AT: Perhaps we could begin with your artistic education and background?

CA: My education in art was more or less self-taught. I first studied architecture for a semester and then I moved to fine arts, where I stayed for a little over a year and got bored. Later I began working on my own, in studios with classmates and friends… In reality, I have practiced more on my own than anything else. I don’t have a formal University education - in fact, I never learned how to paint or to do sculpture. I never took classes; I was forced to learn things as I went along, as I needed them. So that was my artistic formation – achieved more through conversations and daily interactions with friends than in any institution.

AT: I am focusing more or less specifically on the art of the 1980’s in Chile. What can you tell me about the conditions that existed at that time? How did art change during those years?

CA: Listen… the truth is that during the 80’s I barely produced any work. My main work came right before the 1980’s and right after, but the 80’s I sort of skipped over. I worked rather hard up until 1981, and later did another exhibition in ’85 and again in ’89… but the truth is (to speak generally about my own situation) it was not just that I wasn’t producing a lot of art at the time; it was that I felt a lot of anger and resentment about art in those days. I didn’t go to all the exhibitions although I know everything that happened, everything that went on… I saw everything I needed to see. It’s just that I had a very rebellious relationship towards everything that was going on; it was my own process of disillusionment with something very euphoric that existed at one time – a euphoria which disappeared and left me hanging. So… during that whole period I was more or less debating with myself over this conflict. If you ask me about what happened during the 80’s… more than criticism I felt resentment. This was more my relationship with art than anything else. I looked more than with a critical eye, more than opposing myself to what was happening in theoretical terms -- I was opposing myself in emotional terms.

AT: Tomas Andreu [of the Galería Animal] said something very interesting when I met him; he drew a comparison between the artists in Chile of the 1980’s and the slaves who danced the Capoeira in Brazil. He made a point about the use of metaphors and alternative modes of expression to communicate and preserve the past and one’s traditions during a time of censorship.

CA: Yes… that is a good comparison. In a certain way what characterized Chilean art during those years and still today is… the way in which things are said… it is what radically differentiates…
For example, Alfredo Jaar is obviously a Chilean artist; but in spite of the fact that he uses Chilean themes and is a good artist, I consider him a North American artist – because he’s direct. Rather, He’ll say, “A plus B equals C,” and he doesn’t say anything else than that. On the contrary, here in Chile we are accustomed to saying things that aren’t what they seem; we use tricks… they bounce off every surface, like billiard balls. Everything that was said then was like a billiard ball… ‘Tac tac tac.’ Things came in many layers, with many hidden meanings. Though sometimes a piece’s initial meaning appeared insignificant, it was just a mask…and that, in general, was characteristic of all of the artists at the time, and I think it is something that is maintained today.

**AT:** Mr Andreu also said something else which caught my attention. He said, “Art that doesn’t contain life is not art.” [“Arte que no tiene vida no es arte.”] In other words, art that does not have a critical or reflexive aspect is not art. Do you agree?

**CA:** Well, yes… today it’s a bit antiquated as a phrase but … I think, well I think that everyday I know less and less about art… In the eighties art had different meaning than it does today. But, evidently it’s related to life and to one’s own life. My life. Not two or three steps down to the lives of everyone else. No, it’s about my life… a way of saying that which can’t be said - that which isn’t said about oneself. It’s not anything more than that. So, of course, if it’s not tied to life it’s not tied to anything. What happens a lot with contemporary art today are rhetoric exercises, basically… they are ingenious ways to be different or to be something new. Movements of language or forms or images that are, at times, very ingenious and influential… but ultimately detached from the guy who creates them. At the very least it isn’t the art that interests me. I can’t tell you what is or isn’t art, other than that there are increasingly more things inside the category of art; from culinary art to… whatever, everything is art. Or everything pretends to be art. But I am not interested. Or rather, this art doesn’t mean anything to me.

**AT:** I have read that you are connected with the Escena Avanzada. I have not yet read a lot about the group, but I would like to know how you would describe its objectives.

**CA:** Well, the thing is, the Escena Avanzada it's a myth, and like all myths it’s something that is constructed after-the-fact to explain things. Or rather, it doesn’t have much to do with reality. The Escena Avanzada was never an organized group. It was never called that… until later when it was written about. We were the same people who had always worked together, with friends, and friends of friends, etc. And then suddenly somebody decided to call it Escena Avanzada. It was Nelly [Richard.] She called it the Escena Avanzada.

And so, for a long time… during the eighties and even today, there was a sort of movement, (if it can even be called that), to make a point of saying, “I was part of the Escena Avanzada” or “I wasn’t.” “He was, I wasn’t…” Its as if you’re trying to enclose it in a frame that doesn’t exist.
But, I suppose the nucleus would be comprised of Nelly, Carlos Leppe, and myself… that was one group. There was another parallel, simultaneous group made up of Ronald Kay, Eugenio Dittborn, Catalina Parra. And then there was the CADA.

AT: And how did they differ - the Avanzada and the CADA?

CA: Everything really formed part of the same thing. The CADA formed part of Avanzada, but at the same time our group - Nelly, Carlos, and myself – at some times we were all great friends and met every day to work… and then two months later we’d be fighting, hitting each other… irreconcilable enemies. Everything was functioning this way, outside of any organization. In reality, the Escena Avanzada was constructed four or five years later when Nelly started to write about what happened, and gave it a name. So, at this moment, I don’t know what the Escena Avanzada is - it is a myth, a theoretical construction.

AT: What interests me, as an Art Semiotics major, is that this group found ways to disguise their messages. Unlike the artists of the left who went into exile – those who said exactly what it was they wanted to say -- the Avanzada turned to metaphors and symbols to create a new language during a time of great censorship.

CA; Yes that is true in some respects. On the other hand, there was in fact a discussion in the beginning with those artists of the left that stayed here in Chile – a heated, enraged discussion…. with Brugnoli and with the Visual Arts Workshop [Taller de Artes Visuales], a group of artists that formed around him [Brugnoli.] They were, at the beginning our biggest critics because our position was that painting and traditional modes of representation were the language of the system. They represented it. And because we couldn’t go against the system, we went against its modes of representation. The enemy wasn’t Pinochet… it was painting, traditional arts, conventional modes of expression… the “direct” way of doing things. So… when all the new tendencies entered -- the conceptual arts, the idea of working with the body -- these were all ways to challenge traditional modes of representation, to go against the system. They were the very first bounces of the billiard ball, if you will. One would never say “Death to Pinochet,” but rather “death to painting” instead.

AT: Did you often use video as a medium?

CA: Sometimes, but at the time video was difficult and expensive, and it was… complicated. We did do some, yes… I did one video that was as mythical as the Avanzada; every time that there is a festival people ask me for that video -- the one where I was running around Santiago with a camera under my arm. I think the video is still around somewhere. Carlos Leppe and Dittborn also did some important videos. There are three or four. And the CADA, they did some as well.

AT: I am very interested in what Nelly Richard writes about the role of photography in art at the time.
CA: Yes, photography was fundamental because it was clearly the most apparent and
direct way to challenge painting. Painting represented the single object and craftsmanship
while photography represented the reproducible object and the machine. [Walter]
Benjamin’s famous text, *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* was like our bible.

AT: And what’s more, photography was a much more honest and explicit mode of
representation … a sort of witness, no?

CA: Definitely… With a photo something is documented, registered. The concept of
objectivity, though admittedly debatable, was something that we referenced a lot at the
time… in those days it worked. The photograph was obviously more objective than the
painting, which was far more emotional and subjective. At the time, the subjectivity of
the artists didn’t interest any of us – what was important was to work with reality.

AT: What can you tell me about your own art?

CA: … Everything went rather quickly then, in the sense that it all
happened within two or three years. …There was one piece that I did
called, “Revisión Crítica de la Historia del Arte Chileno como
Trabajo de Arte”… [“A Critical Revision of the History of Chilean
Art as a Work of Art.”] So, I began to work with the direct theme of
art history – with the idea of identity, nationality, originality, roots,
etc. That was the theme, and I tried to work in the least aesthetic way
possible. I sent out a survey – a questionnaire that people responded
to, and the exhibition was a show of people’s responses to the
questionnaire. It was a very sociological piece, one that used a lot of sociological
rhetoric. Formally, it was not a very visual piece.
Later I did a lot of art actions and installations. I worked a lot with the museum’s
permanent collection of paintings, (…) which I moved from place to place. Obviously, I
didn’t *physically* move them, but rather projected the images in various different
settings… as if to actually ‘bring the museum to the streets.’ These sort of gestures are
what distance me now; they date me pretty far back in time. They are basically gestures,
symbolic acts… more than anything tangible or concrete.

AT: Are you still practicing art today?

CA: Yes, but very irregularly. Once in a while something comes to me and I’ll go with
it… And then I’ll not produce anything for a certain period of time… and suddenly
something new will occur to me again… there’s no pressure to be current or to fulfil an
artistic career. No… I abandoned my artistic career back in 1981. And now I would say
that I’m working in five-year cycles, more or less -- like El Niño. In fact my last big
exhibition was in 1996.

AT: How did you decide to start producing new work again after 1989?
CA: Well, it was gradual. I began working with big panels, one-by-one. I’d start one and another idea would come to me… each one was more and more introspective. Everything has to do with reviewing my own life, my biography; I took it all in again and reformulated everything that had happened in the past. I live in this world, and therefore everything of mine – my memories, everything – is related to what’s happened in the past.

In my last exhibition, Retratos [Portraits], in 1996, I portrayed the disappeared. I decided to do it because in 1996 Chile was flourishing in many ways. We were four or five years away from being a completely developed country, part of the first world, full of rich people. And yet the issue of the disappeared seemed to be of interest to nobody. It was a nuisance. Nobody – not even the government or the survivors themselves – wanted to hear about it. So, I felt ashamed and chose to work with them – to expose them and give evidence of them on the very walls of the museum. That was my reason for doing it. It had a lot to do with what was happening to me in my own life at the time. I felt a feeling of disgust for all the success around me, and the intentions of forgetting. So those were my reasons, and after the show my interest in art fizzled for some time…. I am working a bit now, but only vaguely.
AT: Before we speak about your own art in particular, what can you tell me about the conceptual art movements in Chile in the eighties?

AD: Yes, well the conceptual movements in Chile began to appear at the end of 1970’s, and were in some way influenced by certain exhibitions that had previously come to Chile and Latin America. Specifically, for example, the Fostel exhibition that was here in 1977 encouraged artists like Catalina Parra, Carlos Leppe, and Eugenio Dittborn to respond in like manner; there was already a certain approach towards this kind of a proposal blossoming here at the time. Also, I would say, there was a relationship - not an extremely intimate one, but there did exist certain ties – with Argentinean artists at the time (for example those of the “Trece” group or the “CAIC”), which in that moment were relating themselves to Chile, in spite of the isolation that existed here during the military dictatorship.

So… that was the beginning of the movement towards a conceptual practice in art at the end of the 1970’s. Afterwards, this movement evolved beginning with groups of artists like the CADA…

AT: And the Escena Avanzada?

AD: Well, yes, but the “Escena Avanzada” is a general designation that includes groups of artists like the CADA, among others. It was given that title afterwards, in 1985, in a study done by Nelly Richard entitled “Margins and Institutions.” Within this context many artists began to produce work; above all was the CADA, which carried out various public art actions, such as “Para no morir de hambre en el arte.” This project consisted of several interventions or art actions with milk trucks that delivered milk to poor and marginalized neighbourhoods in Chile, and later went in caravan to the doors of the Bellas Artes museum, where they displayed a large white banner accompanied by the elusive statement, “Para no morir de hambre en el arte.” [Not to die of hunger in art.]

Simultaneously, Carlos Leppe and Carlos Altamirano were putting up their first exhibitions and Nelly Richard was someone who was tied to their work; above all, she was related to the publication of texts and theoretical papers about their work. So… this association became rather indisputable, in relation to the recent production of those artists at that time. In those days the text was still somewhat associated as a commentary, but today it is much more tied to the production itself of the work.

So those were generally the beginnings… I’ve already mentioned Eugenio Dittborn, as well as Catalina Parra. And at the same time there was Juan Downey, for example, who is
from New York -- he was producing some works in those years and put himself in contact with several local Chilean artists. He didn’t, however, produce a great legacy, apart from some contacts … how should I put it… not influential, just basically contacts with local artists.

Afterwards, during the 80’s all these movements began to converge into a large manifestation that inhabited exhibition spaces like the ‘Galería Sur’ and the ‘Galería CAL,” which were galleries that didn’t last very long. But those were the spaces that published practically all of the events of the time. They showed artists like Juan Davila, Alfredo Jaar, Carlos Leppe, Raúl Zurita, Eugenio Dittborn, Carlos Altamirano … and simultaneously there were younger artists emerging around this group including myself (Arturo Duclos,) Mario Soro, Silvio Paredes, Alicia Villarroel, and … students from the University of Chile, and groups from the Universidad Católica…

…So, basically it wasn't a very big group, but everyone aligned themselves in the setting of conceptual art practices; there were also participating poets, and sociologists within this movement… and some film-makers, and video artists, etc. So it was kind of a conglomeration at the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties that lasted until 84 or 85, in which all of these people congregated in this type of production.

These are the kind of specific antecedents that I can contribute to you. Now… with regard to certain linguistic and disciplinary practices, I would say that in some way there was also a strong relationship with theoretical aspects, as I have said. Many theorists, sociologists and philosophers also aligned themselves with these artists, such as Nelly Richard, Justo Pastor Mellado, and Fernando Balcells (who worked participated in the CADA.)

…So all of these guys were crafting a textual production that involved the work of these artists, who were also producing texts themselves. So, there existed a rather intellectual body of work that formed, above all, a sort of common front - more political than partisan - against the dictatorship. And of course there were various other models that sprung up in Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil; it was a period of dictatorships in Latin America - military dictatorships - where a large part of the artists were trying to organize this sort of a common front against the repression. It wasn’t a type of socialist, communist, or leftist project – but rather, I would say, a project of opposition against the repression that existed on the part of the military government. So, basically, the works contradicted the hegemonic position of the dictatorship. And, basically, the discourses they developed had to do with this opposition; more than just reactionary, it was a gesture of defiance and opposition towards the repression of dictatorship. One also had to be very clever, because you couldn’t work with the obvious. Take Carl Nicher’s case, for example -- he was a Uruguayan artist with Austrian roots, who produced a series of images depicting the dictatorship in Uruguay; he used photographs with images of people who were tortured, who had wounds, etc.

…The great difference here in Chile was the existence of a sophistication of linguistic codes. To reiterate Nelly Richard’s main points, it was a far better production in terms of
metaphor and ellipsis – a sort of ‘circular’ work, at the linguistic level, about the messages that were being transmitted. That is to say, it was a far more camouflaged, disguised, and codified system... and greatly influenced by semiotic codes. … So there was a strong influence on the part of French structuralism and the French semiotic school of thought, with regard to the systems of production of meaning and significance within the works.

AT: Well... you have already answered two more of my questions. I’d like to ask your opinion about something I heard from Tomás Andreu at the Galería Animal. When I asked Mr. Andreu to talk about Chilean art from this period he said to me “Arte que no tiene vida no es arte.” [“Arte that does not contain life is not art.”] Do you agree with that statement?

AD: Well, yes... In a way, art is always tied to reality, and therefore it is within this relationship to reality that many works are produced. I believe that historically all art is produced in this dialect. And this analysis doesn’t necessarily have only to do with politics, but with social and economic aspects as well, among others. But to some extent I think that if there is no tie with reality and with a reflection about this reality, it is very difficult to accept. It is instead simply ‘art for pleasure,’ to hang... and nothing more.

AT: The other thing that Mr. Andreu said to me that I found interesting was a comparison he made between Chilean art of the military 1980’s and the Brazilian slave dance, Capoeira. He based this comparison on the use of metaphors a means to preserve tradition and expression. What do you think?

AD: Well... It’s a pretty far-off comparison but I suppose it’s a good one. It is distant in that in the case of the slaves there was a sense – I would say – of happiness and animation in their expressions. Here, perhaps, there wasn’t the same effective tone – I would say that it was far more sad. It was far more grey, clouded – without this happiness of expression, this transformation of oppression into happiness… In Chile happiness was not what was being transmitted. What was being transmitted was rather different -- it was a certain psychological and I would say spiritual state. In reality, looking back, the works were actually quite dark...

