When Mario lingers outside the open doorway of the dressing room and watches Nancy, she is out of costume and seated at a vanity arguing with her boss, Patricio. From their conversation, it becomes clear that Patricio has just fired her. Patricio tells her: “Your clothing falls off. You don’t have any tits. You look like a little boy.” Her rejection is two-fold. Although the owner
no longer considers Nancy to be individually appealing enough to perform onstage, her firing also results from the fact that her body no longer fits into the collective appeal of the Bim Bam Bum dancers. Like a faulty mechanical part of the mass ornament machine, Nancy no longer fits the specifications of the group and is cast off.

Film, a later derivation of the theater, emulates the ocular analytics of the anatomical examination that classifies and synthesizes. Celluloid film, especially, breaks the body down into static images that are cut apart and restructured (Bruno 241). Before autopsy became a procedure exclusive to the medical establishment, human dissections and anatomies were forms of visual public spectacles. The same audiences that attended the executions of criminals viewed the dissections of the dead as a form of entertainment, “as popular as the executions themselves” (Klaver 6). The language of “performing” an autopsy is evidence of its connection to a kind of anatomical theater, which connects to its early origins when autopsies took place in front of audiences as a source of entertainment. In Larraín’s film, both the cabaret and the autopsy suite are sites where bodies are on display and objectified in some way. For the dancers, on stage, they are no longer whole women, but instead objectified bodies that move in choreographed formations.

In the autopsy suite the deceased are also objectified, transformed into cadavers or specimens. The body itself becomes a version of Kracauer’s mass ornament, where autopsy attendees observe carefully coordinated systems of human anatomy and the
practice of autopsy attempts to organize the disorganizing process of death. Human
dissections and anatomies were often carried out on criminals and as Bruno reminds us,
female bodies. Aside from the autopsy of Allende, the two other autopsies performed in
*Post Mortem* are on female bodies—Nancy’s autopsy that takes place after the coup
d’État and the autopsy of the woman who was beaten to death before the coup d’État.
Although Allende is not a woman, performing an autopsy on his body is still an act of
desecration historically reserved for criminals and females. Several religions prohibit
autopsies. In mystical terms, an autopsy prevents future resurrection. In addition to
physically splitting a cadaver open, it tears a hole in the psychic subject.

### 4.8 Forensic Theater or an Autopsy of the Autopsy

What is at stake in the practice of autopsy? Why does the *truth* behind Allende’s
cause of death matter? In 2009, the Spanish news program *En Portada* aired an episode
titled *Salvador Allende: Caso Cerrado*. One of Allende’s closest confidantes who had served
as his director of the press Carlos Jorquera told the program: “The only thing that I want
[…] is that the truth is known. The true truth” (*la verdad verdadera*) (Guardiola). In the 21st
century, forensic inquiry has become the default path to the truth with the idea that
objective, scientific methods can ferret the truth out of the evidence. Many Chileans
believe that forensic science is the only way that they will be able to settle the objective
facts about Allende’s death in order to create a definitive narrative about both his
character and legacy.
The word, “autopsy” is a fusion of both Latin and Greek elements, and translated as “to see with one’s eyes.” Rather than referring to its “medico-legal” connotation that is most common in Western, scientific terms today, its etymology referred to “personal observation, inspection and experience.” The entry in the Real Academia Española echoes this origin, as it defines an autopsy as an “examen visual.” The usage of the word in the medical, scientific context isn’t recorded until the early 19th century. The word “necropsy” is even newer, which shifts the focus onto the cadaver. Using the word “post-mortem,” to refer to an autopsy can also be used in the context of “referring to analyze, in detail, a past event.” In modern society, an autopsy serves an important forensic and legal function, not just to discern an official cause of death, but pronounce it, put it into language, so that it can be both understood and recorded on a death certificate. Even if the cause of death is unclear, the term “undetermined” is pronounced so that the rituals of paperwork and funerals can take place. Once the cause of death is determined, the body is removed, entombed, cremated, or turned into an anonymous scientific specimen, but the death certificate remains as a metonymic representation of the deceased—a bureaucratic placeholder—like a tombstone. Putting Allende’s death into definitive language is crucial to generate narratives about the coup d’état.

Analogous to the courtroom discussed in the second chapter, modern autopsies involve components that are both oral (dictations) and written (documents and reports). The doctor, an authoritative voice we presume to be backed with science, examines the
body put his observations into words. The bureaucratic clerical worker mediates this performance of pathological dictations by transcribing the words—or findings—onto paper. One of the reasons that the pathologist dictates his observations aloud is because his hands are busy opening the cadaver and examining the organs. At the same time, autopsies were spoken aloud—performed—because they originated as a form of entertainment for the audience (Klaver 38). The problem is that despite the bureaucratic discourse that these activities produce, the kind of airtight “assertives” that Lacan outlines in “university discourse,” the truth is not always what we find in autopsies and forensic inquiries. As Larraín depicts in Post Mortem, hiccups, broken protocol, political agendas and chaos can lurk beneath the text of autopsy reports.