I did a piece in 1983 for example, called “La Lección de Anatomía.” It was a placement of painted human bones arranged on a towel on the floor, with different symbols and inscriptions. I don’t know if you know this piece... Anyway, it was a piece I did in 1983, which was shown again in 1985 … in a nearby gallery. …And so, at the time that I presented this work, there was a certain tendency to try and furtively convey a message, which was rather obvious. But due to the inflation of our discourses, we always tried to produce works in an elliptical or metaphoric manner.
So... in calling this particular work, “La Lección de Anatomía,” there was an allusion to Rembrandt’s work – to the anatomy lesson of professor Nicolaes Tulp (1632.) So... they were painted human bones, like in the ‘incarnation’ painting process where you have to paint the human body with flesh tones, etc. It was sort of a way to dress the bones with flesh again, to bring them back to life – … it was a kind of symbolic form of bringing life back into those inert bodies. One used these kinds of metaphors and comparisons, but in the end the point was so obvious… like the time I showed the piece at the gallery of the University of Essex in the UK a few years back; I remember a journalist saying to me, “it seems those bones make reference to the disappeared.” Obviously, It was evident. The truth is, though, that while someone is producing a piece, its not that they are necessarily thinking about a direct interpretation of reality, its that the reality of the time is so sombre that one can only work with those references. The only references that existed had to do with death, torture and repression.

The big difference is that the discourses that existed around the works at the time were all indirect – they were absolutely indirect. On the contrary, the situation in the 1990’s was that everything became more direct, more mediated. That is to say, the work displayed exactly what was being said. There were no darker sides, nothing hidden; everything was in full view. If an artist was working with such a topic, it was in full sight. There was nothing hidden behind, trying to say something else. But here [in the 80’s] it was completely the opposite. It was like someone pushing all the dust under the rug, everyone was under it; as soon as someone were to lift it up, you would find yourself surrounded by the dust and the bodies….

AT: I’d like to speak more about your artwork in particular. In general, how would you say that your work formed part of this conceptual movement? How is it tied to everything we’ve been talking about?

AD: Well, at the beginning, since the time that I was a student at the Universidad Católica, I associated myself with a group of artists; together we were already beginning to see the process of change that was taking place in Chile as well as in the international art scene. What’s more, we were bit behind because at the beginning of the 80’s people of the avant-garde were there promoting such discourses as the return to painting and the figure, as opposed to the conceptual proposals that had been developing since the sixties and early seventies. So... we were sort of piling together all of these influences and information, and basically our work came about within these characteristics. My first work involved interventions in public spaces – in squares, parks, and streets – that basically consisted of the recuperation of a sort of memory, in a rather personal style. Later I did a sort of gradual turn – through piece like the one with the human bones, for example – towards a more pictorial approach, though one that still always reflected the influences of conceptual art. So my painting, then, wasn’t simply about a return to painting, but rather had, at the time, a number of strong influences that came from texts, poetry, and the ‘codified’ languages we were speaking about before. In other words, I did an investigation of the types of painting that develop a sort of semantic expression – a sort of identity containing various cultural and textual citations, with many references
belonging to diverse disciplinary spheres – sociology, politics, religion, etc. So… you could say that my painting became hypertextual.

This is basically a general description of the development of my work from the 80’s into the 90’s. Logically, my work levelled off a lot more in the 90’s, but basically the weight of the earlier work of the 80’s still predominated; this still had a lot to do with the structure on which I based much of my research – the theme of death (especially at the beginning of the 90’s), and the idea of the fall of ideological systems – these were essentially the main points I was working with at the beginning of the 90’s. Afterwards, later in the 90’s, these evolved into more agreeable themes, as I started becoming interested in other aspects of painting more related to pleasure, and in some ways a detachment from reality… This was completely contrary to the kind of art you were discussing with Tomás Andrieu. In the beginning my work was much more tied to reality, and later I began to step outside this reality a bit. Although I still work a little with this relationship in some of my pieces, it is not in such a contingent manner… I got a bit bored of it. I also think there began to be a certain militancy at the root of these ideas that was beginning to wear out…

AT: What would you say you share in common with other artists like Altamirano, or Eugenio Dittborn, or Lotty Rosenfeld, etc?

AD: Well, I think what we share in common (especially in the works we produced up until the early 90’s) is a recuperation of memory. I think during the 80’s, for me and for many others, all the works were based on this recuperation of memory. And still today, many continue to work with this. In the end, this idea of recuperation has to do with the metaphor of amnesia, a product of the whole ideological system that existed during the period of the dictatorship; there always existed this tendency to forget – a desire to forget or erase – as if to ‘clean up’ certain aspects of reality. And ultimately, many of the artists that you’ve mentioned were constantly trying to call up some sort of reminder, a sort of morbid memento -- like a constant announcement about the memory of death and oppression. I think this is a common characteristic of many of these works.

AT: Much of your work makes reference to the Russian vanguard and the communist experiment in Russia, as well as the end of the Cold War. In what ways do you identify these movements with the situation of new government in Chile?

AD: I think they are directly linked with [the new government in Chile], because for me was also a sort of utopia in all that practices of the 80’s. In a certain way I returned to rethink the all of the phenomena that occurred with the Russian avant-garde, in which there was an alliance between the artistic and political domains. But, however, when the political vanguard took power, the artists were immediately called to order, because what was needed was to educate the people, and to achieve a realistic type of art that could meet all the expectations of the revolutionary changes proposed by the political vanguard. Ultimately, I was interested in working with the division between ideology and art, and in a certain way it was a proclamation of independence from all the ideological dependencies that existed during the 80’s. All of these ideological dependencies were like
a common front – a sort of placard or unwritten slogan – under which we all moved in opposition, tied in some way to the left. Afterwards, following the fall of the socialist block, there was not one hegemonic power that maintained a polarity. Ultimately what fell, then, was an entire block of ideologies. This was the work that I chose to develop. The political changes that were taking place at the beginning of the 90’s were now coming together outside of those terms; there was no longer the same enchantment with previous ideological projects.

There is no existence of enchantment, nor is there a question that can be defined from a credible likeliness or probability. As Marx said, “history repeats itself twice – the first time as a tragedy, and the second as a farce.” This was clearly a farce. And in some way, all of my work at the time pointed to this state of being, this state of mind, this state of destitution… to the loss of the feeling of idealism.

AT: I read somewhere that your work exhibits “an existentialism in quietude” on the part of some “crisis of identity or values,” and that you tend to use a ‘questioning’ sort of language. What could you tell me about this?

AD: Yes, well…that is what all artists do. Positions are always ambiguous. One is always countered by a limitation or border, and I think that is the only position from which an artist can work - it is the only comfortable position for an artist. He is the ‘swindler,’ always sort of in two positions – deceiving one the one hand, and at the same time attempting to call up reality. I think this defines many works, not just my own. Now, with regard to language, my work is far more ironic, because I work with certain references or paradoxes that translate into a certain irony. For example, when I mention “Mr. Gorbachov,” there is an irony about the alliance between…. Or rather, it is how the artistic vanguard ultimately joins the political vanguard, but only for their funeral, their diminishment, their extinction…

AT: I know that you use a good deal of etching in your work. Nelly Richard writes a lot about the role of photography in this movement (reproductive and serial images, etc.) Do you think that the use of etching can be spoken about in a similar respect?

AD: NO…basically, I worked in etching for more commercial reasons. It’s not just limited to etching; I have worked with other printmaking techniques as well – laser transfers, silkscreen, etc. – that I use to print on top of the canvas and mechanically reproduce different types of photographic images. But with regard to etching, I am interested simply in the commercial aspect – in the diffusion of the piece and in greater, more economical access for the people who want my pieces. I think that it’s the same with other artists as well. There isn’t a very elaborate belief system surrounding the technique of etching.

With regard to Nelly Richard’s commentaries, I believe that a lot of the photography work of the 80’s and 90’s up until today (not of current new artists, but of the ones that we’ve mentioned) …has meaning from the perspective of memory that we were discussing. Because, through a photograph, it is possible to construct a link with memory.
The photograph is a document; it the only truthful account of an act that effectively occurred in a determined way. In contrast, painting does not share this characteristic. The painting is something more fictional; the photograph is more truthful. So, many of the artists used photography and still continue to use it due to this phenomenon of verisimilitude. It’s a form of testimonial – to document a memory and to establish a bond with that memory.

AT: You mentioned something about etching as related to commercialism. I have read that you have had some experience working in commercial or publicity design. Would you say that this has had some influence in your use of popular iconography?

AD: Yes, I did work in publicity design, and as an art director in an advertising firm, but this was only for four or five years in the eighties; it was a time when all the artists were working in different areas – photography, publicity, etc. I think its part of the whole process in which all artists need to work for some time until they have some financial independence from the sale of their work, or certain autonomy stemming from academia. But, I suppose the influence of advertising design was something that gave me another viewpoint on how to create art, how to establish other disciplinary practices, other forms of production. Basically that’s all – there’s no other influence than that.

[As for the use of symbols or iconography] I don’t know if there was any great influence. I think more so that the symbolic aspect has to do with a certain understanding that I had at the time of certain aspects of communication. It doesn’t have anything to do with publicity, but rather with something totally different – [it has to do] with the collective conscience, with the idea of certain archetypal visual cultures with which everyone is able to look at a piece. What interested me was the creation of certain simulacra, simulations of things that could be a ticket or a banner or an emblem that contains these symbolic codes. It was much easier for people to be drawn to the works if they had some kind of recognizable structure – a structure of familiarity. In this case it has much more to do with semiotics – the notion that people gravitate towards certain signals. Basically what I was looking to do was pervert or distort these kinds of structures.

… Someone without any artistic cultural formation could just as well make out certain codes that draw them into the painting because they might see aspects of religion, for example, or something familiar to them... On the other hand, I realized that many contemporary works tend to turn viewers away because for lack of a certain communicative concept – a friendly platform that allows them to associate with other images. I think that we all have a foundation – an image base, a visual culture – which is in some cases more sophisticated than others; at the popular level, for example, it is not as sophisticated as in the case of someone who studies and goes to exhibitions and who looks with an educated eye. But yes, there is a connection in both cases, which has to do with things in common that have been seen. When one finds themselves in front of these common elements, a work can be seen as equally valid from one perspective as from the
other, with entirely different views. The entrance to the works is wide open, and this is what interests me.

**AT**: Isabel Aninat, in her book about contemporary Chilean painting, says that your work uses a ‘demythilizing’ language. What do you think that means?

**AD**: Well, the term “demythilizing” is her own – you would have to ask her. Perhaps it is because I tend to put such themes as death, religion, etc. ‘on the dissection table’ – they are exposed in an evident way. In this sense they might share a ‘demythilizing’ role. To tell you the truth, though, I don’t really know – I haven’t read her book yet, so I don’t know much about what she wrote about my work. I don’t know the context, but I would imagine that that’s what she’s referring to.

…What I can tell you, however, is what interested me in the early nineties – to liberate myself a bit from the sort of oppressive burden of that period of the Escena Avanzada and the military dictatorship. There are many factors involved, because there existed great ideological control, not only from the dictatorship, but from all the major intellectual groups as well. So you might say that these intellectual groups transformed themselves into our little dictatorships. In the end they were full of Pinochet. There were also many other ‘little Pinochets’ running around, determining and telling you how art was to be; ultimately it had the feeling of wearing a straightjacket. It was that way – a very restrictive feeling.

And so what I did during the 80’s and early 90’s was to liberate myself from that -- ideologically, conceptually, socially, economically, etc. My position was to liberate myself in all of these senses – not simply to propose an autonomous type of work, but also a financially independent work system, etc. That is, I turned to other forms of art production – not as a “dummy,” or an “illiterate,” or an “endangered intellectual.” I think I was interested in the in between; at the end of the 80’s everybody was politically compromised, and during the 90’s everybody was politically correct, so I was interested in being “in between” the politically compromised and the politically correct. I think that accommodated me much more.

**AT**: How exactly would you say that the military government directly affected art and culture? Just how did these change?

**AD**: I think that basically what changed was that people had to begin producing art in a more furtive way. Everybody lived in fear, but that fear wasn’t that clear. There weren’t many artists that suffered direct persecution, but in the end I think there was a good deal of victimization, when people began to feel that they were victims of the military government and that they were going to be persecuted. It’s obvious that if I paint a picture of dead bodies and present it in a gallery, of course they will come and they will ask me, “What does it mean? What are you talking about here?” But many artists liked to play that role – they would come and make themselves out to be heroes… but that didn’t seem very smart to me, because it was very obvious how someone would think to resist what was politically determined by the dictatorship. So, what changed was that people had to produce work from enclosed spaces, very enclosed circuits; all of the circuits of
the Escena Avanzada combined did not exceed 500 or 600 people, within which everyone knew everyone else. They were the same people that were in the galleries and exhibitions, the private workshops, the universities, etc. It was a type of camaraderie, nothing more than a club.

So... what changed was that production occurred at this level – within a clique, a private circle. There weren’t exhibitions projected outside of this; there were no galleries and the museum of Bellas Artes was closed for three or four years for renovation. What happened, then, was that the entire sphere of artistic expression was closed. It was also a closure that the artists themselves produced; it was self-closure, from within. Everything happened in only two or three galleries or places… nothing came outside of that. It was a very private thing... a group of friends that met and proposed ideas together. This was the great change that occurred under the dictatorship –everything was shut down, closed...

AT: Yes… but even so, in spite of the censorship there did exist opposition to the government in these works of art. For example, in your works, there were certainly allusions made... no?

AD: Exactly, but what happened was that everything was circulated privately, not in a public way; the work wasn’t hung on the walls of the museum for thousands of people to come and see, but rather it was something that occurred within a very closed circuit. That was the great change, with regard to how the artwork comes out and communicates with the public – it was now a closed public. And, therefore, when works are produced within such a closed circle, all of the codes are kept therein.

AT: Was it still that private towards the end of the 80’s? There weren’t any galleries or anything?

AD: No... The truth is that most of the exhibitions occurred only within this circuit, within this group of people. It’s not like today where you can go to Alonso de Cordova or to the museums and see gallery spaces and people exhibiting. Today it’s all open, democratic… everybody goes; before it wasn’t this way. Before, as I’ve told you, it existed only within this group of people, and it was very difficult for people outside of this circle to enter; “outsiders” signified a threat, a danger... someone could just report to the authorities that people had been producing work that spoke about death, or about revolution, or about sex... whatever.

AT: It is clear that painting or visual arts can maintain a secretive element, but what about the public art actions of the CADA? Take Lotty Rosenfeld’s work, for example....

AD: Yes… the CADA did produce these big public projects, but these were only made with the intention of later being circulated as books and catalogues. There weren’t great projects that had a major impact on the social order, capable of taking apart the system. Ultimately they were works produced within this same circle. Later we’d all meet in… I don’t know, the French/Chilean Cultural Institute… to present videos like Lotty’s, where she put the great crosses in the pavement, and to launch books like Francisco Zegers.’ But still, it was a fairly private circle. Therefore, it wasn’t something that the public at
large would know about; it was only the artists themselves that knew about it – the writers, the poets, the filmmakers, the sociologists… the people that belonged to this circle. And, as I’ve told you, they were only a few; [the works] circulated there.

… And actually, in doing those crosses [Lotty] had to work at night. In the end one could do a lot, if done in a clandestine way. It was ultimately a rather clandestine movement altogether, to say it another way.

The truth is that there is a bit of cliché surrounding all this about he Escena Avanzada – how it was all a clandestine movement, an opposition… there’s a tendency to mythalize all that. Today, looking back, no one was really personally persecuted – no one was actually incarcerated or tortured, though it may be true that we were all very afraid… I remember some of the pieces I was showing during the eighties… the one with the human bones, and the one with the bath towels… and the hammer and sickle… they all had those kind of allusions, so naturally I thought they might put me in jail. But there was a certain sense of pride in all that; in the end we were all looking to become martyrs of some sort. However, none of this happened; because it was all happening in such enclosed circles, it was impossible. Nobody would take those risks – one would have to be stupid to do that. It made no sense; a live artist is more valuable than a dead one. I don’t think anyone was prepared to offer his skin, his body.

There is, therefore, a cliché about all this – about a resistance art movement, a clandestine and confrontational act. But you have to remember, … it was a very enclosed circle; like Osama Bin Laden with his group. They are a clandestine group that works underground, with the FBI and CIA chasing after them. Thought at the same time, we didn’t have anyone chasing us like that… with some exceptions.

I remember one time when Pinochet’s police people came to ask questions, but no one was ever detained, interrogated, taken for a beating, tortured… Instead there was this latent fear. And because everything was functioning underground, it was impossible for any major danger to occur. There was never a very real risk situation, because we were not exposing ourselves in the streets… the students were the ones that did that. The students were the ones that suffered, along with the workers who protested in the streets and erected barricades, etc. Those were the people that suffered and died… but I suppose that’s another question…
AT: I am doing a project on art movements in Chile from the early eighties onward…

IA: Ah… this is a topic that interests me a lot… Just this last week… I was discussing the idea of doing an exhibition on the political art of the eighties. I would be interested in working with you on this… I was thinking of doing a fairly large project on how, why, in what ways… etc. So your work interests me a great deal.

AT: I have read a lot of Nelly Richard’s work, which talks a lot about what these artists share in common; namely the way in which language in reinvented, and symbols and signs are used to say that which can’t be said… As for your book on contemporary Chilean painting, I am drawn to several of the artists you discuss. How would you describe, in general, the conceptual art movements that developed at the beginning of the decade of the 80’s?

IA: … My gallery opened in 1983; in ’83 I opened this gallery with a show that contained many political pieces. For example, there was a very important piece by Rodolfo Opazo, which didn’t appear to be the most confrontational, …but nevertheless maintained a very powerful position. So the gallery opened with this exhibition, in which there appeared a large mouth, with a boot inside… it was a general’s boot… a typical military boot.

It was a painting that showed all the manifestations of rage against all this… very, very powerfully… but at the same time, it could have been something else. This is what I find so impressive.

After that, there was an exhibition here with Langois. Juan Pablo Langois. …Not the son, the father. He simply put a bunch of Chilean Identity cards in a fishbowl… floating, making reference to the disappeared. Nobody understood much – for some, it seemed rather crazy.

…That’s why I proposed (and still propose today) that a return to a more pictorial art was justified, for my taste at the time, in a country like Latin America, especially the South. …We are a more emotional people. In truth we are not very rational, and I feel that our art does not fall on the side of concept – it falls more on the side of emotion. But in that time it was justified much more than it is today – installations, conceptual arts, and so on… because it was a form of expression that one had to cleverly use in order to say what one couldn’t say.

And yet today, it’s become sort of a ‘fad’ in many cases (with some exceptions, of course). …When you create an installation or a conceptual piece today, it is more of a fashion statement than anything else. On the contrary, at the time … it was what it was.
... It was an absolutely transgressive and marginal thing. So I think it was justified at the
time, and very important. I don’t think it’s as justified or important today, except in
certain very special cases.

AT: In your chapter about Roser Bru, you say that her manuscripts are used
as a means to bridge experiences that cannot be expressed or translated concretely in the current complex system of communication.” I think that’s
an interesting way to put it…

IA: Yes… Take that work by Eugenio Tellez, for example… it is a very important piece.
It is totally of the period… of dictatorships in Latin America.
You’ll see that it’s rather phallic… it is a masculine depiction of Latin America.
…It was a very strong way, you see, to say what going on in Latin
America.
…So in my opinion, this work is very interesting, in that one has to
read it three or four times to realize.

AT: And what about Duclos’ work? You write about him as well in your book.

IA: Listen, the thing with Duclos, is that he uses today’s language… he is much younger.
He didn’t see the 80’s like the others did. …He was just beginning to work then.

AT: In describing the effect of his work, you use the word ‘demythalizing.’ What do you
mean by that?

IA: …Because he uses symbols that carry heavy symbolism or mysticism – the hammer
and sickle, the symbol of the communists, …or the cross, etc.
…Nevertheless, he unites these and places them repeatedly throughout his work, in such
a way that… so as to leave them… or introduce them as…
…Like Duchamp with his urinal, for example.

AT: What can you say about the CADA?

IA: What do I know?

It was the first group that positioned itself inside conceptualism. It was a group that
presented art with ideas of rupture… to be in the streets, to “sense” what was happening to
the people and to interpret it.

It was a very interesting group in Chile, because it also questioned the art that was being made then -- the official art, or the ‘accepted’ art…

…They broke open and questioned all of this, and attracted everyone’s interest to the
very subject you are studying – art as a form language, with many codes… the meta-
language that is art… they set out to translate it. So I think the CADA is a very
interesting group in Chile; they put ‘mind’ into art… previously art would tend to simply come and go…

AT: What’s more, theirs differed from the art of the left, which was more direct… right? The Avanzada concealed their messages…

IA: …Despite the fact that they have a language, and that they have a stance… it has more to do with art. It is not propagandistic.

…In general, they were more or less of the left, but theirs is an art that transcended the merely political; I think their art was about more than just that, otherwise it would not interest me …Unlike Lenin or Hitler, who’s art was very political and propagandistic, which doesn’t interest me at all. (…) [Lenin and Hitler] would use their material as propaganda, …like Fidel Castro, who also used art as propaganda. The CADA, in spite of the fact that they had a clear political position, did not use their art in a propagandistic way… they went far beyond that…

(Interview interrupted…)
AT: What can you tell me about the later development of Escena Avanzada?

The ‘Escena Avanzada’ was a denomination of Nelly Richard’s. In my opinion it addressed three important themes: ‘corporal’ art (with Leppe and the CADA, etc.), political art, urban art, and photography.

…Later, there was a crisis in 1982; there was a return to painting – a return to young painting, a return to the painting of the exiles (Balmes, Barrios, etc.), and a return to critical painting like that of Gonzalo Diaz. So… In 1982-3 (with Justo Pastor Mellado) the Escena Avanzada began to disintegrate a bit… Leppe abandoned art and Dittborn began to work more independently (with his 'postcards series, which he began to distribute in 1984), …and there emerged a younger generation of painters, …people like Arturo Duclos emerged at the time, along with Alicia Villarreal, etc. …And, there is the return of Brugnoli in those years – 1982, 1983 – working with installations.

AT: Could you speak a bit about Brugnoli’s work as an antecedent, and his experience during the dictatorship?

GM: …Brugnoli stopped producing work in 1973 after the coup. He retreated into a sort of self-exile, and Balmes left altogether – to France; in my opinion, they were the two most important people (along with Juan Pablo Langois), from the 70’s until 1973. After that, Brugnoli’s work began to be more educational. He opened up a space called the Taller de Artes Visuales, which was open to critical reflection. …And they invited Duclos, and Leppe, and Nelly Richard, and Dittborn, etc. …But Brugnoli reemerged on the scene in ’83, and remained at this level until 1990 when democracy was recovered. In studying this later period, there are three main important exhibitions. The first was that of Balmes (which came slightly before, in ’88 I think), entitled “En Tierra Firme,” which consisted of works that Balmes brought back from exile – it was Spanish painting from a young man brought over from Spain. It was a matter that Pablo Neruda, the poet, supported. …So it appeared as if the ‘exile’ in Chile was putting his foot down on the ground -- “En Tierra Firme.” He exhibited paintings of exile… paintings with many gestures.

In the same gallery, which was called ‘Ojo de Buey,’ there was an institute of visual arts called “Arcos,” which today no longer exists. (Which is this… pointing to a catalogue**) There Balmes exhibited, and later Gonzalo Diaz… I think Brugnoli was the last to exhibit in the gallery (I could be wrong), with his exhibition entitled ‘Cadaver Exquisito.”
…These signs have to appear somewhere. Nelly Richard, with Carlos Perez and Gonzalo Arqueros, wrote the catalogue for “Cadaver Exquisito.” …Here Nelly Richard highlighted the fact that Brugnoli was established on the level of critical art, as opposed to one more profound or metaphysical – in addition to Balmes and Gonzalo Diaz, who were grouped together. … And within the three works, Balmes represents return – epic, political painting of the exile; Balmes never stopped doing what he had done in th 70’s… he carried continuity.

…And Gonzalo Díaz stems from painting, and produces critical work though the use of installations dealing with the political issues of ‘Lonquen.’

…And Brugnoli destroys the notion of the gallery, and creates ‘Cadaver Exquisito,’ which represents the relationship between Jericault and Delacroix in order to restore democracy.

Meanwhile, what Nelly Richard does in conjunction with Carlos Perez, is to bring together and form an association between Gonzalo Díaz and Balmes, so as to legitimize Brugnoli.

In reaction, Gonzalo Díaz and Justo Pastor Mellado wrote an article attacking Brugnoli and Nelly Richard.

…I’ll read you a fragment of what Gonzalo Díaz wrote so you can get an idea.

He writes a preamble to Justo Pastor Mellado’s text (which is an ironic text), “Not everything that is said to shine is gold upon his cadaver.” (“No todo lo que se dice que brilla es oro sobre su cadaver.”) He is referring to Brugnoli’s exhibit, Cadaver Exquisito, which is a denomination constructed by French surrealism…

(Diaz’ text will be in red to prevent confusion.)

“I have the great pleasure of taking the initiative to make the necessary efforts of putting Justo Pastor Mellado’s present text in circulation (albeit a restricted circulation.)

“…It seems to me that the text “No todo lo que se dice que brilla es oro sobre su cadaver”… (Machuca pauses..)
…Because Nelly Richard, in opposition to the profundity of Gonzalo Diaz’ and Balmes’s work, highlights the Brugnoli’s brilliance [as in ‘shining.’]

**AT:** “Los brillos?”

GM: Exactly -- appearances, surfaces…

…So, the criticism of depth and representation in Nelly’s discourse can only be manifested in the opposition of Brugnoli to the profundity of Balmes’ and Diaz’ gesture of narrative, in spite of the fact that they’re installations. …So Brugnoli appears more ‘avant-garde’ here.

*(He continues…)*

“It seems to me that the text, “No todo lo que se dice que brilla es oro sobre su cadaver” appropriately responds to the errors of analysis and interpretation that tensely circulate within the pages of “Cadaver Exquisito,” a cadaver of fear published at sunset [Machuca intervenes, “sunset’ in the sense of death here,”] “…by Fransisco Brugnoli on the occasion of his hurried, hastened homonymous show (which he wasn’t able to show in the historically monumental year of 1973!!)”

*(Machuca intervenes again…)*

GM: He assumes that Brugnoli produced this exhibition, *Cadaver Exquisito*, in 1973… and that he was unable to show it due to the military coup.

*(He continues…)*

 “…and finally – promoted by history’s eruption – he exposes to the gaze of anyone who may want to see it in the twilight [or rather, the death or the fall] of the gallery “Ojo de Buey” in the the capital of this quasi-democratic republic.”

GM:…Because indeed, Chile was in the process of recuperating democracy.

*(He continues…)*

“It also seems to me that the present text, which you and your family can read next, has the good virtue of having raised to the sacred surface [GM:…refering to Brugnoli] …the stench of bad milk which signifies the perspectivist operation of Fransisco Brugnoli’s show…”

GM: What’s more, he criticizes the writers of the catalogue…

*(He continues…)*

 “…so as to ventilate the purified air of the texts of decomposition in the catalogue. Clever, repetitive texts, shortsighted nonsense.”

GM: That is, …referring to the dialogues of Carlos Perez, Gonzalo Arqueros, and Nelly Richard. He says…

“I recognize my slowness in ‘pulling out the writing revolver,’” (GM: Like in the ‘wild west…’) “I recognize my slowness in ‘pulling out the writing revolver,’ and I don’t know if I’m explaining myself… as everyone already knows, Justo Pastor Mellado is the fastest and most well-informed of the western world.”
He says…

Even though its late, I promise to learn the lesson of not walking out into the open scene without forewarning. Ultimately, as my grandmother always insisted, there are – in addition to waste (GM: ...which Brugnoli exhibited), garbage, plastic containers and accumulations of shards – ‘cogoteros’ (GM: That is, people who jump you in the street… he’s saying that writers are like the people who jump you in the street), … ‘lanzas a chorro’ (GM: In Chile, this means ‘pickpocket’…), swindlers, gossipers, (…) and predatorial writers.” (…*carroñeros = predators – crows, lions, etc.)*

(Machuca repeats…)

“...cogoteros, lanzas a chorro, estafadores, cuenistas y escritores carroñeros.”

GM: Predators who survive on cadavers…

…So Gonzalo Diaz and Brugnoli proposed a question here within the *Universidad de Chile*... Well, Diaz had already been conducting classes in the university, and Brugnoli joined him later, after he was reintegrated. …Diaz had always been teaching there, even throughout the 70’s and 80’s. He was really the only important avant-garde professor during the time of the dictatorship.

AT: It is true that Brugnoli lost his job after the coup, no?

GM: Exactly, in 1973, as did 90% of all the professors in that school. And then there were others who went into exile.

AT: And why was Gonzalo Diaz able to stay? Did he have a different agenda?

GM: It’s that he’s younger than the others… he didn’t share the political commitments that Brugnoli and Balmes had at the time.

AT: I have these notes here that you wrote out the other day... Could you possibly explain them to me again? I am having trouble understanding the schematics.

GM: Lets see if I can even translate them myself. It would be better for us to meet after you have read some of the texts I am going to lend you... that way we could meet later and I can explain my thesis to you. This is an order that I myself set up... I have used texts from the 1970’s, but feel that it is necessary to begin even earlier... to go back as far as the 1920’s [in order to gain a more complete understanding of the antecedents.]

In my opinion, there is a desire for modernity in Chile, and this is a central theme; When does the desire for modernism, modern art, and the vanguard first appear? According to Nelly Richard, it begins with her – with the *Escena Avanzada* or the ‘new scene.’ In my opinion it begins much earlier than that; I think that it has always been this way – since the Academy, in 1849. It was a longing for modernity; when Chile gained independence from Spain, it began to look towards France, of course, and to republican institutions. And the phenomena of the enlightenment and of illustration arrived here… along with the development of universities, medicine, the judiciary and political systems, and – of course – the *Bellas Artes*. And in Chile, unlike in other Latin American countries, there was never a baroque or splendid period, or a pre-Colombian art. So there was a wide opening, a void. Within this void, as if to be *avant-garde* in a sense, a school
of visual art was established – a copy of the French Academy – in order for Chile to enter into modernity. This academy was established during a time when there were non-conformist, rebellious movements circulating throughout Europe. I have written about this phenomenon in many of my essays…

I don’t know if others have approached it from this perspective.

…I could go on for a long time about how the academy born in Chile was challenged; from Delacroix up until Cézanne. …Chile’s second stage of modernization began with the arrival of Cezanne’s painting.

…With Cezanne there is a crisis with the notion of ‘space’ …of the Renaissance, painting changes – there is a ‘Cezannian’ rupture.

In my own work, I investigate how Cezanne’s appearance in Chile made possible a more constructive type of painting, and hence a transition towards conceptual art.

(…)

…I in my opinion, the 1920’s marked a break from Spanish and French influences in the academy, with the advent of Cezannian discourse, or post-Cezannian discourse – a time when Picasso and the avant-garde had already re-developed Cézanne’s work with cubism.

And then there was Marchel Duchamp with his ready-mades, etc…

So when Cézanne arrived in Chile, he wasn’t thought of as ‘modernized’ by the avant-garde (so it is yet another failed gesture), …but he did imply a gesture of modernization. So… my thesis is that concrete painting and the incorporation of art into the object, the collage, or the ready-made, make up a fundamental aspect of post-Cezannian discourse.

…In Chile, when artists assume Cézanne’s work or travel to France, they don’t see the passage from constructive painting to objective painting… and thus, then, to assemblage, to the ‘happening,’ and to installations.

…What’s more, collage didn’t arrive in Chile, with all the conceptual implications of its technique, …until 1960, with Balmes. It had undergone 40 years of rejection.

This is the way in which I am organizing history –what is happening here as a direct result of foreign influence; I formulate history based on what is produced here locally, and the transferences that come from abroad. Chile is a country that is constantly trying to be up-to-date, to modernize itself; according to many historians, this modernization became evident only in the 60’s, with Balmes, Brugnoli, Juan Pablo Langois and others. Why? Because there can also be seen a relationship between art and politics.

If one attempts to be modern, or tries to modernize art in opposition to the ‘official’ art of academia, art is approached from a political standpoint. We then enter into the conflict between art and politics, or art and political representations, or art and political commitments. That’s the game…

It didn’t have precedents or antecedents before in Chile. There is, however, literature… and in my opinion there was a parallel in literature that anticipated painting, because the poets had already discovered collage. In Chile there was Nicanor Parra, Alejandro Jodoroski, Enrique Lhin, etc. already working with collage in the 50’s. (I’ll show you a
magazine from the time to give you an idea.) But, nevertheless, Balmes was the first to take a photograph from the press… to take an object, a shoe, and put it on the canvas… rendering possible an ‘exteriority to the frame’ (‘una fuera del cuadro.’) …And Brugnoli went even further, working not just with ‘elements’ on the canvas (although he may have at first), but with material objects. …And Langois produced works within the museum. So there is a process towards the criticism of art, accompanied by a revolutionary project of the time. Political problems also existed: North America invades Santo Domingo, there is the Cuban Revolution of ‘59, there is the Vietnam war, the Student reform and revolution, the ‘hippy’ movement, etc.