Autopsies generate knowledge, which is not to be confused with the “truth.” The modern practice of the autopsy emerged outside of the fields of funerary practices or even of medicine, as a part of the European quest for knowledge. The histories of the terms in the previous paragraph reflect this origin, as their bases have to do with the act of seeing as a form of gaining knowledge. An autopsy is broader in scope than merely a clinical procedure but rather “a searching gaze deployed by the subject to ferret out meaning and significance” (Klaver 3). “[W]hether at a microscope, in the theater, or
reading a book” autopsy is tied to the Western spectator’s quest for knowledge and extends into other activities and contexts (Klaver 3). If as the idiom declares, “knowledge is power” whom does the knowledge generated through autopsy empower? While an autopsy is considered an objective tool to aid in the pursuit of justice, Post Mortem depicts how in the context of the Chilean military state the procedure acts as a statist surveillance practice. As in the case of the abbreviated autopsies depicted in the film, autopsies don’t just identify cadavers so that they can be pronounced as deceased and their family can be informed of their loved one’s demise. They serve as a war-time accounting practice; they confirm the identities of political targets and keep track of how many people—or to use the officer’s term “bajas”—have been killed. Post Mortem unveils that the everyday bureaucrats who produce documentation can also be complicit in the operations of state violence. Or as Mario’s case illustrates, they may actually be murderers themselves. They take the real of the body and write it into signifiers, shaping the story we tell about those deaths, controlling the narratives of history. Bureaucratic paperwork not only may get it wrong, but also lie.

4.9 Staging an Autopsy

In Post Mortem, Larraín depicts the events of the Allende autopsy as improvised chaos. When the military took over the morgue, the employees had little option for anything else but to comply with the demands of the military. This takeover and the compliance of the staff illustrates one of the principles states in Max Weber’s theory on
bureaucratic organization, in which he states that “even in the case of a revolution by force or of occupation by an enemy, the bureaucratic machinery will normally continue to function just as it has for the previous legal government” (Angier 90). When Mario returns to the morgue on the morning of the coup d’état, it is beginning to fill up with bodies. Its previously quiet rooms are bustling with workers and soldiers who are standing guard with guns. The bodies of the dead line the halls, piled on gurneys that are parked wherever there’s an unoccupied space. The military colonel who has been assigned to the morgue directs Dr. Castillo about how to handle the influx of bodies. He explains to the workers that the country is in a state of war, and “in war there are always casualties.” Despite Dr. Castillo’s previous declarations of support for the government of the Popular Unity and his fervent political chants and invocations of communist history, when the military takes over the morgue he cooperates without hesitation.

The officials summon the doctor and functionaries and explain that the team will have to leave the site of the morgue in order to complete an autopsy in a special location. Dr. Castillo explains to Mario that for this autopsy, the protocol will be different. Mario is used to transcribing the autopsy procedures by hand and then transferring them onto typewritten pages using his typewriter at home. But in this case, the report has to be written directly by typewriter. As we see at the beginning of the film, even though it is his occupation, Mario’s skills as a typist are mediocre. Attempting to find an excuse, Mario protests that he will be unable to complete the task because he doesn’t have...
typewriter. Dr. Castillo explains that they can take his secretary’s machine, but, as Mario points out, it’s a newer electric model that he doesn’t know how to use. It quickly becomes apparent that Mario has no choice but to cooperate. As Mario leaves, the coronel states, “Congratulations, you now work for the Chilean Army.” Over his shoulder, on the wall of the office is a portrait of the former President Balmaceda, a historical figure who is often compared to Allende because he was also overthrown in a government coup d’état after refusing to protect the imperial interests of foreign companies in the Chilean nitrate industry. After he fled to Argentina, like Allende, Balmaceda committed suicide.

Ironically, as the scenes progress the military officials also begin to adopt the clinical uniforms used by the staff of the morgue. The coronel directing the autopsy places a white lab coat over his military uniform. As the military soldiers and the staff adopt each other’s clothing it insinuates the increasingly close relationship between the military and the functionaries. In the truck, the electric typewriter occupies a seat of its own as if it were a protagonist in the movie (see fig. 34).
Before any of the personnel climb out, the soldiers unload the typewriter down off the truck as though it were the most important item in the truck. Making us aware of the typewriter’s presence asserts the recording function of the bureaucratic team. But, as we see in the autopsy scene, the records of history are not always perfect representations of what has occurred.

Larraín recreated the scene in the exact same room of the military hospital that had been frozen in time, as it hadn’t been altered since the time that the President’s autopsy took place. Larraín even used standard light bulbs, suspended above the set, in order to film the scene using authentic, “institutional” looking lighting (Lucca). The autopsy performance has an audience; Larraín depicts nearly a dozen military officials,
standing in a formation at the side of the room, observing the procedure. Some of them have on hospital masks, obscuring their identities, and others—such as the person who is referred to as “Coronel” who is presumably Pinochet—are clearly identifiable.

According to the research and interviews that Hermes Benítez conducted about the autopsy, its circumstances, and the documents it generated, it is unclear who exactly had attended the autopsy, as many more people had been present than had been listed on the report.

The script of the scene is not a performance of the exact words of the autopsy documents. Instead, Larraín has the actors perform bits and pieces from the actual report. I presume that the edited version is in order to keep up the pacing of the film and not overwhelm the viewers with a barrage of clinical language. The bits and pieces that Larraín includes in the script touch on the major points of the autopsy: the trajectory of the bullet, the general condition of Allende’s body, and the general observations covered in the document. Larraín makes visible Allende’s body mangled corpse, laid out on an exam table with a huge gaping wound on the top half of his head, exposing the grey brain matter. As the external examination takes place, the otherwise silent room is filled with the sounds of Mario fumbling with the electric typewriter, unable to keep up with the dictation. The machine has a mind of its own and performs carriage returns at

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7 The typewriter is an Underwood Golden Touch Electric Typewriter from the 1950s, with automatic carriage return, which had become popular in office environments in the period following the Second World War.
random as Mario struggles to type. The first person to look over at him is Sandra, who can tell that he cannot keep up with the pace of the exam. Next, Dr. Castillo shifts his attention to Mario and asks him, “Do you have it, Cornejo?” Mario responds, “Not all of it, Doctor.” Aware of his incompetence, the Coronel orders that someone else—who knows how to type—take over the completion of the task. One of the soldiers asks permission before he steps forward, walks over the desk and stands, looming over Mario. For a second, Mario sheepishly looks up at him hesitant to admit his incompetence, before standing up and surrendering his position at the desk. The military typist takes the seat and the exam continues (fig. 35). With this action, the infiltration of the military into bureaucratic recording of history is made visible. In Larraín’s version of history, it is the military, not the bureaucratic functionary who records the crucial findings.