… It was a very interesting world at the time – a world of possible utopias… Above all in Latin America, where Allende was the only democratically elected socialist president at that time, and the United States was immanent, by way of the CIA and the FBI, to assassinate Allende. …And the great majority of all of the artists of the time (maybe even 100%) were committed to the left – whether genuinely or for political accommodation – Balmes, Brugnoli, etc. This all ended with the military coup of 1973 – the continuity was broken, and Balmes went to try and stay alive abroad.

…These discourses we rearticulated in ’78 (…’75, ’76, ’77), when Nelly Richard emerged on the scene. That is, there emerged a political art ‘arte-político’ that stemmed from this language… and from the Mexican muralism movement, and the [Brigadas] murals in the streets, etc… These were the discourses of the 1960’s, dissimilar to that of Nelly Richard or the CADA; although the CADA does represents a discourse of ‘the street,’ it is a live one… nevertheless, it did stem from it’s influence.

What are the major differences between Nelly, the CADA and all the others who participated in the ‘scene,’ …as compared to Brugnoli and Balmes. [Brugnoli and Balmes] would say that they were the first to position photography, to work with the urban landscape, to relate art and politics; but according to Nelly, these ‘modernizing’ elements were never accompanied by texts or writing relating to the modernization of art theory which calls for the recognition of structuralism, semiotics, …psychoanalysis and post-Marxism …so as to be able to speak about works that summon these readings. That is, she is saying that the discourse of Brugnoli and Balmes up until 1973 was an oral discourse (basically a university discourse), …and the big discourse up until ‘73 was that of the social sciences or sociology.

And what Nelly Richard did was place herself within the margins of the radical or confrontational discourse of the epic left, for its triumph, its hegemony, its patriarchal nature – she placed herself within the margins of social sciences (because she regarded social scientists as ‘official ’), and within the margins of official or academic discourse. …You’ve got the radical discourse of the left, the discourse of social sciences, and the discourse of academia, and she found her place within the margins [of all three], with a discourse that claims to be ‘deconstructive.’

That’s it, …and her scene appeared from 1977 until ’83.

It is important to try and place her – to physically locate the Escena Avanzada or the “New Scene,” as she calls it. It obviously can’t be placed within the University or in the social sciences, because they represent academia – FLACSO, Ceneca, José Joaquin
Brunner (Alwyn’s minister), etc. – they are financed, as I understand, by international organizations.

...Then, of course, it’s not official painting, because the Escena Avanzada is anti-pictoric, Balmes included. (The was an earlier dispute between Balmes and Brugnoli, because Brugnoli denied the pictoric object and balmes didn’t – he continued with epic political painting and muralism in exile in France.)

Nelly Richard’s discourse doesn’t relate to continuity; her discourse refers to the crisis of meaning – the Escena Avanzada is a reflection on the crisis of codes and language. So, it criticizes painting, sculpture…

AT: It’s very interesting to hear this from your point of view…
I have spoken with several of the artists themselves, but to speak with a historian (and not someone who was directly involved) allows me to take a step back and gain a more complete structural or historical understanding of the relationships between my subjects.

GM: I have sort of given form to a structure that many others have left out – a structure based on the notion of ‘modernizations,’ which effectively applies to the period of the 1990’s as well…

There is one theme for which I reproached Nelly Richard, namely her failure to address the topic of sculpture.

With regard to modernization, at the level of discourse, there are indeed obvious influences [as Richard affirms] drawn from the work of such theorists as Julia Christeva, Gilles Deleuze, Michael Foucault, Lacan, Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, etc… these influences are important and evident. But, at the level of visual arts, Richard has always included issues of painting, drawing, and engraving in her discourse, but never sculpture… and it remains that way. Within these circumstances, I believe that the work with the corporal and with the urban space, can certainly be read from the perspective of sculpture. The manifestations in the 1960’s of the German sculptor Beuys (and his ‘amplified’ notion of sculpture), serve as a relevant example.

(...)

According to Richard, the presence and power of this scene faded in 1982 or ’83, as other interesting phenomena emerged; namely the return of painting on the part of young painters trained within the School of Fine Arts at the Universidad de Chile.

…So from ’82 to ’89 there is a so-called “third period,” (the first having been from ’73 to ’77, correlating to the fist stage of the dictatorship, and the second having been ’77 to ’82 or ‘83.) The third period began in ’83 and lasted up until the 1990’s – including this whole argument surrounding Brugnoli’s exhibition [Cadaver Exquisito, which we were discussing before.]

So… there are three phases; and the richest period, in my opinion, is that of ’83 to ’89 – the ‘third period’ in which many key players emerged.

…First, there was a return to painting, …but from whom? – From students at the Universidad de Chile, who weren’t taught by professors of the Avanzada (with the exception of Gonzalo Diaz.) Nelly Richard challenged this, because according to her the
return of painting was a gesture performed by illiterate artists -- illiterate, because they lacked a real university education; they couldn’t/didn’t understand contemporary referents; they lacked reading material; it was a university that remained separate from the Escena.

[In the Universidad de Chile] there appeared instead expressionist, animated painters. And then there was the Universidad Católica, which housed a critical workshop of engraving, run by an engraver by the names of Vilches, who had a Bauhaus formation. …Here artists like Arturo Duclos, Alicia Villareal and Mario Soro emerged -- a group that was later to be more interesting from the perspective of Nelly Richard and the others.

… There was also Brugnoli, who appeared again in 1983-84 with his installations, and Balmes returned from exile in ’84; Gonzalo Díaz and Justo Pastor Mellado also emerged with an intelligent, critical reflection of painting, as if to extend the critical harshness of the Escena Avanzada, but applying it to the criticism of painting. There we have it…

…The important figures are Balmes, Brugnoli, Duclos, Benmayor, Gonzalo Díaz, …and Dittborn, who had already begun his work with postcards.

…Davila (who had always lived outside of Chile), and Leppe abandoned visual arts in 1982-'83.

AT: Nelly Richard and others talk about a rejection of painting during this period, but many of the artists that we are speaking about were painters... like Davila, for example.

GM: Yes, but he is a painter that thinks critically about painting; he is a cold painter – very obscene – that is, he is ‘coldy’ obscene. He is a chiller; he cools ‘hot’ painting… in the same way that Dittborn ‘cools’ painting through the use of photography. But they are not artists that deny painting; let’s just say they de-construct painting through representation.

…Altamirano also exhibits some of this, and Duclos, who works with engraving and transfers in his painting, so displacement is implied – a change of supports.

The CADA worked with displacement – out of the painting, off of the pedestal, and on to the street. …Brugnoli denied paintings in the 60’s in order to work with the object, but he then would paint the surface of the object; the negation is of the illusion of painting, to the frame-fetish, and to the transcendental, profound and metaphysical image of the painter. Above all, Nelly Richard attacked categories such as inspiration, classic beauty, art for art’s sake, …all the mythologies of the artist, of the author, of the ‘small god.’ It a post-structuralist work of the criticism of the subject, the criticism of unity, of ontological and hegemonic accounts, which according to [Nelly] still apply to the discourse of the left, which resists the cutting of ties with the past.

…You see the difference between Balmes and Davila: Balmes is in exile, and ‘exile’ represents continuity; it’s also monumental, as he returns from exile. Davila, on the hand, isn’t an exile but a traveler… he doesn’t have territory of his own. So, Davila’s reflection of Chilean painting is one of fragmentation, of scraps…

(We flipped through catalogues, etc...)
GM: (Pointing…) This here is an icon of political painting, which is very important for the muralist movement. For example, it was very evident in the United States during the time of the Great Depression of 1930’s, when Roosevelt was in power. The government financed the nation’s artists, who struggled as a result of the Depression and the great crisis of capitalism in North America at the time; and the authorities wanted painters to display a positive image of factory life, of workers, etc., and hired Jackson Pollack, who painted a socialist realism. At the time, Mexican muralists like Rivera, etc. were popular. Then later, in the time of McCarthyism and slightly before, many murals were erased.

(...later)

GM: In 1982 there emerged in Chile young artists and writers who were tired of Nelly Richard’s conceptual art; they reacted with a ‘pleasurable’ form of painting.

Nelly Richard dedicates a chapter to this in her book, [Margins and Institutions], entitled “A return to the pleasurable.”

(He includes it in this catalogue as well…)

(He is pointing to ‘Fuera de Serie.’)

GM: According to Mellado, this was the final exhibition of the Escena Avanzada…

The names are printed backwards… the artists included are Brugnoli, Davila, Diaz, Dittborn, Duclos, Errazuriz, Leppe… and then the writers: Gonzalo Muñoz, Pablo Oyarzun, and Nelly Richard. What was asked of the writers was not to write about the artworks, but to make the text itself a work of art; the texts were also displayed on the walls. It was 1985.

…Nelly Richard, in her text, contests young painters. (…)

… And Oyarzun, what does he do? …He approaches a very important issue in his analysis of Rauschenberg’s exhibit in the Bellas Artes museum. Because Rauschenberg brought with him a tremendous ‘pop’ apparatus, …which is quite impressive.

…I’m not sure if he was an alcoholic, or gay, or homosexual.

He replaced all the circular portraits that are displayed on the façade of the museum with the image of his own face, smiling in a cowboy hat. The left in Chile felt very violated… and there was therefore a conference, with Rauschenberg and his translator, in which the translator failed to translate what it was that the public was asking. The people noticed this, and someone offered to translate instead. Then, Rauschenberg really heard what the people were asking him and, surprised, he laughed… saying to the public, “you Chileans are more straight-laced and moralistic than the pope himself.” Outside no one commented.
In this way, and in Chile, the idea of Rauschenberg was more critical, and brought with it an entire aesthetic company, a work of immeasurable value. And this is what Oyarzun deals with – that at that moment in Chile there was an ongoing reflection about techniques... about photography, etc. And the impact of Rauschenberg’s almost imperial technological development left the Chileans feeling like mere artisans, which angered them greatly.

(...)

(Pointing to the Revista CAL...)

GM: This was a magazine printed by the ‘CAL’ gallery in 1979, dedicated to the criticism of art. It features all the important figures of the time. I am going to lend it to you so you can photocopy it, but you have to be sure to take very good care of it, because all these original publications are being destroyed. ...So be very careful when you put it in an envelope and fuss around with it in your bag. Don’t let it fall into the hands of children or kids, or others who might have greasy hands, because these people can be rough handlers... I’ll give you a strong envelope... just take really good care of it.

(Pointing...)

This was a guy that worked in the Universidad de Chile, a typical teacher of the history ‘official’ Chilean art; Gaspar Galaz wrote together with Milan Iverich, and conducts classes in the Católica...

Then there’s Brugnoli. Each one responds here with their opinion of the criticism of art. And here’s Nelly Richard ...look, and Carlos Leppe, and Carbacho, who wrote a book on sculpture that was very bad, very ‘official.’ ...So, in looking at all these faces it is interesting to see the differences.

(...)

There is also a text here written by Ronald Kay (who I’ve told you about) and who, in my opinion, wrote the strongest essay on Chilean art in its examination of photography and Eugenio Dittborn’s work, entitled “El Espacio de Acá.” He writes about this problem... namely, photography in the New World -- the effects of the first photographic interventions in the New World. ...I think it’s the most important reflection about photography. (... Kay was a parallel to Nelly Richard and her work.)

(...)

Here there is an interview with Carlos Altamirano – a very radical Altamirano from the Escena. ...He himself regrets it today – he was a committed militant leftist, and now... he is much more accepting, etc.

I am definitely going to lend this to you... it will be very useful.
AT: To begin with, what can you tell me about the movements of arts that emerged in Chile after the military coup?

FB: Well, what can I say… There are many things to say about this period… I think it is a very interesting moment in Chilean art history. I am convinced that it appears that is the most important period… in the sense that it more or less necessitated a reflection on the languages of art production. In Chile, this was something that was dealt with intuitively … exceptionally. This consideration of language was a result of the oppression… of the circumstances and context. Language always represents power; the one who names (labels) is ultimately the one who designates, and therefore delivers something’s designated value based on a predetermined reading. In this sense, the dictatorship as controller of power, established itself as a controller of language in general. It named a new national reality, or at least attempted to name one… and was rather successful in this endeavor. I think this is something that we must clearly understand. In the face of this, one might say that artists – in a highly subversive position, (in the complete sense of the word) – set out to reverse the meaning that the power established, introducing a factor of ambiguity in their works …rupturing the conventionalities of gender, and entering a line of experimental art that was highly productive.

Now… I can also tell you that there existed a rather serious problem, one which we have discussed quite a bit with Nelly… namely that the Chilean military coup sought after a forceful cultural rupture. It set out to inaugurate a new period in history. This is not new in Chile, nor is it new in Latin America. In Chile every government agenda based on some type of innovation, feels it has the right to rewrite history. We have lived through a succession of histories; the city [of Santiago] is proof of this in the sense that the monuments of our heroes change places according to the system… some are even lost, never to be seen again. This is really something very particular and quite special.

Now… the post-1973 movement ironically reclaimed the concept of rupture, and a correspondence was created between rupture of dictatorship and the rupture it was reclaiming. On the one hand, the dictatorship attempted to renovate Chile’s institutionality – to construct a new concept of institutionality. In its own right, this movement [that we are discussing] tried to somehow form meta-narratives – allegories of sorts – for what institutionality could be. The magazine “Manuscritos” that you have over there is an unusual publication in Chile, more for its level of production than for its content; it is too elegant. Chilean artists were in quite
marginal conditions, and the magazine implies a character of officialdom. That is, there was practically a claim of what institutionality should be as well. Catalogues began to take on this characteristic; Manuscritos went on to influence all editorial production.

What’s more, this movement – in qualifying itself as ‘ruptural’ – created a very serious problem in Chile, the problem of coinciding with the dictatorship in historical continuity as well.

The truth is that experimental art in Chile was already born; there are concrete examples from the 1960’s. I think that in order to talk about rupture or contemporary art in Chile, you have consider - at the very least - the 1950’s onward. One has to carefully read the discourse of the ‘Rectángolo’ group, for example, which was characterized by the installation of the avant-garde, in a wider socio-cultural sense.

AT: Yes… I talked about this with [Guillermo] Machuca.

FB: Right…

…Then you have to review the significance of the “Signo” group – Balmes’ formalism. In my opinion, in spite of the fact that this continued to be painting, the break with respect to the concept of the frame was very radical. And later, I think Virginia and I (and other artists) produced another rather serious break, one which surpassed what we had planned or had in mind, marked by the reaction of artists, of the public, of criticism against this… because in reality, one recognized a certain radicalism with regard to all processes of art production and a deep reflection with respect to spaces of circulation, with respect to the appropriation of artwork, etc.

…The rupturist movement, the Escena Avanzada, denied these antecedents… and this was something I argued a lot with Nelly about at the time, in some very heated discussions. I have a great friendship with Nelly, but it is a friendship in which we acknowledge our differences and we both welcome mutual discussion. It has been this way since the beginning. I was always invited to exhibit my work in the spaces that she generated like the “CAL” gallery and the “Sur” Gallery. Likewise Nelly’s presence always counted in the spaces that I generated, such as the Taller de Artes Visuales, which was in many ways the major center of discussion.

… I think the best thing we could do in opposition to the dictatorship, with respect to critical thought, was to create a reflective space that would influence subsequent criticism. And the best thing that post-dictatorship art produced wasn’t so much the art itself, despite its unquestionable international importance… but its unique theoretical discourse, which had tremendous originality and impact. This is what inspired Ronald Kay and Nelly Richard… but ultimately it is Nelly who really permanently sustains it. Nelly is an essential person in Chile; one must always acknowledge this.
Anyway, this subject was always very polemical, and I think it is still unresolved. I think the Escena Avanzada identified itself with a heroic concept that contradicted the content, the very operation of its work. A deconstructive operation isn’t heroic at all; it is an *anti*-avant-garde operation in a way.

AT: How would you say that your own work did or did not form part of the Escena Avanzada?

FB: Well, the truth is… there was a parallel movement that I participated in and Lotty participated in, etc. In my opinion Nelly was very late in recognizing me as an antecedent. …We argued over this as well. But it was impossible to deny… many of the people in the Escena Avanzada were either students or classmates of ours – they had seen our work and the polemics that existed before the coup.

The fact is, there was an intense divided situation. I founded the *Taller de Artes Visuales*, a center of production that necessarily allowed Chilean artists to have a space in which to work …but it was also a place of reflection about the graphic production, specifically etching. It was one of the places of origin of experimental graphic art, simultaneous with other explorations that were being conducted, such as Eugenio Dittborn’s, etc. The fact is, many of the young artists from the new generation of experimental art were part of the *Taller de Artes Visuales* – they emerged from it.

In my opinion, the Escena Avanzada’s eagerness to establish a break… I’m telling you that I don’t think we have discussed this with the clarity it deserves. I don’t think I had been a …bothersome person; I kept a memory, I was an antecedent, etc. The irony is that after 1973 I had nowhere to show my work. For me it was absolutely impossible, and the Escena Avanzada managed to create exhibition spaces that showed works of considerable importance. With this the idea of rupture was accentuated, the idea of historical reference that I have been talking about.

I reappeared on the scene for the first time in the 1980’s, when I was invited to participate in collective exhibitions in which Nelly was the main protagonist – in the “Sur” gallery, for example. It wasn’t until 1983 that the gallery offered me a spot, when Virginia [Errazuriz, my wife] and I exhibited “Paisaje,” which I think was an absolutely key exhibit for the period. More than that, it opened up a lot because it launched new operational referents …in opposition to clear association with ‘poor’ art that the Escena Avanzada maintained, seeking to express its marginality with the poverty of its materials.
In 1983 I began to work with processes of ‘make-up,’ called attention to the ‘kitsch-ization’ of culture. “Paisaje” was an exposition that took place inside a gallery, but alluded to the landscape (‘paisaje’) of Santiago. This in itself is ‘kitsch’ – to allude to without being, which implicates a deviation …a deviation of character.

That exposition was quite polemical …generally all of my exhibitions have been controversial or have generated controversies, some of which I regret.

Later, in 1990, I was in another controversial exposition, which Nelly wrote about on my behalf. What Nelly wrote in her text ended up provoking a violent debate with Justo Pastor Mellado. I think that ‘Cadaver Exquisito’ (the exhibition from 1990) was an exhibition that marked certain situations and problems in Chilean art that are removed from some of the Escena Avanzada’s positions; curiously, some of the members of the Escena Avanzada tried to initiate certain actions that I would call ‘monumentalist’ … a kind of ‘grand’ existence of works.

In my opinion, there was also an implied contradiction between the insecurity that one experienced and the reality of marginality in Chilean art…

AT: Could we speak about certain works in particular? (…Ones that specifically achieved the goals of this movement.)

FB: Well, lets see…. the Escena Avanzada, as first defined by Nelly Richard, was composed of a very small group of people: Eugenio Dittborn, Carlos Leppe, and Carlos Altamirano. Later, Lotty Rosenfeld was considered …but not really, because Nelly always maintained her distance with the CADA. Nevertheless, with time, she began to admit that the CADA did in fact exist within the broader concept of the Escena Avanzada. In this broader conception of the Avanzada, she also began to acknowledge mine and Virginia’s work, and also began to include Gonzalo Diaz. Even later, there was another element added, which incorporated artists like Arturo Duclos. But, I tell you this was… gradual. So, if I were to name key pieces from each period, they would undoubtedly be those of these artists.

Eugenio Dittborn’s works, mostly those from before “El Arte Postal,” profile a series of graphics on cardboard …in which, in my opinion, he does something extremely interesting…something I talk about a lot with my students. I am referring specifically to a key piece of his called “La Pietà” or “The Death of Beneguit Paret.” He takes a photograph of a video or television screen and he turns this photograph into a silk-screen, which he then prints on cardboard. This process is very interesting because from the television or the screen, which would be the most advanced processes in the production of images,
he recedes back to photography, and then back to the silk-screen, which is another important historical jump backwards. …Then the silk-screen is put onto cardboard, which is an act related to the art of painting and the pictoric, to the treatment of surface, etc. I also think that what Dittborn says is very well written. What occurs is an unintentional process which implies a concept of reservation, in a manner that I find quite brilliant, in addition to the metonymy of working photographs of Columbian criminals. Undoubtedly the use of photography alludes to the photography of the ‘wanted’ man, of the disappeared prisoners. What’s more, there is a general concept of delinquency; during the dictatorship the left was thought of as a delinquent association…I think that is a very key work.…

There are also 2 or 3 of Leppe’s pieces, done in association with Altamirano, that are very essential. (…Pointing) That work, in my opinion, is Leppe’s best of all. I photographed it a lot, and included it in some of the lectures I conducted in Europe – it’s called “La Sala de Espera.” (“The Waiting Room.”) This piece was exhibited in the “Sur” gallery alongside the Eugenio Dittborn piece that featured the photographs of the delinquents. They appeared in the same exhibition.

In addition… Lotty Rosenfeld’s most paradigmatic work, which still remains so today, was “Una mila de cruces sobre el pavimento.” That was an extremely significant piece, in which she carried out various interferences in the subversion of codes, the questioning of language, the insertion of a feminine action, etc. I refer to the latter not as a result of her being a woman, but in her feminine actions of curing, applying a bandage, etc… the actions of the woman as defined by Nelly Richard, who maintains that when a woman plays a protagonist role, she acts subversively with regard to her corresponding role in society. Therefore, this participation has representative value, with respect to all the subversive roles that are reactions to the roles that society assigns to all men. This is a brutal question that Nelly uncovered, and I think it is most clearly exposed in this work of Lotty’s.

(…)

AT: What more can you tell me about media or supports?

FB: Well, I think that Nelly’s criticism of painting is correct… but it was a mistake to impart such strong emphasis in its interpretation… because one spoke then about the ‘death’ of painting, though Nelly had never said so. …This created a whole new reaction, one which served as the basis for the ‘neo-painting’ movement in Chile that commenced more or less in 1982 with Tacla and Benmayor, in an exhibition entitled “Zapateo Americano.”

…Jorge Tacla and Sammy Benmayor are Chilean artists that lived abroad in New York. They chose to do this exhibition “Zapateo Americano” after having gone to New York
and established contacts with the ‘transvanguardia’ in 1982, where the Italian transvanguardia had already been exhibiting for some time. (…)

So… these were artists who formed part of a young movement, reclaiming the notion of painting; but this reclamation of painting was also tied to something else – the art schools had been transformed into highly reactionary centers, and tended to ignore everything that occurred outside their walls. So… everything represented by the Escena Avanzada, by the movement generated by Nelly, and by our work in the Taller de Artes Visuales …was ignored within the art schools.

...A student once came to me and said, “We aren’t even capable of reading Nelly’s texts, because we don’t have the instruments of formation to be able to understand what they’re about.” [My students] laughed about semiotics …which was absurd, since we had long since introduced ‘semiotics’ as a study through school seminars …since 1970 or 1971. So… the truth is that it was another school altogether, and ultimately the people were defending precisely what Nelly was attacking, which was the handmade value of painting. To understand painting in terms of craftsmanship implied a failure to take account of the fact that artists must necessarily relate to, challenge or incorporate the technical means of production of their time. That is, when an artist works in handicraft, it can be read in two ways; the guy either is doing it to respond to or confront the technical modes of production of his time, or he is acting in absolute ignorance… living on another planet. And that’s exactly what was happening – many were living on another planet.

Because… hyper-realist painters who paint by hand are painters 100%, but nevertheless their work directly responds to the existing means or resources. …This is very interesting, but the reference there is simply to a very late history of painting, one that has long been surpassed…

In putting on a pedestal the ‘inexistent heroes of art history,’ and above all the value of the trade and the handicraft itself… they were dealing with issues that had already more or less been questioned in the 18th century. That is – lets say – the question of photography vs. painting. Now… Nelly is correct with regard to the subject of photography; her discourses are well supported by Walter Benjamin’s analyses.

The concept of ‘aura’ is a concept that we discussed at length; I think it’s a concept that we should still continue to talk about. (…) The idea of the copy and the deterioration of the copy is a very present phenomenon in Chile, precisely because all of Chile’s urban referents are merely photographic reproductions of images (…) I learned the entire history of European art, for example, by means of a book… in which the textures were all identical, and so on… I could touch the images of these paintings, and therefore desecrated them, etc.

I think that this topic still necessitates further discussion, due to the very fact that (re)producing an artwork on the basis of a photographic image represents a loss, a deterioration… and from this deterioration, an entirely new thing arises.
So…I have been writing this thesis for a long time now, with a neurotic stance on Latin-American art. I think that there are things that must be reflected upon – at the very least as a necessary gesture of recognition – following Benjamaian logic.

(...)

AT: In addition to being graphic in nature, a great majority of your works are installations. What drove you to choose ‘installation’ as a medium or support?

FB: …Well, the ‘installation’ is a fairly universal artistic medium.

Elements of earlier works, in which I had previously dealt with the criteria of installation, were clearly recognizable in my first installation….I understand that an installation necessarily implies an action over a space. And therefore, one interacts with the spectator with respect to this relationship with space.

…So, the works that I did up until the 1970’s – collections that were suddenly scattered or spread out across the floor – weren’t necessarily installations… I don’t know, perhaps they were ‘semi-installations.’ But in 1971 I did do a piece that operated in a ‘total’ space, one that worked with the spectator. The piece itself was modified in the sense that the spectator moved throughout it.

…I think that with respect to my current work there are two recognizable differences (…I think we are ultimately going to have to approximate here); first, I am very interested in the notion of silence. …I think it is important to distinguish between visual and verbal language as two different things. If not, one or the other wouldn’t exist. If I can say ‘this,’ it is not necessary to do ‘that.’ …I produce a piece in the sense that I can’t say it. …There are some necessities of language that can only be settled by means of metaphor or metonymy; it is in these where the work appears. …. (Gonzalo) Diaz has often rested inside operations that have to do with verbal language and therefore, in my opinion, …in the interaction between the image and verbal language. I find this very interesting, but it is very different.

In my opinion, installations shouldn’t have titles at all, or have ambiguous titles like “Cadaver Exquisito” or … “11:00, 11:05.” The spectator must necessarily submit to the piece as an experience. I think that this is one main difference.

The other difference is that although my works can sometimes be akin to ‘monumental actions’ (I have worked with the concept of the ‘monumental’), …they always display great skepticism with respect to the entire discourse of the artist.

…Since the 1960’s I’ve held a certain opposition, in consideration of cultural paradigms. We artists do things that are very dangerous in this respect. We install something, and this in turn develops an image, and therefore an imaginary… thus effectively creating a conduit with respect to this ‘something.’ …As a result, I have always tried to work deconstructively, to dismantle this process; but in order to dismantle something one has to work with the thing itself.
Have you read Borges? …There is a text of his in which he cites *Giordano Bruno*, …a 16th century Italian philosopher. The text I am referring to is called “*La Esfera de Pascal.*” …Giordano Bruno offers a masterful definition of the universe. He says that the universe is a sphere… listen closely; ‘it is a sphere who’s center is everywhere, yet who’s perimeter is nowhere.’ But, in order to be able to say this, you have to name it a sphere. …If I were to simply say that the universe has its center and perimeter everywhere and in everything, it would be a much more approachable concept than saying that it is a ‘sphere.’ …The ‘sphere’ represents a process of displacement… there exists a significant void.

…So, to work with issues that consist of cultural paradigms, and to operate a ‘rupture’ that causes this paradigm to deviate from its monumental position, leaving it destabilized and astray… I really don’t know where it will end.

(...*Pointing*)

Those over there are the ruins of earlier installations.

AT: From “*Paisaje,*” no?

FB: Yes… from several things, actually. The gray one is from “*Cadaver Exquisito*” -- I have worked with light bulbs positioned in that way for quite some time.

(…) Several works appeared on the scene that involved large structures built with tubes of fluorescent light (I am referring here to Leppe’s work from the 70’s and 80’s.)

…Gonzalo Diaz began to work very early in accordance with Mario Merz’s work, in his inclusion of ‘neon.’

…So, I took this challenge and I worked with it; namely, the marginality of the ‘other.’ …The ‘other’ implies the idea of progress, and this is the idea of the complete opposite. …Now, what you see there you might find in the circus – in ‘poor’ circuses or in ‘poor’ theaters – used to illuminate the stage, fashioned exactly the way they are right there. …*Or* you could also find lights like that mounted in poor churches, for religious public services and rituals – exactly the way they are there. …But, then again, they are also like the lights on the make-up mirror of an actor or a movie-star. …They are all these things… you see?

(...)

AT: …Would you say that artistic practices must necessarily continue to question political processes in a critical way?
FB: Absolutely. In this respect, I greatly appreciate what Marcel Duchamp established historically, which had previously been referenced in the works of Cezanne. The artist must continuously live in critical and reflective observation of his context – of everything that surrounds him.

AT: Tomas Andreu once said to me “Arte que no tiene vida no es arte.” He also drew an interesting comparison between the ‘capoeira’ dance used by slaves in Brazil to maintain tradition and to communicate with one another – to ‘say the unsayable.’ He spoke of language that effectively questions society, used in this case by Chilean artists in the 80’s to communicate under conditions of intense censorship. I found this very interesting.

FB: But, after 1983, all of this was forgotten. The language of the Chilean avant-garde was determined thereafter by what was allowed in the largest art galleries, and painting appeared to be on the ‘come-back.’ It wasn’t until the 1990’s (when it was happening all over the world), that the younger generation began to look with a sense nostalgia or curiosity about what happened in the 60’s or 70’s.

…It should be noted with a critical eye that this newfound ‘nostalgic’ or ‘curious’ gaze, was no doubt influenced by the ‘Freeze’ exhibition in England… and later by the ‘Sensations’ exhibition in New York.

…“Freeze” was a group that exhibited in London in 1989. Nine years later, the Royal Academy invited the same group to show their work, and the resulting exhibit was named ‘Sensations.’ That show (with some additional works) then went to the Brooklyn Museum of Art in New York, and Mayor Giuliani was made a hero.

(…)

AT: There is one thing I have wanted to ask you… Could you clarify the impact of the military coup on your own career and profession? You worked as a professor until…


AT: Of course. Did all of the art professors lose their jobs then?

FB: Many… I would say about 60% stayed. Everything was so difficult …very, very difficult.

AT: Did conditions change in 1983… to allow you to begin producing work again?

FB: No. The dictatorship engaged in highly intelligent operations. What happened was that in 1982, a group of young people with very progressive tendencies founded an institute of higher education… and they invited me to teach a class on the history of art. It was then that I proposed the creation of an art school. Thus, in 1983, art academy ARCIS, which is something you should know, because in my opinion it is still the most important thing that has happened in Chile in the realm of art education. …So, I conducted programs with other professors; of course, Nelly Richard was one of the
professors I invited to join … so you can see the importance of our dialogue – it was a heated dialogue, but a dialogue all the same …which is what’s important….And then Gonzalo Diaz began to teach, and Euguenio Dittborn as well. So, it is a school that began with a very high level faculty. Ultimately, ARCIS played a fundamental role - in the context of a national struggle with respect to the history of local art - in what was to come of the relationship between the artists of the 1990’s and the scene from the 60’s and 70’s. ‘ARCIS’ was where all of this began to develop. On the other hand, foreign influence also played a very important role. For example the “Sensations” catalogue was widely circulated in certain art schools.

… What more can I say?

…So, from 1983 onwards I went back to having a professional space, as a professor – specifically in an art school. In 1989, the architecture school at the Universidad de Chile invited me to teach. From then on, I began to recuperate. Then, in 1991 or 1992 they held a public contest to find an art history professor in the Universidad de Chile. I entered, but without much hope, because I didn’t have a degree in the history of art, though I had studied a bit with Rayanti and Argan in Europe. But… I developed an innovative model for the teaching art history in Chile. There was a jury – a very honest committee, which awarded me first place. (At a considerable distance from the other contestants, I might add.) I was very surprised indeed.

…So that is how I became a professor of art history. Later, when I was teaching history classes at the university, a group of painting students approached me and asked if I would give them lessons. They organized a movement, and from then on I conducted a workshop of advanced art classes. …So that’s the story of my re-integration into the Universidad de Chile.

AT: And how were things characterized within the museum while everybody was on the ‘outside’ during the military government? There wasn’t an official art like Hitler’s was there?

FB: No, there was never an official art, but there did exist ‘black lists.’ …For those of us on these black lists, it was a very difficult situation to overcome. …It wasn’t until 1978, for example, that I was mentioned again in the newspaper. …In reality, I began to be recognized again in 1980, but it was quite unusual – there were years of profound silence. From then on I began to have a place of mention, but this occurred only very recently… this important place of mention.
Virginia Errazuriz
Santiago de Chile, 9 November 2002

AT: One area that I haven’t explored much in my previous interviews is the question of gender, though it is treated in Nelly’s book, *Margins and Institutions.* As a female, what can you tell me about this issue with regard to contemporary art in Chile?

VE: There was a gender problem, but it was not that important... there was the Popular Unity movement, and the issues of dictatorship... so there were things more important than gender to consider. The gender question didn’t become important until *after* the dictatorship... that’s when Nelly began to work with it in some way.