Figure 38: A soldier replaces Mario at the typewriter during Allende’s autopsy, Screenshot from Post Mortem, dir. Pablo Larraín (Kino Lorber, 2010; DVD).
The doctor announces that he will begin the internal exam. Sandra is overcome with emotion. During the exam she uses a blue cloth to cover the body of the president and tucks the edges around his body, tucking him in to sleep. She is unable to make the incision. After another moment of hesitation, Dr. Castillo cannot make the cut, either. Instead he pulls the cover over the cadaver and states:

Conclusions: Cadaver of masculine sex, identified as Salvador Allende Gossens. Cause of death: cervical-buco-cranial encephalic wound, recent, with exit wound. The gunshot is what, in legal medicine is referred to as, ‘close range.’ The shot could have been made by the victim. (Dir. Pablo Larraín)

*Post Mortem* recreates the autopsy scene as a sloppily conducted procedure filled with irregularities, one that Larraín hypothesizes never actually took place. Like much of the film, the defining scene of the movie, the much awaited autopsy scene, doesn’t actually happen. Larraín suspects that since the internal exam never took place the autopsy reports are either forged or estimated and consequently unreliable. It turns out that Larraín’s suspicion was disproved in the second autopsy that was performed in 2011 after the movie debuted. Markings on Allende’s ribs showed evidence of the previous internal exam (Exteberría et al. 1). Even so, as our witnessing of Nancy’s autopsy at the beginning of the film reminds us, even if we know the cause of death—which in Allende’s case was a gunshot wound—we may not know the whole story. Even when conducted in the most perfect circumstances, forensic inquiry is just as much an art as a science.
For many Chileans, they had hoped that gaining access to the truth behind Allende’s death—presumably through forensic inquiry and discourse, would settle the “facts” behind the “official” narrative of history. These historical narratives matter because they hold the ability to galvanize affective responses and political unrest. The veneration of material remains, such as those belonging to saints or religious figures, emerged prior to the practice of ancient Christianity and still holds religious weight in Christian practices today. Material remains are important objects to which people anchor ideology and religion. They influence how we make sense of the world. The deaths of polemical political figures—and consequently the material existence of their remains—comprise important roles in political and cultural imaginaries. Michael Lazzara states, “Bodies are passionately contested palimpsests onto which national dramas are condensed and versions of history staged” (“Pinochet’s Cadaver as Ruin and Palimpsest ” 121). Governments have long feared the cultural power that the bodies that political figures possess, going to great lengths to control public visibility and access of their remains.

The kind of worship once reserved for saints is now practiced for celebrated public figures such as politicians, movie stars and sports figures. They occupy a place of religious iconographic status after their deaths, and their bodies and possessions are treated as relics. The embalmed body of Eva Duarte de Perón in Argentina is an example of the power of bodily remains. The government feared the potential political unrest that
her body could have galvanized if released for public worship. This led to the military government’s obsessive desire to hide, move and even duplicate Duarte de Perón’s body in order to control both the location of her body and its cultural significance. Another example of a public figure elevated to saint-like status after his death is Argentinean Ernesto “Che” Guevara, whose body was also buried in an undisclosed grave after his execution in Bolivia. Guevara’s hands were even removed from his body, preserved in formaldehyde, and sent to the United States so that officials could confirm his identity, comparing the fingerprints of the cadaver to Guevara’s Argentinean identification documents.

In a more recent example, the United States military disappeared the body of the radicalized foe and leader of Al-Qaeda Osama Bin Laden after they “eliminated” him. They purported to have buried him at sea a mere 24-hours after his death due to fears of the revolution his body could ignite if it had been released. Controlling both the location and access to bodily remains not only applies to the body itself, but also the bureaucratic documentation that bodies generate. Intelligence cables that were leaked in 2015 showed that the United States also refused to issue a death certificate to the Bin Laden family following his death. The refusal to issue death certificates is a common military practice for individuals who are killed as a result of strategic military operations.

Part of the power derived from these remains is the stories they generate in the cultural imaginary; they serve as powerful cultural symbols and didactic lessons.
Although these stories are based on history, they often blur the lines between fiction and nonfiction. Lyman Johnson compares “stories of martyrdom” to the oral narratives that recounted the gruesome deaths of saints called “the passio,” which served as a form of education and entertainment at festivals. The narratives of political martyrs “often imitate the narrative development of these early Christian models” (20). The idea of a subversive hero who battles until death is present in the Chilean historical imaginary in the Chilean historical figures of the Mapuche warriors, Chief Capoulicán and Lautaro, who both battled against the Spaniards and died gruesome deaths. Both Alonso de Ercilla’s *La Araucana* and Pablo Neruda’s *Canto General* tell the stories of their physical transformations and tortures (Neruda 81-4). Johnson writes that “the human remains of these heroes, and the locations associated with their sacrifices and martyrdoms, retain powerful emotional content that can be used to mobilize mass action on behalf of a nation, an ethnic group, or a class” (Johnson 4). The significance of a hero’s body extends beyond the duplication of their likenesses or names in portraits, statues and memorials. Johnson emphasizes how the bodies, or body parts of Latin American martyrs are converted into “political vessels” and “invested with meanings” (3). After death, the stories of political heroes can become cultural icons, celebrated symbols of resistance, and inspirations for revolution. In *Post Mortem*, Larraín refuses to take a side or use fiction to imagine the elusive “official” history. Through his fictional film he resists the aims of nonfiction to fill in the gaps.
Benítez suggests that because of the ongoing debate on the topic of Allende’s death his “true” death has been replaced by a “mythic death” (180). The initial withholding of both Allende’s body and information about the cause of his demise spurred the obsession with finding the “truth” behind Allende’s death. The repeated autopsies, parsing of words in the reports, and generation of new reports, analyses and expert opinions play out a delayed process of coming to terms with the past by way of knowledge. Klaver observes that “when autopsy is lacking […] discourse arrives” (113). Because a dead body makes us aware of—exposes— a “cleft in the ideological field” (112) and “marks the fissures where things will not correlate”(113) we try to fill the lack with language. The uncertainty of Allende’s story, the military’s insistence that he died by suicide, and the public’s ongoing attempts to unravel or corroborate the story generate a narrative in flux. Even though Allende’s former doctor Patricio Guijón happened upon the scene just as Allende pulled the trigger and, thus, an eyewitness account of Allende’s suicide exists, people maintain the idea that forensic science may be able to conjure the truth from Allende’s skeletal remains and Allende’s rightful story of heroism will finally prevail. Larrain exposes that perhaps the only “truth” to be gleaned from Allende’s autopsy is society’s propensity to counter uncertainty with myths.

4.10 Moral Decay

The evening after the autopsy is conducted (or not conducted) in Post Mortem when Mario returns to his home with Pituca, he discovers that Nancy is in fact alive,
hiding out in a storage space at the back of her house. She requests that Mario bring her food, water, and a radio. He complies, and returns in the morning to give her another meal before work. The number of bodies in the morgue continues to multiply. Running out of space in the exam rooms and in the spaces where bodies are refrigerated, they stack the corpses onto gurneys, line them up along sides of the hallways, and even place them along the stairs. Contrary to the assertion that Chile was in the midst of a civil war and that the people killed during the dictatorship were armed militants, the bodies shown in the morgue appear to be relatively harmless, such as elderly men and women still dressed in nightgowns.

In Dr. Castillo’s office, the military official is standing in front of a chest of drawers, otherwise known as a “bureau,” clutching a handful of toe-tags and donning a lab coat—explains that they will now have to perform abbreviated versions of autopsies, in which the most important task was discerning information about the victims’ identities, rather than their causes of death. He explains that functionaries from the Civil Registry will be assisting them, making records of their fingerprints. Sandra is indignant; she replies, “This is not the autopsy protocol.” This dialogue, sourced from actual testimonial accounts of workers at the morgue, shows that the military was unconcerned about how these individuals died, but are, instead, was focused on confirming their identities and keeping track of the numbers of victims, presumably to assure the successful execution of key political opponents and Allende loyalists. The
function of the workers in the morgue was not to find the case of death for any legal reason—at the time there was virtually no law to be upheld—but rather as an accounting practice.

The functionaries work through the huge pile of cadavers, removing their clothing and lining up the naked bodies in organized rows. Mario spots Nancy’s father among the dead, takes his face into his hands, but suppresses any kind of reaction. As Mario unloads one of many carts of bodies, he hears barely audible moans and whispers and realizes that one of the bodies is still alive. Realizing that what he is doing is potentially dangerous, he seeks out Sandra’s help and discreetly wheels the man through the morgue on a gurney, a sheet covering the body so that no one can see him. Without anyone taking notice, they drop him off on one of the floors of the hospital that is still tending to the living. The man thanks them as they quietly leave. At this point, it appears that Mario may be transforming into an unlikely hero in the face of the coup, demonstrating small acts of resistance under the noses of the soldiers.

However the next morning, the third day after the coup, things begin to unravel. Though we are spared images of bodily decay, Post Mortem is rife with moral decay. Mario heads over to Nancy’s house to give her the radio. Increasingly withdrawn, it seems that the activities of his day are beginning to take their toll. When Nancy won’t accept the radio, because it’s a tube radio—rather than battery operated—he becomes increasingly frustrated. She begs him to find her father and brother, but when she tries
to go back to her hiding spot, he grabs her breasts violently while she fights him off.

Mario arrives at work to find the morgue is becoming buried in piles of bodies, too many to organize into rows. He overhears Sandra becoming irate. She shouts, “What are these people doing here, now? What happened, why are these people now here?” The psychological toll of the work in the morgue causes Sandra to become crazy. She shows Mario that she has just now found the man that they had saved yesterday—dead—along with the nurse who had accepted him into the hospital. She begins shouting even more, attracting the attention of the military official. He fires a shot into the air (see fig. 39) in order to get her to stop yelling, and then he begins to shoot incriminatingly at the bodies on the floor. The personnel of the morgue fall silent, and Mario steps over the bodies piled in the hallway as he leaves (see fig. 40).

![Figure 39: The coronel fires a shot, Screenshot from Post Mortem, dir. Pablo Larraín (Kino Lorber, 2010; DVD).](image)

When Mario returns, he opens the door of the hiding spot and finds that Nancy is not alone, but has been with Victor, the man from the earlier scene of the protest, the
entire time. Mario finds them lounging together, naked in the hiding spot. Showing no reaction, he confronts them with his icy silence. Unsure of what to say, Victor thanks him for all that he has done, and asks Mario for some more food. Mario returns with a fried egg and Nancy comes out to accept the food, without saying a word. With a clothesline creating a visual line between the two of them, as if performing a transaction, she reaches across toward Mario, undoes his pants and begins, mechanically, to pleasure him. Mario quietly exhales, it is not apparent if it’s from pleasure or if he is crying, and slumps over. Nancy whispers in his ear, “Can you bring me some cigarettes, neighbor?” She looks at him with disgust and tells him to go away.