AT: Can you speak a bit about your own work from that period?

VE: I don’t know which works you are familiar with.

AT: Well I know, for example, your work that appeared in the “Recovering Histories” exhibition.

VE: The truth is, I appeared in the “Recovering Histories” catalogue, but not in the exhibition itself. But there was another exhibit shown at the *American Society* in New York, which later went to another university in the US... I can’t recall the name right now... It was curated by Fatima Werth, who worked with Gonzalo Diaz, Zamudio, Gonzalo Mesa, Alicia Villarol and myself ...on the problem of language in the Chilean situation.

AT: What was that exhibition called?

VE: …Let’s see if I can find the catalogue...

… (*We leafed through several of her catalogues and portfolios.*)

AT: Would you say that you work more with installations than anything else?

VE: Yes, I work mostly in installations.... but more from the perspective of drawing and design. So... that’s where all these notions come from about the serial image, the use of space, etc.

AT: And there is also an element of using language that questions society, no?
VE: Right, exactly… In spite of the fact that you may be working with objects that are considered “pretty,” ...they still must pose some kind of question. Yesterday there was a gringo here from London, … and he asked me “how is it possible that you all created such pretty things in such violent circumstances?” I told him that one had to reverse language in some way … in order to be able to …“speak.”

AT: To say the ‘unsayable.’

VE: Exactly.

(We continued to look through her work…)

AT: If I may, I’d like to return to the gender issue; it is something I haven’t discussed with anyone else.

VE: The interesting thing about the ‘gender theme’ in this situation is to see how people really began to subconsciously work with this issue at the end of the dictatorship … not in the sense of differences in sensibility that can occur between the two sexes, but rather the aggression directed from one gender to the other. You have to understand that by gender I don’t just mean masculine and feminine… for example, the feminine can also exist in the man … in the sensibilities of his work. What interests me is that all this emerges in some way with this issue of questioning language.

AT: Like Lotty Rosenfeld’s work …

VE: Exactly. Take Roser Bru’s work, for example, which involves the question of the woman, and other issues…. But she treats the feminine issue more “emotionally” … with less of a focus on the problems that existed with respect to the issue of language and gender … For example, as Diamela Eltit does with her literature. So… it’s an entirely different situation that develops. I still think that this has developed in literature here in Chile, and in the visual arts. …Sometimes one has to approach a piece and look for differentiations… in language, in rhetoric… it’s interesting. At times it’s easier for someone ‘on the outside’ to look at a piece and to visualize it than it is for someone ‘on the inside.’ This can sometimes be deceptive… you might miss it.

AT: Can we talk again about that exhibition you did in the states?

VE: Sure…

AT: Was it entirely made up of Chilean art from the inside?

VE: Yes… everything came from within. Because, of course, we enclosed ourselves here… we differentiated between the situation of artists that had stayed from that of the ones that had fled Chile, even though some of them may have returned.
AT: Yes, and this catalogue here only shows the work of those that stayed, correct? And therefore, the ones that were obligated to experiment with language…

VE: Exactly, just like the exhibition in Germany that I am sure you have heard about… “Cirugía Plastica” [“Plastic Surgery”]

AT: Yes, I have heard of it.

VE: That exhibition also worked with the same situation… namely, the contemporary art in Chile of those that stayed within the country, who worked with experimental art and language…

AT: What can you tell me about you own use of experimental language in your work? How did you say that which couldn’t be said? (Pointing to a photograph…) For example, what is this piece about?

VE: Well in this case all of these works are installations, which obliges the spectator to enter into the piece… In 1990 there was a rise in… the influence of Italian painting. These things here are like popular posters from certain middle class social sectors, so the reference here is to the Chilean middle class. There are references to the notion of light – both the light that allows us to see, and that which blocks our vision.

The piece plays around with this… using reflections, and mirrors in some cases. In other cases there are piece of plastic, which I interlace or weave together… I work a lot with the idea of weaving. “Tramas” (which is part of the piece’s title) is difficult to translate into English. Literally, it is the name for the threads that run crosswise in a woven fabric, but in Spanish, it has many connotations – the weaving of society, the weaving of the economy, the weaving of politics, the weaving of fabric… There are many connotations, and one has to play with these connotations. In English it is far more difficult – it is hard to translate the word itself, because there isn’t really a word in the English language that is as versatile as the word “trama” in Chile.

AT: I understand… This is a characteristic of conceptual art in general; it can be read in various ways. A piece can mean one thing to somebody, and something entirely different to someone else. That is the reason why it existed at all during Pinochet’s time…

VE: Exactly… So, in this piece all these things represented different elements, all working with the idea of “tramas” as it is used today – in different layers, like the layers of society.

(We continued to look through her collection of catalogues and portfolios.)

VE: This one for example is made up solely of white chalk and light; the tiles imitated or evoked images of footprints, but in reality symbolized the “trama” or woven pattern… not the footprint.

So, they were multifaceted… you see. …And the distribution of each one corresponds to the “trama” of agriculture -- though more representative of the last century. So this
evokes a certain type of weaving that involves triangles, and is at the same time suggestive of the way in which trees were planted so as to receive the greatest amount of light… Then, for some, this recalled the act of lighting candles… So you see, there were many different possible… interpretations.

…There were these elements that appeared very… clean, even evoking a somewhat Japanese-like aesthetic, but at the same time they spoke of other circumstances… like the disappeared.

So… it was about what they might be… without knowing exactly what they were.

... I generally worked with certain repetitive elements. …All these installations work with the idea of light, for example.

… I worked as well with the feeling of…

For example, this was a local exhibition … from ’83, which also evoked the different signs of the time, depicting the image of Chile as seen on postcards, which ironically were all printed abroad. …So there is sort of an idealization of the image of Chile

AT: That’s a clever idea.

VE: And this one… was simply discarded clothing; it was an image of Chile at the time… the image of possibility and expansion… the Chile that was to be created. It was made simply out of white cardboard boxes, printed with the imagery of painting…. with plastic bands made from the primary colors…

This was the moment of construction... but for what and for whom? One always remained ignorant afterwards… There was no way to see what was being constructed. So… I worked a bit with this idea.

… If you look around the apartment there are remains from many of these installations.

You’ll see that there is always this notion of the weaving together of our reality, of the reality that we were shown, and the reality that was being constructed; but it was always a sort of ‘open’ reality – or rather, I couldn’t tell you what it was that was being constructed.

( Pointing to another photo…)

…And this one was sort of an ‘anti-installation’ …It was a small corner seen through a mirror, which acted to visually assemble the piece. Do you see here the detail… how light plays around to both reveal and conceal what you’re seeing?

(Continuing to flip the pages….)
…These are much older works… from 1979, which deal with the problem of the disappeared. This man was a university professor, a friend of ours who belonged to the communist party and was one of the disappeared. He disappeared ...like a bag, literally like a bag. So in this piece I put a photocopy of his picture, of his identity card and a band on the surface of the bag... and stamped it “PAID…” like the rubber stamps they put on your receipts at the stores. And the stamp contained the date of the day he disappeared.

And this one...he was an art student that worked with us sometimes. This is the last etching that he did before he disappeared – it was a boxing glove with the hand of a skeleton inside. These are all little things that have to do with the disappeared.  
…There was sort of an effort to ‘gather up’ these people.

… And this one was a collective piece, which is very important. It was done in ’78 at the “Taller de Artes Visuales,” where we worked. (“The Visual Arts Workshop.”)

It was done for the ‘Human Rights Symposium,’ which was an exhibition sponsored by the Chilean church. It was the first exhibition where we could show this sort of art that had an element of remembrance; we were within the realm of the church…. so we had some degree of protection. What’s more, it was the first exhibition that brought foreign work to Chile.

We called this piece the ‘archive’ or the ‘filing cabinet,’ which is a piece of furniture that they use in public offices in Chile. The piece dealt concretely with the human rights situation – the cabinet was left open so that the public could both look for and contribute information. The problems were about labor security, and of torture, and of exile, and of the disappeared.
Nelly Richard

Santiago de Chile, 19 November 2002

AT: Well, to begin, could you explain to me how the military regime affected culture in general? How did the art movements change as a result? … the world of art, the art scene here…

NR: Well, first I don’t think we can talk about THE art scene – there were several. Right after the military coup, what first occurred came from within the sector of the ‘unorthodox’ political left, the sector of the militant left, the sector of confrontational art…. generally tied to the central communities. In the face of prohibited politics – politics under intervention – art then adopted an alternate function, an alternate structure… in order to be able to say what couldn’t be said in politics. Surrounded by the task of recovering the silenced and marginal voices that occur in this particular art scene – the scene of militant art, of marginalized culture, …of the more traditional left, one might say.

Later there emerged a different scene – that of the Escena Avanzada, which, as I explained in my lecture at the Católica, established certain relationships …while recognizing, on the one hand, the more conventional art of the left, in the sense that the Avanzada, like the artists of the left, are obviously anti-dictatorial. But at the same time, the art of the Escena Avanzada uncovers a strategy of signs that doesn’t have to do with the systems of language, communication, and expression of this other, more militant art.

So…. you can’t talk about the field of art or the scene of art, because there are many individual circuits that make up the field, which in turn establish relationships among themselves based on differences… and oftentimes polemics.

AT: For example, how did the art of the Muralist Brigades differ…?

NR: Well, the Ramona Parra Brigade, and all the other muralists from the time of the Popular Unity movement, were undoubtedly of great importance within the small towns and villages during and after the coup. There was a great movement in muralist art, organized in the work of Humberto Diaz, for example who was a key figure in coordinating all the muralist art from the villages. What’s more, the CADA, for example, …became indebted to Ramona Parra’s muralist work. In spite of the fact that their artistic strategy was totally different, they nevertheless recognize this “historical art” …this art of political and popular happenings.
So, [the CADA] pays homage, to put it one way, to the Ramona Parra Brigade… though I would say that the practices of the Escena Avanzada and the others …do not share this recognition of muralist art.

AT: In your book you speak of anti-history, or the distancing from history… I have read about the distancing from traditional media and conventional aesthetics, but am curious about estrangement with regard to ‘history.’ What can you tell me about that?

NR: Well, in those times …in the times of the Avanzada, it was due to the types of discourses we were constructing, and due to the nature of existing theoretical debates like Walter Benjamin’s, which was very important to our work … Eugenio Dittborn has produced very Benjaminian dialogues, for example...

(…)

As you well know, Benjamin is a critic …from the time of the “neo” …flanked by history’s emptiness and homogeneity. I would say that the polemics, the thematic debates of the Avanzada, had a lot to do with this… a criticism of historicity … a criticism from within the Bellas Artes, in the traditional sense …a general criticism of “museum art,” …specifically in a contemplative, prognostic sense…

Walter Benjamin’s book, The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction was central in thinking about the departure from painting… specifically the political kind.

So… to answer the question, what happens with history here is exactly what happens in Benjamin’s dialogue, which very much influenced the distancing from … the ‘art of memory,’ …the ‘art of identity,’ …’the art of the people.’ …The notion of history was much more transcendental… epic… a monumental history about the defeated, which took on a symbolic form that was just as extensive and complete as the ‘official’ history. Meanwhile, the Avanzada saw history as a discontinuity… as a ‘jump’, as a ‘rupture,’ as an allegory, as a metaphor… in a very Benjaminian way, I would say.

…And there was also the question of photography… which was decisive for the Avanzada.

AT: Yes… that’s another question… I am very interested in talking about the role of photography, but I’d like to stay with the theme of history for a moment. I am currently taking a very interesting class at the Universidad de Playa Ancha called ‘Comunicación y Cultura,’ taught by Professor Luciano San Martin… I don’t know if you know him. Anyway, he’s a friend of Justo Pastor Mellado’s… he’s a very interesting professor. He speaks a lot about the crisis of “Chilean-ness” [‘lo chileno’], which results from a general lack of critical thought in the modern world. (…) This then directly relates to these art movements… with respect to censorship, or self-censorship…

NR: No… with regard to the Escena Avanzada one can’t ever speak about a lack of critical thought. I would say that this scene represents an exacerbation of critical thought
… precisely an attitude of permanent dismantling and deconstruction … of the systems of signs, of language, of codes, of mediums, of techniques, etc.

AT: Of course… of course… They represented critical thought during a time when one couldn’t say these things. They looked for other ways to ‘say the unsayable’ and in this way, they maintained critical thought during a time when it didn’t exist. …I read this book *A Nation of Enemies* in the plane coming down to Chile – I read it to learn something about the history. I think it is a very good book… it says a lot about the ‘Culture of Fear’ that existed, and the widespread self-censorship. What interests me very much about these artists is that they stayed, they didn’t flee.

NR: What self-censorship does is make every operator of signs – every writer, every artist, every poet – establish a much more intense relationship with language; as a result of self-censorship one must think about language and the factor of risk. …They must think about the language and its communicative substance… about the perversion of codes, the reversal of signs, etc… So, really this refers to the critical powers of language…

AT: The other thing that interests me about this art movement is that there is a very important relationship between the spectator and the artist…. one in which the spectator also plays a central role… in reading and interpreting the piece, for evidently there were many possible ways to interpret these works…

NR: It is also important to be careful, I think, not to conceive of the Avanzada as a block or a whole, because there are a number of dissimilar works within the Avanzada, that do not necessarily share the same assumptions. For example, between the art of the CADA, which has a certain element of *monumentality* and is *heroic, utopian, messianic*, etc., …and the work of someone like Dittborn, there are many differences. But during those years – due to the political conditions – they were obliged to emphasize their commonalities and leave aside their differences, in order to protect and fortify what was being articulated. … But, with the passage of time, it is necessary to acknowledge the differences that exist within the Avanzada, and not to view it as a uniform tendency, a homogenous group, a cohesive group, but to really comprehend that *within* the Avanzada there exist various different work methods…

AT: Actually, can we speak more about this? I’m still not entirely clear on the relative chronology of these artists… for example, how does the Escena Avanzada differ from the CADA, and within those spheres, how do their individual participants differ from each other?

NR: The thing is, in a certain way it’s the book “Margins and Institutions,” which ultimately “institutionalizes” … or presents the Avanzada as a referent; it articulates the objectification of a group of diverse & scattered practices, and thus makes them appear to be a whole.
...Perhaps there was a need for ‘an articulator’ so that the various scattered practices could appear above a common denominator, in spite of their existing differences.

...Lets say that the CADA had a more utopian, messianic dimension ...more avant-garde, in the sense that they chose the avant-garde elements of ‘art and life’ to be the chief focus, the crux of their hypothesis; this, however, is an axis upon which there developed many differences in practice, precisely in consideration of the fact that there is a certain metaphysical element in resemblance, an allusion to the... ‘fusion’ of art and life. There is a certain “naiveté” also implied here, in the attempt to erase certain elements, as if the fusion of art and life could function... without limitations or codifications.

AT: So each artist had his own agenda... for example the great age gap between someone like Brugnoli and someone like Duclos sets them in entirely different contexts.

NR: Well Fransisco Brugnoli and Virginia Errazuriz emerged and came together way before the Avanzada... we’re talking about artists who introduced ‘pop art,’ etc...

What’s more these are not artists of the Avanzada...

...The Avanzada is not a generational concept... that’s why we talk about a scene and not about a generation; but they are artists that more or less share in common the principles of the 80’s, while Brugnoli and Errazuriz are more from the 70’s...

AT: But isn’t it true that one mustn’t confine their investigation solely to the decade of the 80’s, but rather look back to earlier decades as far back as the sixties in order to better understand this group’s origins? I spoke a lot about this with Machuca.

NR: (Nodding yes.)

(Change of subject...)

NR: That magazine you have there, the CAL, was a publication edited in 1979. It was directed by someone else, but I edited two issues... this issue was one of the first instances... (because the Galería CAL would later be one of the first to show the works of the Avanzada) ...so this issue was one of the very first antecedents of what was to become the Avanzada. Many of its main players were featured: Altamirano’s in there, Leppe’s in there, Diamela Eltit’s early novels are in there, along with fragments of Zurita’s poetry... We are talking about the years of ’78, ’79, so this is an example of an antecedent for what was to come later...
That is a fragment of Dittborn’s work there (pointing...).

And so... it is clearly important to ‘recreate,’ so to speak, the genealogy of these documents... and then you’ll see how Brugnoli and Errazuriz are another scene; they may indeed have intercepted the Avanzada in a very productive way, though their appearance... their history... their context is from an earlier time.
(After speaking about the project for a while, I chose to return to the issue of gender with Nelly in our final remaining minutes.)

AT: One of the issues I haven’t brought up with anyone but Virginia is the question of gender. Can we speak a bit about that?