Mario replaces the piece of furniture that he had been placing in front of the door so as to hide it from anyone who may come to the house looking for Nancy. There are sounds of heavy objects shifting off screen, and Mario returns, carrying pieces of furniture, a chest of drawers, an office chair, and placing them in front of the door. We hear pounding on the door to signal that Nancy and Victor are aware that Mario is closing them in, but despite their efforts, they are unable to open the door against the weight of the furniture (see fig. 41).
This final scene finally reveals the nature and manner of Nancy’s death. She starves because Mario has enclosed her in the hiding spot and covered the only exit in furniture. Her murder is not a crime of passion, but a distanced indirect bureaucratic way of killing. He kills her by shutting the door—imposing a partition—and tossing a pile of furniture on top.
Framing *Post Mortem* with Nancy’s autopsy and then later revealing her actual cause of death brings to the fore the bureaucratic elisions that lurk just under the surface of autopsy reports—that which is lost when a person’s body is reduced to words. Autopsies and bureaucratic documents may serve the purposes of entertainment, generate of knowledge, and aid the state in its ability to identify, track, and account for both the living and the dead, but they can contain errors, they can leave things out, or sometimes they can only capture part of the truth. As Mario’s fateful love story turned lethal brings to the fore, bureaucracy may not always be as rational or reasonable as we believe. Ben Kafka writes that the unpredictability that bureaucratic paperwork contains “can also be a part of a struggle in which pleasure and unpleasure, love and aggression, conscious and unconscious motivation all play a role” (111). Nancy’s death and its incomplete representation in bureaucratic documentation reveal the existence of a counter-archive—silent, hidden, unspoken. These silences and ambiguities are cast aside in objective accounts of the past that focus on historical fact and evidence. Once we consider its absence in the bureaucratic documentation, it becomes clear that fiction may be the only medium that makes these silences audible.

**4.11 Conclusion: Forensic Fictions**

In 1990, when the dictatorship had finally been dismantled and Chile’s new, democratic government came to power, one of the first orders of business for the new president Patricio Aylwin was to organize a state funeral for Allende. Before holding the
event, a group of 10 people went to the cemetery where Allende had been secretly buried and exhumed his remains in order to verify that they were actually his. At the moment of his secret burial in 1973, no one except for the people who performed the autopsy had seen Allende’s body, not even his wife. Although the partial exhumation was clandestine, the group included photographers and videographers who recorded the event. The videographer who took the footage, Pablo Santos, released his original tapes to a Spanish news program En Portada, which they used it to create an hour-long program titled Salvador Allende: Caso Cerrado that aired in 2009.

In the program, under the cover of night a small group of cemetery workers hastily dig up the grave. As they break through the dirt, the news program cuts between footage of the exhumation, archival footage of Allende’s presidency, videos of the coup d’état and interviews with the people who spent the final weeks with the president. A voiceover of the Spanish journalist José Antonio Guardiola narrates the historical background information over dramatic music. The burial was secret, but had taken place with all of the proper bureaucratic documentation and authorizations of the Allende family, as the news program made sure to point out and even zoom in to show the documents with their signatures on screen. Finally, at minute 37:00 the cemetery workers break through to the crypt. As the workers struggle to pry open the metal casket over which concrete had been poured, the sound echoes through dug-up grave like a drum. Through the course of the 17 years of dictatorship, the metal casket
oxidized and in the process of opening it, it collapses on top of the remains. One of the doctors that had been with Allende on the day of his death named Arturo Jirón descends into the crypt to make an identification based on the clothing on the remains. Since Allende never had been embalmed, his tissue is completely decomposed, leaving only bones. In an emotional moment perfectly presented for the screen, the stunned Jirón finally utters that yes, it was the clothing that Allende had on the day he died and must be the true remains of Allende. Someone reaches into the casket and removes Allende’s shoes, placing them—with skeletal remains still inside—on the floor of the crypt for the shot of the camera. At the end of the program, *En Portada* gives the statement, “In editing of this report some images from the exhumation of Allende have been omitted out of respect for his figure.” What the program did not document was that in the hasty performance of the first exhumation, Allende’s remains were damaged, and some of his bones and clothing were lost, potentially thrown in the garbage (Marín). Immediately following the secret exhumation, Allende’s remains were placed in an urn and re-buried in the General Cemetery outside of Santiago after the official state funeral. *En portada is everything Post Mortem is not*: a non-fictional news program that inundates its viewers with a montage of historical visual content. Filling the long span of time that it takes to unearth Allende’s casket with a barrage of dramatic historical images. Yet, in their effort to film this historical moment of documentary fervor and produce a revelation for the
cameras, the investigative team adulterates the very forensic evidence they seek to analyze.

*Post Mortem* debuted at a time when public pressure to further investigate Allende’s death was mounting. In 2006, the same year Pinochet died, Benítez published a comprehensive examination of the evidence, witness statements and materials available about Allende’s death. In 2009, the editorial published a new edition of the book, which included additional addendums and annexes to the original version. Amongst the information was an analysis of the reports performed by a respected forensic physician Luis Ravanal Zepeda, in which he concluded: “The wounds described in the Autopsy Report are not compatible with one (or two), of the suicide type” (223).

Benítez asserts that the “custodians of the ‘official version’” of Allende’s death have refused to acknowledge that “the death of Allende has not been, up to now, adequately investigated and studied, and that in the 18 years they have not had, nor demonstrated, the slightest interest in establishing scientifically the truth of the facts” (231). In 2011, upon the urging of the public, Judge Mario Carroza ordered a third exhumation of Allende’s remains and a second autopsy to be performed. This time, an international team of renowned forensic experts worked side by side with the Chilean team. Yet, their conclusions were consistent with the original report, ruling it a probable suicide. The daughter of Allende, Isabel Allende Bussi, stated:

> We are at peace because this report concludes something of which we were already convinced. What is now different is that there are scientific tests supporting [what we,
the Allende family, have already concluded: President Allende, on September 11, 1973, confronted with the extreme circumstances that he faced, made the decision to take his own life, rather than be humiliated or face other consequences. (Andrés López)

Even so, a new determination in the second autopsy was that two bullets could have killed Allende, rather than one. This is consistent with the two bullet holes that were found in the wall above his body and the two shell casings on the floor. Some have used this detail—the possibility of more than one bullet—as a point of departure for new theories, the most common hypothesizing that the fatal shot came from a smaller caliber weapon and was later covered up a the staged suicide with Allende’s AK-47.

While forensic anthropologists and forensic professionals can excavate or exhume remains, their professions are as much an art as a science. Their reconstructions of the past are riddled with inferences, differences of opinion, educated guesses, hypotheses and conjecture. To date, debates about the cause of death remain. The irony is that with each forensic exhumation and examination, material from the remains is damaged, irrevocably lost. As Nancy’s body, and the hundreds of other bodies pictured in Post Mortem remind us, as forensic bureaucratic documents are unable to produce “truth” we are left with only fictions to fill in the gaps.
5. Conclusion: Bureaucratic Illusions and the Military State

5.1 Voluspa Jarpa’s unmaking of history

In 1998, after a relatively placid decade of slow-moving political transition, information-seeking truth and reconciliation commissions, and a few emblematic court cases, international news outlets erupted with the news that General Augusto Pinochet had been arrested in London. Pinochet famously had enjoyed immunity from prosecution in his own country, written into the 1980 constitution. Yet, during a visit to England for back surgery Pinochet was indicted on charges of murder. He faced not only extradition to Spain as a consequence for the human rights violations against Spanish citizens that he committed during his regime, but also what he considered the demoralizing possibility of being fingerprinted and photographed for a mug shot. The United States government, headed by the Clinton administration at the time, ordered the release of over 50,000 pages of intelligence documents as a part of a “discretionary review.” Paired with the prior discovery of the “Archivos del terror” in Paraguay in the early 1990s, these archives opened an aperture into Operation Condor.

Pinochet was ultimately released in 2000, when after 18 months of investigations and deliberations British authorities determined that he was too old and infirm to withstand trial and allowed him to return to Chile. Once back on home soil, the frail old man who had been wheeled off of the plane in a wheelchair triumphantly stood up and
walked off front of adoring crowds (Farnsworth and Lanfranco). Despite legal attempts in Chile to bring Pinochet to justice, Pinochet died in 2006 without ever facing trial.

Fascinated by the deluge of declassified documents that were during this period artist Voluspa Jarpa began to develop the work *La biblioteca de la No-Historia de Chile* in 2010 based on the dossier. Jarpa explains that her compulsion to turn the documents into art came from the affective response they provoked. Even though the documents revealed information about the operations of the Condor network, she was the most fascinated by their redactions—the results of the process of censorship the documents underwent before their release. She writes that the *tachas* (crossing-out marks) became ingrained in her visual memory: “I was no longer interested in the information that they contained, but instead the latent image they carried” (24). Rather than focus on the specifics contained within, Jarpa centered on the documents’ materiality in order to make readers aware of what she calls their “visuality” (16). As a result, the stuff of bureaucracy—its format on paper, the stamps and seals that grant its legitimacy, and its insipid, at times incomprehensible style of discourse—takes prominence in the work.

The redacted U.S. documents are bilingual snapshots of an unequal information exchange moving primarily from the south to the north. Thick black bars interrupt clumps of text, sometimes obscuring entire pages from our view (see fig. 42). These markings are traces of a final act of bureaucratic power exercised before the documents’ release. The CIA calls this process of censorship “sanitation,” referring to the “scrubbing” of sensitive information from the files. Along with the official release of the project, the U.S. government stated: “Some information has been redacted to protect the privacy of individuals, sensitive law enforcement information, intelligence sources and
methods, and other national security interests” (U.S. Department of State). The central thrust of the Biblioteca de la No-Historia de Chile is to make visible the “tension” between the information revealed and black bars of censorship (García). Jarpa stresses the contradiction evident in the fact that, despite their claims of intended transparency and cooperation, U.S. government officials had to censure the documents in order to release them. Cristián Gómez-Moya interprets the redactions as reflection of the violence of the dictatorship, an ongoing “violence” within the archive, the act of censorship that uses “destruction as an aesthetic operation” (Derechos de mirada 74).

Jarpa has worked with declassified documents for over 15 years, revealing the opacity in what was supposed to be an act of transparency, what Sebastián Vidal Valenzuela calls “annoying bump between what is said and absent” (147). Jarpa’s Biblioteca de la No-Historia de Chile, an installation that would repeat and transform in subsequent years, first occurred as an intervention in 3 bookstores scattered throughout Santiago. Jarpa created several hundred “non-history” books that comprised a selection of heavily redacted declassified documents. As in the artwork of Guillermo Núñez in the first chapter, the covers that Jarpa designed feature appropriations of bureaucratic symbols. She created reproductions of the graphic elements present in the documents, such as the official seals representing organizations like the U.S. CIA and Department of Defense, as well as the stamps used to brand the documents with internal codes such as “communist propaganda,” and the words “confidential,” and “declassified” which had
been later crossed out. To exhibit the books, she inserted a light box into the existing shelving of the bookstores, so that her non-history books were displayed in the same fashion as the other store merchandise (see fig. 43).