NR: Well, I have written a book called “Masculine, Feminine” (“Masculino, feminino”), I don’t know if you know it… There is a chapter which makes reference to visual arts and … and the question of whether one can speak of a feminist esthetic (and whether one can differentiate between the feminine aesthetic and the feminist artist)… or the relationship, that is, between art and gender.

There are differences that occur in literature and literary studies, in poetry, etc; in these areas there has been a more or less structured movement towards a feminist esthetic, but not in the visual arts. Not many people have dealt with the issue of gender, though it is obvious that many of these artists are women.

… It is a complicated issue, because it is not about thinking of the artist as a woman… for example Roser Bru’s case, her works are ultimately labeled as feminine because she works with symbols of maternity, and of the woman, etc.

I think it is far more interesting to conceive of the feminine in terms of acts of disobedience as anti-hegemonic practices. One might say that Lotty’s work Cruces, while void of any predominant representations of the woman, is an anti-hegemonic practice and is in that sense feminine... in the sense of being a lesser practice…

So… there is a return here to a type of feminine art, one that is construed as something more than just the ‘art of the woman’ or the ‘art of gender,’ from a position of resistance, …which brings to the forefront discourses of sufficiency and of power relations of all sorts…

…The first antecedent of this gender dialogue was an exposition that was held in Berlin… I can’t remember what it was called… It consisted solely of women, in 1982, I think… and later Diamela Eltit, Lotty Rosenfeld and I all participated as curators of an exhibition in Vancouver, Canada, called “The Human, the Art, and the Periphery”. I would say that those were perhaps two early antecedents of this topic – namely, the issue of gender – and it relationship to aesthetics and politics.
AT: I have read this text of yours from 1990 – your response to Nelly Richard’s discourse in the *Cadaver Exquisito* catalogue. What can you tell me about the debate that existed between you and Nelly?

JPM: That was one particular controversy from 1990. More than simply explore each individual text, you have to place yourself within a broader chronological view, in order to properly inform you vision of the period as a whole…

(...)

AT: I am interested in the commentary in the [*Chile: 1000 Años*] catalogue about the relationship between criticism and curatorship.

JPM: …From the year 2000, right? Ahh… that is another situation altogether, you see; you *must* take into account the context of the time.

AT: Well, I suppose chronology and background have been confusing me all along. For example, I know Brugnoli has a very different agenda from Duclos, for example, …or Altamirano, etc. When you curated the exhibition [on the ‘third period’ of the last century], how did you separate the artists and the rooms?

JPM: Yes… I understand. Again… that’s an entirely different problem. Have you made a chronological map of the period?

AT: Sort of, yes… but one can separate these artists in a number of ways – materials, backgrounds, history, etc.

JPM: You separate them by history. In this case there is a history of polemics – it’s one way of modelling a historical perspective – a history of polemics.

For example, in the next few days they are opening an exhibition called “*La Mirada Austera*” in the *Instituto Cultural de Las Condes*; it was curated by a young guy, and it is a completely neutral history of abstraction in Chile. One might say, “Oh… it’s the history of formal synthesis,” though I would ask, “but in which country did this take place?” It’s as if it doesn’t mean anything. So… there is a tendency to eliminate the *specifics* of the most conflictive historical problems. If one says, “the struggles between the artists are also academic,” I would ask, “But who controlled the school at that time? Who forced others to leave? Who won the contests? Who had the best international contacts? Who
had better contacts in the market? How was this articulated with the complicity of certain critics from the press?” These are all “dirty histories” … but not only do they ‘spice up’ history, they are the small problems that make history consistent. That is why, I insist that you differentiate between the time periods and contexts in which these texts were written.

I have worked in art since 1980, and my texts from the 80’s are evidently different from those of the 90’s and today. But, they are different in certain ways. I would say that I am pretty faithful to coherency as a whole …and in truth, I have always worked with the same set of problems. If I had to summarize the problems of Chilean art that I have worked with that over the past 20 years, I would say the history of transference and density. (“La historia de transference y densidad”), which is the title of the exhibit that I put together for the museum in 2000. So, if you look solely at that exhibit, you will get a completely biased platform; that is, it is my platform, one in which no one else interferes. It’s an alternative platform, on which everybody opens fire, because they haven’t come up with anything better to challenge it. I can’t classify or rate the quality of my presentation; It has to be proven… and I think it was somewhat proven in that exhibition. And your question is, how did I organize it? Well, it is organized in a curatorial manner, and not just any type of curator… a curator with very few characteristics of an anglosaxon. What do I mean by an anglosaxon curator? …One who writes an essay about a theme, about a problem… One who chooses artists that more or less illustrate their concept. I’m not saying that this is good or bad…

…But in a country with no consistent history of art, I have found that assembling exhibitions has been a way of working with history. So… I have gotten myself into this mess… but I enjoy confronting it; it is the paradoxical situation of putting together a curatorship in the present… one that operates within precise coordinates – of the museum today, of current art-related questions, etc. – but whose object is ultimately to continue constructing history. It is a re-reading of the history of art in Chile; and this re-reading isn’t one that I myself invented, it is a re-reading of other texts, by other people. …One must insist upon this as well.

So… more or less all of those texts there are from the year 1988. That is, the concern for the history of Chilean art in theory wasn’t that great or established either.

You’ll find texts by Galaz, Ivelic or Isabel Cruz, which are typically more historical/sociological, or Nelly’s texts…

AT: …And Ronald Kay’s as well?

JPM: …But neither Nelly’s nor Kay’s are historical.
…And then there are my texts, which are more historical and theoretical, in a sense.
…And the philosophers’ texts – Oyarzun, Perez, Machuca, etc. – which aren’t historical either. So… you’ll have the difficulty of having a great quantity of textual systems…

(...)
AT: …I guess, with respect to the exhibition, why did you choose to create separations based on ‘histories.’ Why histories? There are six ‘histories’ here: ‘histories of anticipation,’ ‘histories of localization,’ ‘histories of identification,’ ‘histories of recollection,’ etc. …And there are eight rooms in the exhibition. How did you choose to separate the artists into these respective ‘histories’ and rooms?

JPM: This is simply a function of… Well, when you are putting together an exhibit, what are you always obliged to surrender to? …to the layout of the museum. (…)

There are 8 rooms there – it’s as simple as that. And I didn’t want to use the Matta’s Room, because it is an unmanageable room; that is, [it is an unmanageable room] if you don’t invest a lot of money in creating a huge museo-graphic (‘museografico’) apparatus.

For me, the 8 rooms were enough to represent this schema. So… I put together these 8 rooms, following these axes... But, the axes are also explained by something else, because I operate around two notions: of transference and density. I can explain it in two words.

I do not think there historically exists a material avant-garde in Chile. …What do exist are copied transferences of information; there are moments when these derived transferences are more consistent, and others when they are more diffuse.

And… in those moments of consistency, important formal accelerations occur. Period.

With regard to history, I am the most un-dramatized and the least optimistic. .

No, no… there is no avant-garde, and so what? It’s as if it were a sin that there was never an avant-garde in this country. No… I don’t think that there is an avant-garde in Chile; instead, there are copied transferences of information.

…And in speaking about transferences one is then referred, in the society of reception, to analyze the institutional character of the reception itself; that is, how the reception of foreign ideas is organized in a country like Chile …and how they are recycled, how they are sustained, how they are accepted… or how they are resisted.

…So, my hypothesis is rather that modern art was resisted… and that a plot was organized on the part of the university institution in 1932 to hinder the inscription of modern thought or modern practices in the Chilean scene – modern, as far as the groups of artists that were resisting could permit. They set the range of tolerance of what arrived from abroad – what was [and was not] acceptable.

…In 1932 there was an artist named Gazmuri, who was one of the last Chileans if not the last, I think, who took classes with Andre Lhotte in Paris. He returned to Chile in 1932 or 1931, having had the experience of Andre Lhotte’s workshop -- that is, cubism as a ‘military service.’ …He arrived in Chile, and was the most advanced person with regard
to information about contemporary art; and he was met with total opposition from his colleagues at the Universidad de Chile, which had only recently opened its art school, which derived from the Academy of Painting and the Academy of Bellas Artes – they were now part of the Universidad de Chile, which was meant to signify a modern gesture. I’ve noticed, however, that it was completely the opposite; ultimately, the art students, upon entering the university, became the principal combatants of modernism’s arrival – they persecuted and repressed a cubist like Gazmuri. This would become very symptomatic of, and would set the tone for the Chilean art scene – self-defense against the aggressor, self-defense against anything that comes from abroad, because that is considered to be an aggression. …But there are civil ways to defend oneself. That is, there are more brutal ways (i.e. close all frontiers), but conversely there are more civil ways, which are very clever and devious, which say “I can’t avoid the fact that the world is coming down on me (‘se me venga encima’), but what I can do is thoroughly and completely obstruct its establishment. …And in fabricating this obstruction, I can modify… and can simultaneously appropriate, the introduction of what I am able to modify and control.”

…That is, “this is no longer my own history …it is simply the history of human behaviour; it is a sociological banality.” …This just goes to show you that the Chilean scene is very inbred – …it eats itself, it’s an auto-phagocyte. [Phagocyte: A leukocyte which plays a part in retrogressive processes by taking up (eating), in the form of fine granules, the parts to be removed. (Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary, © 1996, 1998 MICRA, Inc.)

…This situation was only disrupted (‘solamente fue remecida’) in the 50’s, with the arrival of the French exhibition “De Monet a nos jours -- De Monet a nuestros días.” It was the first time that 150 “original” canvases arrived – by Van Gogh, Degas, the impressionists, etc. Even though there are some critics that would say that they weren’t the best impressionist works …in any case there they were, and they were first-rate paintings.

…This created a huge remission in academia, and from there began the history of the 60’s.

For this reason, I explain to you my notion of transference (‘transferencia.’) …There’s no avant-garde, but there are transferences – some transferences are more severe, and others are more bland. …In my opinion, in the 20th century, there were two fundamental transferences – one tied to Balmes’ work and the other one to Dittborn’s, with twenty years in-between. And look at what happened in those twenty years; it’s as if fifty years had passed instead of twenty. But, on the other hand (playing a bit with words here), it’s also as if only two years have passed between 1973 and 2000. That is, history is compressed or extended… history is condensed, concentrated or extended. Are you with me?
…I’m speaking to you about *transferences*, so this is therefore a very important part of the title, “Historia de Transferencia…”

**AT:** Could you explain to me the definition of *transference*? (*transferencia*)

**JPM:** …The transfer of certain ideas and certain practices -- the pictorial practice, for example -- …how it is transferred and how it is received in a particular place.

For example, in Chile there is no great colonial painting, but where did the *transference* of colonial painting come from? [It came from] indigenous painters fashioned by …Bavarian Jesuits …that came from Cuzco, and established themselves in *Calera de Tango*, and therefore the *San Fransisco* series that can be found here, arrived from Cuzco already made. It wasn’t even painted on our national territory… but still, it’s considered Chilean colonial painting.

…I don’t care that this happened – I am not fighting for any licence. What fascinates me is how it occurred in this way, and how we call this *Chilean*; we call something *Chilean* that we bring in from the outside. That is, we are calling a system of appropriation *Chilean*. Do you realize that? …Well, anyway, that is what happened with the colonial, and happened again as a posterior model as well.

And as for the notion of *density*…

Well, actually, *transference* is a double-sided coin; on the one hand, one speaks of technological *transference* in economic terms, and on the other hand, one can speak of *analytical* or *psychoanalytical* *transference*. I try to give the notion of *transference* of ideas and pictorial practices an *analytical* connotation as well -- that is… of love, of hate, and of desire.

…And on the other side, there is the concept of *density*, which is the way in which a particular amalgamation, full of complex elements, articulates itself and produces more consistent effects than in other stages and periods of the same history.

…So it was very important for me to use the words *transference* and *density*, because I concluded that the period of greatest density within the greater period that I touched upon was that of the 1980’s. And *that* is why I furnished the 8 rooms of the exhibit as a function on this hypothesis of *density*; this means to say that there is, between 1973 and 2000, a moment of greater material/artistic density that *defines* the period as a whole. And therefore, I set out to select the works that best display, with the greatest material efficacy, this element of density symptomatic of the period.

…And what people did not understand, due to their unwillingness to understand this manner of working with history, is that it must be a *panoramic* in the first place; this is utter *stupidity*, because they are analyzing an exhibition based on what is lacking.

I had problems with three artists in particular that didn’t want to participate in my exhibition. My reaction was, “fine… it doesn’t matter, because they are part of the
history. They may not be in the exhibition, but they are situated within the history …and they are in the phantasm of this very exhibition, as those who are lacking or not represented. (‘como faltantes.’)"

…So this was rather risky – no one else dared to do it but I did. Why? …Because I acknowledged the value of loss or absence (‘merma’) …Because I acknowledged the value of constructing things based on what is lacking or missing.

…So, therefore, it wasn’t really necessary for me to have included Gonzalo Díaz’ work in that specific instance. Everyone already knows about my interest in Ditborn’s work, and Diaz’, etc. – it has already been written about and sufficiently argued. Just recently I have been refurbishing the polemic of those years …now that I have the time, distance, clarity, and desire …and now that I am not out to fight with anyone. Perfect. Now, today, I am answering everything. And I am having a great time.

…This is an exposition that hasn’t really been debated.

But, what may interest you about the exhibition (whether or not you agree with this curatorial standpoint), is that the works displayed in it correspond to certain axes that have, in any case, intersected Chilean art-production over the last 30 years; [these exist] no matter what.

**AT:** What can you tell me about this text of yours, _De como el arte chileno es visto por los otros?_ (‘How Chilean Art is Seen by Others’) I found it today in the section ‘textos estrategicos’ on your website.

**JPM:** Let’s see… what year is this text from? Oh yes. It was written prior to the exhibition.

**AT:** Yes, of course.

**JPM:** …Did you say you just found it today? …Ahh, you still have a lot to read, my dear.

**AT:** Of course… I am only just beginning.

**JPM:** Well… I suppose rather than drawing you a general picture in this interview, I should be telling you which texts you’ll need to read. The thing is, with my work, there are two different types of texts: polemical texts (this here is a polemical text), and theoretical-historical texts. Both of these feed off each other, …but you need to learn to distinguish between which polemics are being dealt with. Because _De como el arte chileno es visto por los otros_ is situated within the circumstances of the year 2000 – in an entirely different moment than when I would have written this one, in ‘90’s. (Pointing to the text written in response to Brugnoli’s “Cadaver Exquisito.”) The truth is… something that I wrote then (in the ‘90’s), might still be my way of saying the same thing – but in the 1990’s.
...So, if you put those two texts together and ask yourself, “How does Mellado put together an analysis of these polemical situations as a whole?” [Then you have a problem, because each text deals with a different polemical situation…]

AT: Yes, I understand…

JPM: But, if you want an overall interpretation of this period, without confusing yourself too much (because I understand that it is confusing to involve yourself in a country in this way, due to the actual diversity of the material) – you should resolve to study this and other texts that are similar to it. For example, there’s a text that’s also on the website called, “El concepto de filiación y su intervencion en la periodización del arte chileno contemporaneo.” That text is much more important than this one… (pointing again to the text written in response to Brugnoli’s “Cadaver Exquisito”), and it relates to this text here [De como el arte chileno es visto por los otros], and to the text from the Transferencia and Densidad catalogue.

AT: (...Holding up “De como el arte chileno es visto por los otros”) What interests me about this text is that I myself am an ‘other’ looking at contemporary Chilean art from the outside. And, I realize that I can’t avoid being a foreigner, and all that this necessarily implies… and therefore, I want to acknowledge or recognize this in my thesis.

...That is, I know it’s inevitable that I’ll subconsciously carry with me, in my interpretation my own presuppositions, stereotypes, opinions, etc… I know I can’t ‘look’ without all of these lenses. I just want to acknowledge this as I go ahead with the project.

JPM: What exactly are you trying to accomplish in this project?

AT: Well, for one… I am trying to establish ties between the artists in Chile under the Pinochet dictatorship, and the semiotic theorists I have been studying within my major at Brown for the last few years.

JPM: But, don’t forget that here [those semiotic theorists] are read in a certain way. That is, in the US, they are read in a way that I myself find very peculiar.

...But also, they are read here [in Chile] in a very utilitarian way in which one might say, “you can’t group Leotard with Baudrillard... they don’t function in the same realm.”