The installation as a whole exposes traces of the bureaucratic machine that functioned behind the scenes of the dictatorship, the very organisms that circulated intelligence briefs, memorandums and photographs. The prevalence of censorship, reminds the viewer-reader that somewhere, sitting in an office, these bureaucratic mechanisms are still functioning and that a government official had to sift through each
and every paper that was released to determine what information would be withheld. Furthermore, according to their own criteria, the omissions imply that some of these unknown operations may still function into the present. The black, rectangular spines of the books that resemble the shape of the tacha are contrasted against the white light of the backlit shelf. Juxtaposing the books with light created impact as well as a visual representation of the idiom so often employed in Spanish and English when speaking about declassification, “brought to light.”

_Biblioteca de la No-Historia de Chile_ invites its viewers—art patrons and bookstore clients alike—to take home a book and engage in the same action as the artist; to thumb through the documents and form their own subjective reactions to the barrage of memorandums, cables, and briefs that are each inscribed with the ornate markings of the bureaucratic process. Jarpa’s work underscores the importance of witnessing the power of the documents first-hand, akin to the presentation of legal documents that Eltit performs in _Puño y letra_. The copies of the books are free of charge, distributed in exchange for a brief questionnaire that Jarpa used in later projects. This alternative method of “payment” disrupted business as usual for the national literary marketplace and circumvented the customary exchange that occurs between literature and the government, since Chile considers the sale of books to be a “luxury service” and booksellers pay a cut of 19% of sales to the state.
Biblioteca de la No-Historia de Chile inhabits the rich space that exists between language and image what Jarpa refers to as the “limbo between image and word” (Gómez-Moya Derechos de mirada 73). Within the framework of conceptual art theory, Benjamin Buchloh refers to this strategy as “mapping of the linguistic onto the perceptual,” so that the art can “systematically perform all the visual and textual options” contained within a piece (125). Dissolving the boundaries between the discursive and visual atmosphere that these documents create replicates the sensorial experience of being subjected to bureaucratic practices. By design, bureaucracy works to vacate the so-called “irrational” and emotional qualities from its process, so that order, classification and hierarchies prevail. Max Weber points out: “Bureaucracy develops the more perfectly the more it is “dehumanized” (975). This detached position is supposed to achieve objectivity, fairness, and equality, but Jarpa works against this impulse, striving to re-inscribe the human effects back into the bureaucratic documents, reminding us not just of the affective reactions bureaucratic procedures provoke, but of their physical—material—consequences, such as the bodies of 50,000 dead and 30,000 disappeared that the Condor network claimed throughout the Southern Cone.

Jarpa’s presentation of the elisions in the dossier of unclassified documents emphasizes that omissions obstruct the path to an excavation of “truth.” Drawing on the same bureaucratic inadequacies as the autopsy report Larraín explores in Post Mortem, Jarpa reveals that if there is a truth to be encountered, it must be read in terms of
absence. The same bureaucratic machinery that made people disappear can also be exercised against bureaucracy's own documents—the United States Government can exercise the ability to erase and obscure at will. As Jarpa's work makes known, the power of the dictatorship that survives into the present rests in the ability to make things disappear.

During the dictatorship the disappeared were people. Yet even in the post-dictatorship period it is information that disappears. It has been destroyed, redacted, lost to amnesia or faulty memory. A classic convention of illusion, Diana Taylor described disappearances as a theatrical support for state spectacles, "disappearing acts," where "[a]s if by magic, people disappeared into thin air" (Disappearing Acts 98). This concept repeats in the work of curator Soledad García Saavedra and artist Brandon Labelle who have proposed that we frame the dictatorship and Chilean society today in terms of magic. They delineate a "politics of invisibility" exercised by the state, asserting that "what is seen and what is unseen are understood to perform equally within the material realities of Chilean society" (García and Labelle 14).

Veena Das suggests that state bureaucracy "oscillates" between a "rational" and "magical" mode of being. Michael Taussig, too, establishes that the state utilizes mystical means to come from nowhere and extend to everywhere, an "abstracted authority" that "seeps as formal rationality into the fundament of modern law and bureaucracy." Yet, this is a concept rarely discussed in relation to the still very-real
theatricality of the dictatorship period in Chile. This idea can be used to examine the power of bureaucracy in the dictatorship. For one, in writing this dissertation I have come to realize that bureaucracy harnesses its power not by its totality but rather through the illusion that that the totality exists.

Jarpa, Núñez, Eltit and Larraín’s works signal the fallibility of bureaucratic documents. They depict them as an instrument of the state that deals largely in illusion. Núñez intervenes in their signs and symbols; Eltit performs their obtuse bureaucratic discourse; and Larraín portrays them as corrupt and potentially murderous. All these representations address their political, cultural and social power, but at the same time unmask them as untrustworthy, problematic and unreliable. Although bureaucratic material and procedures have the ability to produce historical consequences, these works prove that bureaucracy’s totality is part of its own manufactured mythology, smoke and mirrors.

García and Labelle’s proposition of magic studies lends a meaningful way to reflect on this dissertation. These works call for a reconsideration of how we conceptualize bureaucratic power. Since Max Weber put forth the term “rational-legal authority” at the turn of the 20th century, bureaucracy has been viewed in terms of rationality. This characterization still influences how we conceive of and read bureaucracy today. Weber’s description of the ideal bureaucracy is brimming with the language of both capitalism and modernist design. The perfect iteration of bureaucracy,
according to Weber, is one that reduces both “friction” and “material and personal costs”—an exacting calibration and coordination of all moving bureaucratic components, the principles made visual in Kracauer’s mass ornament, which I discussed in chapter 3. Weber writes:

> Precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction and of material and personal costs—these are raised to the optimum point in the strictly bureaucratic administration, and especially in its monocratic form. (Weber 973)

Contemporary interpretations of Weber’s ideal forms of bureaucracy do not account for a comprehensive understanding of the bureaucratic power practiced during the Chilean dictatorship as Weber’s characterization of modern bureaucracy a rational entity eclipses the origins of bureaucracy that have been rooted in ritual. Bureaucracy and its operations are not always rational.

The origins of visual symbols and signs utilized in bureaucracy, like those that Núñez appropriates in his work derive from medieval seals, which before they were a part of modern political and administrative affairs. In the 12th century, seals were used as an early iteration of the signature, a highly personalized rendering, which represented sovereign rulers such as kings. Like the modern signature—which represents the physical movement of ink across a paper, creating a self-made symbol for an individual’s identity—seals were created by imprinting a personal stamp into wax. In this early practice, seals “synthesized a contact between things” such as “hands, wax and matrix” (Bedos-Rezak 91) and “bridg[ed] and blurr[ed] the distinction between self
and text, ego and imago” (90). Seals were not just imprints, they “embodied their owners” (90). Sometimes, they even contained traces of the body—or actual bodily material—like fingerprints, bite marks or strands of hair coiled into the wax, in order to boost their authenticity (90). Not only was the seal itself important, but the act of attaching a seal to a document was performed in public as a ceremonial ritual. The gesture was “often accompanied by such additional personal gestures of commitment as kisses, oaths, or the signing of oneself (and of the document) with the sign of the cross” (90). Bureaucracy, in this sense, was performed, as we see in Eltit’s work. When we are reminded of this original usage of the seal, it reasserts the ties between bureaucratic practice and the sovereignty it attempts to reinforce. It also underscores the bodily that haunts the bureaucratic, despite bureaucracy’s own attempt to subtract the human element and disembode it.

The practice of making and using astral seals was thought to harness astrological powers. As Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak writes, “seals were understood to be images, imprints of the figures of constellations or planets, whose power they thus concentrated so that it could be used to change one’s destiny” (92). In this sense, the act of turning something into a symbol and possessing it, allows the holder to manipulate its power. Taussig describes the “magic of mimesis” as “the making and existence of the artifact that portrays something gives one power over that which is portrayed” (13). Functioning like a kind of alchemy of the state—bureaucracy possesses the ability to
transform everyday materials into powerful, at times valuable objects—to taking plastic card informally known as a “green card” and turning it into figurative gold. A booklet with a cover and some stamps becomes a passport, a plastic card with a photograph and a fingerprint becomes an identity card, and a string of digits becomes an identification number—more unique to its individual holder than their own name. In its ritualistic form, bureaucracy even resembles a kind of spell; if we produce the right components in the correct order we uncover the incantation that makes bureaucratic magic happen—it has the power to confer or take away power, to protect or expose. Aníbal Quijano writes that in the process of the colonization of the Americas colonizers “imposed a mystified image of their own patterns of producing knowledge and meaning” (169). Based on a magical reading of bureaucracy, it is possible to see how an exercise of bureaucratic magic still manifests this mysticism in bureaucratic practices and procedures today.

And manifest they do. At the time I am finishing this dissertation, an old law from the dictatorship era has been revived, given new life in contemporary Chile in 2016. Known as the Control preventivo de identidad (Preventive control of identity), this law allows the police to stop anyone over the age of 14 at any time and demand to see their identity documentation. After Chile had transitioned from the dictatorship to democracy in 1990, it took 8 years of legal battles and legislation to do away with the law. Now it is back from the dead under the pretense national security, order and “anti-delinquency.” Even in a supposedly democratic Chile, the dictatorship rears its head.
through bureaucratic practices. Using biometric, digital technology, the police can check for any outstanding warrants and arrest the individual if they refuse to produce their identity documentation, give falsified information, or verify that the person has an outstanding arrest warrant. The controversial part about this law is that any person can be stopped for any reason, or even no reason, without having to prove probable cause. Furthermore, the police can hold this person for up to an hour under the presumption of verifying his or her identity.

Bureaucracy is powerful despite its seemingly mundane pretense. It has the ability to classify—by nationality, wealth, race—to enact spatial divisions, partitions, and borders. It forms the material supports for the nation and can outlive its makers, even coming back from the dead. Yet the work of Núñez, Eltit and Larraín assert that even under the totalitarian environment of the dictatorship bureaucracy’s totality can be undermined. While the aesthetics of bureaucracy construct its symbolic and functional power, they can be appropriated, performed and embodied in new ways. Documents can be forged. Papers can be misplaced. Emails deleted. In a 2008 the CIA declassified one of its own training materials from World War II titled *Simple Sabotage Field Manual* written in 1944. Amongst its lessons are instructions on how to use bureaucracy against itself. “Multiply paperwork in plausible ways. Start duplicate files.” “Apply all regulations to the last letter.” “Snarl up administration in every possible way. Fill out forms illegibly so that they will have to be done over; make mistakes or omit requested
information in forms” (Office of Strategic Services 30-31). Núñez, Eltit, and Larraín demonstrate that through its own aesthetics bureaucracy can be made and unmade. It is all in the files.
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Biography

Amanda Leigh Suhey was born in State College, Pennsylvania in 1984. She received a Bachelor of Arts in English and Spanish at Cornell University in 2007. She completed a Master of Arts in Hispanic Literature at The University of Texas at Austin in 2010 and a Master of Arts in Romance Studies from Duke University in 2011. She has published an article titled, “Conceptual Strategies in the Art of Guillermo Núñez: Object, Document, Testimony and Nation.” Research for this dissertation has been completed with the support of a Romance Studies Dissertation Research Fellowship, Romance Studies Departmental Doctoral Dissertation Continuation Fees Fellowship, Allen and Joyce Temple Graduate School Summer Fellowship, and a Tinker Field Research Grant for Pre-Dissertation Research from the Duke University Center for Latin American Studies. She was previously awarded a College of Liberal Arts Fellowship at the University of Texas at Austin. She is a member of the Latin American Studies Association and the Modern Language Association.