So …Nelly [Richard] doesn’t function in the same realm as I do, nor does Brugnoli, nor does Machuca. So, I would advise you choose one and study that, so that you don’t have this huge task of citing everyone’s differences and risk making an inevitable mistake. This is my advice for you with regard to your own methodology. I don’t really care who you choose… I am telling you for your own benefit. Listen, it would be much simpler for you to dedicate yourself to Nelly Richard. And why? …Because she is much more dogmatic …and everything that is more dogmatic is more approachable from a student’s point of view.
There are the texts on her commitments to visual arts; then there are texts on her deconstruction of the issues of feminism; and then [there are texts on her deconstruction] of cultural studies. And so… with these you can properly inform a hypothesis about a Chilean intellectual, of French origin, who (with regard to of three stages) equips a body of thought about identity. And there you have it – material identity, sexual identity, and cultural identity. And that’s it – you’ve done it. And then how many books are there? …Cuerpo Correccional, Margins and Institutions…

And then you don’t have to worry about the issues that I may take up with her…

“No, it’s not true... because in Margins and Institutions Nelly just exaggerates the importance of this or that ...that’s a lie, this is a lie... blah, blah, blah.”

Forget all of that. Forget it.

One takes Margins and Institutions as a textual apparatus, and one takes Cuerpo Correctional as a textual apparatus… just like all her later books, “La estratificación de los margenes,” etc. And that’s all…

This is only one way of doing it… Just be careful not to create too many complications for yourself. Don’t get into all the controversies – just dedicate yourself to individuals.

AT: Yes, I understand what you are saying, but the project is intended to be much broader than that… it’s not meant to be so narrowly focused. I have conducted eight interviews so far… and what I envision is an educational website that allows someone to click on ‘Carlos Altamirano,’ for example, and find his biography and interview… or to click on ‘Cadaver Exquisito,’ and be taken to a ‘gallery’ of images, etc.

JPM: Ahhh... I see. So I am going to be all over the web?

AT: Well, I don’t know if it’s actually going to be published, but that’s the idea anyway.

JPM: …So really your thesis is …an edition of oral and written documents (interviews and texts) about contemporary Chilean art. But, you have to explain your justification in compiling this edition.

AT: Well… I began with this notion of how communication and language changed under the censorship of the Pinochet dictatorship.

JPM: But that’s the hypothesis behind Recovering Histories.

AT: Well, that was one of the first things that I read…
JPM: This assumes a certain point of view, one in which Chilean art is explained by way of the dictatorship. Because of the dictatorship, art was previously conventional, but the dictatorship, due to the restrictive conditions that it imposed, forced artists to advance in linguistic re-accommodations.

…That seems rather Marxist to me.

…Do you know why? …Because it assumes that Chilean art under the dictatorship was like a block or a whole, and the truth is that it can not be conceived as a block or a whole, above all because the entire notion of the Escena Avanzada was invented by Nelly Richard. I am not implying that because it is her invention she is lying, …but rather that she produced a fiction that allowed her, after all these were done, to unify them with an interesting descriptive characteristic; and she called this the Escena Avanzada, so as not to have to call them avant-garde. Why? …Because her thoughts appear during a time marked by the failure of the Chilean political avant-garde, assuming that the Unidad Popular was “a non-avant-garde or mainstream avant-garde.” Because within the process, the extreme left was saying that Allende was a reformist and that they were the political avant-garde; and they took things to such an extreme, …that they created a justification for military intervention.

No… in my view the very notion of artistic avant-garde, is tied to the notion of the political avant-garde within the discussion of humanities and political science in the 50’s, 60’s, and 70’s… this dialogue already existed. That is, between us there already existed a huge criticism of the Marxist nature of the political party, and the notion of the political avant-garde. …So in 1975 and ‘76, in our conversations with Nelly, she couldn’t really use the word “avant-garde,” because she herself was doubting its efficacy, its existence and its necessity. But she had to refer to it somehow… and it occurred to Brugnoli to call it advanced, so they called it “Escena Avanzada,” in order to be able to talk about certain dissimilar (and in some cases antagonistic) works, …which nevertheless shared one characteristic, which was the criticism of pictorial representation. And from there they went… So, you see, it was not a block or a whole -- Dittborn’s work is very specific. You could literally organize the entire history of the last forty years around Dittborn’s work alone (I myself have sort of attempted this), and you’d see that Dittborn cannot be explained by the existence of the dictatorship; he existed before, during and after it. That’s something else you could do altogether, but Dittborn’s work is very difficult. (Oooooh…)

…I myself have just recently posted two new texts on my webpage about Dittborn’ work from 1976 and ’77; they have to do with texts that [Ronald] Kay and Nelly [Richard] edited in ’76, about an exhibition of Dittborn’s drawings. The exhibition was called “De la chilena pintura historia.” So… if someone wanted to pose another problem, they’d necessarily say, “Ooooh… in 1977 Eugenio had already done De la chilena pintura historia.” Dittborn can’t just be reduced to the Escena Avanzada. He could have existed independently of the Escena. He stands alone by himself as a separate scene… not as a biographical character, but as a work diagram.
So… just recently I posted two texts: one about the conditions the appearance of the magazine Manuscritos, and the other about Dittborn’s work from 1976 and ’77… that is, not long after the dictatorship’s initiation.

But… Dittborn’s work took form long before that; his work dates back to 1965, when he left Chile… and to 1970, when he returned to Chile. What did Dittborn do between 1970 and ’73? That’s a very interesting question. Very interesting.

Anyway… I speak a little about this in a book I wrote about Dittborn called, Mano Cortada, (which you don’t know…)

So… you could delve into the texts about Dittborn -- those two on the website, among others. I’ll put it this way, chronologically: one text about the magazine Manuscritos, another about his work from 1976-77, then there is an essay that I wrote in 1988 called El fantasma de la sequia,” and finally a text I wrote in 1998 called, Mano Cortada.

So… in total I have written about 200 pages about Dittborn, in three different periods. I used the last period to write about Dittborn’s first period. …That is, in 2002 I wrote about the Dittborn of 1975; in 1988 I wrote about the Dittborn of 1980; and in ’98 I wrote about the Dittborn of 1990. (JPM makes several erratic hand motions in different directions.) …You have to understand in this way. That’s what I’m trying to explain.

And then… on top of Dittborn’s work you have Leppe’s work; ooooh… a different story altogether, you see? (He speaks as is I am three years old.)

So… the Escena Avanzada is a way of uniting a group of works. That’s certain. But each one….

AT: I know…Altamirano is very different from Duclos, who’s different from Brugnoli, etc.

JPM: But Brugnoli never formed part of the Escena Avanzada.

AT: Yes, but even so they are exhibited together in shows like Recovering Histories…

JPM: And why do you think? …Because of last-minute political ‘arrangements.’ This is one of the problems of the ‘transition.’ Nelly included these artists in an exhibition called “Fuera de Serie” in 1985, as if to add them into the Escena Avanzada. “At long last we are part of the Escena,” …or something to that effect. No way.

…Up until today Brugnoli (who is evil, by the way) has dedicated himself to the questioning of Nelly’s theoretical work about those years. That is, Brugnoli never stopped repeating the same hypothesis. Therefore, we can’t really consider Brugnoli’s work (or Virginia’s) (‘la Piquina’) as forming part of the Escena Avanzada. On the contrary, they were its principal opponents. In the same way, Gonzalo Diaz wasn’t a member of the Escena Avanzada, but still he was invited to participate in the exhibit in
1985. So… the *Escena Avanzada* is like a train, which people get on and off of at depot stations everywhere.

*Ha ha ha…*

**AT:** Well, I suppose this is the source of all my confusion…

**JPM:** Well …the available material is certainly confusing and you don’t have the methodological “evil,” necessary in order to take a *concrete* position. …For instance, there is a *gringo* from a North-American university somewhere in the South, who takes the case of the CADA.

**AT:** Robert Neudstat.

**JPM:** Yes… and he dedicated himself *only* to that; and he didn’t give a damn whether what he was told was the truth or a lie, if it stunk, etc… And he discarded anything that didn’t fit into his hypothesis. Obviously. Why would he want to take *everything* on?

This poor faraway *gringo* doesn’t understand Chile’s evil. So anyway, that’s what he did, and I think it simplified his work enormously; he dedicated himself *only* to the CADA.

…This is why I am telling you no to try to cover [too much]…

…I’ll give you another example; I never cease being a professor. If what you are interested in is the *Escena Avanzada*, fine. I am delighted. I can help you out a lot. But dedicate yourself to… *what they call the Escena Avanzada*.

For example …you might present yourself as being highly orthodox in everything related to… Because, what’s more, I am thinking in terms of a ‘*producer of archives*’…

It would be great for you to do it, in the way you say to intend to… on the web.

…Someone goes to “*Escena Avanzada*” and clicks… and ‘pop’ …a definition appears. Nobody has done this yet, [I assure you.]

But it is an extremely dense problematic. I mean, you could do it… it doesn’t matter – you present yourself very *dogmatically*, and set out to reproduce Nelly’s thoughts with regard to the *Escena Avanzada* (nothing more), …thereby restricting yourself to the years between ’76 and ’85. Done. (And don’t involve yourself in any other messes.)

...And from there, take all the relevant texts produced during that time, and the recuperations, the intersections, etc. And you could find many of the original documents in scanned form… No one has done this. This would be an extraordinary contribution. But you wouldn’t need to go and talk to Nelly to ask her what she thinks today about the *Escena Avanzada*… no, no… she would just offer her ideological discourse.

You need to work as a historian, *period*; […] and work with what is available.]
The truth is that the Escena Avanzada provides you a highly established frame… one that is very manageable from an academic perspective.

For instance, Chapter X: “Opponents of the Escena Avanzada.” Ahh… I, [Justo Pastor Mellado] would surely need to be included there.

So… you arrive here and ask me, “In which texts have you questioned the Escena Avanzada?” I could then help you and tell you, “oh… in this one, in that one, etc.”

You could then ask, “in which texts does Oyarzun dedicate himself to the Escena?”

Simply highlighting the intersections…

Or… “Which texts does Adriana Valdes dedicate to the Escena?”

Thus, you can [formulate your thesis] based on textual constellations… locating the different analysts of the Escena. Just organizing this material is already a contribution.

In this sense, don’t try to invent some sort of Chilean identity….

Nobody cares, nobody is interested, and that’s no way to learn.

Alternatively, you should devote yourself to the revision of very precise, concrete texts…

Or, for an even more specific methodology …[you could devote yourself] to just one; for example, the visual work of Juan Luis Martinez, ‘the visual poet.’

Think about the fact that you have six months left ahead of you, and that this is intended for the web; and what’s interesting about the web are the conditions of connectivity that it offers. So… when it says Escena Avanzada, and you ‘click’ on the word ‘Escena’

…ding ding ding! …There suddenly appears a semiotic definition of Escena and a Freudian definition of Escena. These are the two definitions with which Nelly Richard works. And what’s more, [there appears a definition of] the use of the word ‘Escena’ in the discussions and discourses of the time (Nelly’s, mine, etc.), namely, Derrida’s texts about Freud and the Escena de Escritura (‘scene of writing’)…

So… [you might ask] “How does Nelly speak about a scene?”

One can always speak about a scene, but she clearly calls it the Escena de Avanzada, which presupposes the existence of an avant-garde scene.

Right, so from there you could begin to deconstruct the notion of ‘escena.’ [or ‘scene.’]

And then you have… ‘avanzada.’ (‘advanced.’) …But advanced in relation to what?
This goes to show you that Nelly had an idea in mind of what had been tradition and academia in Chile. So… I’m telling you, it doesn’t matter if I’m not necessarily in agreement with this. I am just explaining to you how things function.

So… ‘Avanzada’/‘reta-guardia’… What has been delayed here?

[Note: ‘reta-guardia’: “the ‘reta’ root presumably comes from the word retraso, or retardo, which mean ‘delay.’ His implication here, then, is a sort of ‘delayed’ avant-garde.”]

…In that period there were three or four issues of a magazine that [Nelly] was helping to direct at one time (she was the editor for a short period) – the magazine ‘CAL.’

This was extremely important…

So, you see… you can allow yourself a huge capacity of information recollection.

In fact, I am working now with a team to produce archives… somewhat in this way – in a more bibliographical sense. This could prove to be very useful for you, and your work could very well be useful for us…

I have five boxes of archives and files here… and five others somewhere else. There are also obviously some documents that are more important than others… but they all come from the same period. … Why? Because we are formulating a corporation designed to be an archive of contemporary Chilean art. Period.

So… this is why I am telling you to dedicate yourself to narrower, more manageable questions… because otherwise they can get out of hand, and will confuse you enormously. You could cover this period of ten years… you would have compiled very rich material that no one yet knows about, but it would necessarily imply that you have assumed the position of an archivist… You would need only to return to Chile with a giant scanner and record everything.

…And then, someone could ask, “How is Margins and Institutions useful to me?”

[And they could find it right there.]

(…)

… I’m not telling you what I think of the Escena; I’m telling you what problems exist.

How is Brugnoli going to tell you about the Escena, if he was it’s principal opponent? Period. And, the truth is that if one reduces the Escena simply to what Nelly says in Margins and Institutions, then we are talking about something else altogether… something extremely close-minded. You would say, then, as a rule, that the Escena lasted from 1975 to 1985. “In 1975 The Following Escena Avanzada exhibitions were held… Catalina Parra, etc. 1977: Carlos Altimarano, Carlos Leppe, etc. 1980: Cuerpo Correctional, El espacio de aca,
etc. ” And so on… You would have a long list of everything that happened over these ten years, one which would be very interesting for your website. Nothing more than a list of all the different exhibitions that occurred. With regard to the Escena Avanzada.

Or, for something entirely different, …you could compile a complete bibliography of Nelly Richard’s work. For that, you wouldn’t need to be doing these interviews; for that, you can’t ask for our help. …In your “acknowledgements” you’d say, “I thank Justo Pastor Mellado and his team very much for having thrown me off balance…” Ha ha ha…

That’s fine with me… but you’ll be left with a huge mess on your hands, because we’ll have had the knowledge and information before you do.

You may ask yourself, “How many people have criticized Nelly?” Don’t worry about it… let us take care of that. When would you like to know by?

And then… “Yes – there are 25 texts.”

…Okay, and of those texts, how many are books? How many are interventions? How many are colloquiums? How many are articles? In what circumstances…?

I think you’ll find it easier to work in this way…

(Excited, he spots the “Fuera de serie” catalogue on his shelf.)

You see, look what I have! I have everything!

AT: Yes, I have seen that. I have it photocopied.

JPM: …But if you are going to dedicate yourself to this situation, without understanding the general panorama of the time… you are going to seriously confuse yourself.

…Because, this [Fuera de Serie] could be “the last exhibition of the Escena Avanzada.”

(He says this in a sarcastically ominous tone.)
AT: To start with, how did you come into contact with the other people in CADA… how did you begin working with them?

DE: Listen, I had a personal relationship with Raúl, we were living together. One day Juan Castillo came to propose… well, to discuss some topics, and the idea of working together with Lotty Rosenfeld and Fernando Balcells came up. We began a work design, which was focused mainly in the city, and we worked on a possible relationship between art and politics. This was during the year 79, which is now many years ago.

AT: I was wondering if you could help clear some of my confusion about the separation between different groups at the time, and the differences between artists of different ages. Robert Neudstat, for example, makes references to these differences.

DE: Listen, more than separations (which sounds too harsh) there were differences of options in a generally quiet and subjective period. So, each group worked their own practices, and… this generated tensions, which in another situation might have been lesser. Because of the country’s situation, however, the differences became more evident.

For example, one of the biggest conceptual disputes was whether to work inside or outside of the gallery. Working outside of the gallery, we provoked other groups and generated discomfort.

What I am trying to get at is that any differences that might of existed were conceptual.

AT: Neudstat says that that there were 3 more specific groups: the CADA, the group formed by [Nelly] Richard, [Carlos] Altamirano, [Carlos] Leppe, and [Eugenio] Dittborn, and a third group formed by Francisco Brugnoli and the “Visual Arts’ Workshop.”(Taller de Artes Visuales.)

DE: Brugnoli was a visual artist, a painter that worked with mixed techniques. He didn’t go to exile, but stayed and he had a studio where meetings were held. He was basically interested in linking visual history… as a continuity. His theme was also, in a sense, to keep in mind everything that happened during the military coup. That was his project, his interest, from his new conceptual and intellectual point of view.

Nelly also worked, but the artists that worked with Nelly had other interests. They were more vanguard and worked mostly with the Leppe and performance art. That was her focus, “performance.” And we [the CADA] were working within the margins of the city. So… this generated differences, three different origins.
AT: And other artists, for example Arturo Duclos, can you comment about them in this context?

DE: Arturo was young and just starting. He was probably studying. I don’t remember well, he was close to all of this, but still had not completely developed his work.

AT: It’s interesting to hear you explain this, because I was confused from all the texts and materials, how the movements were different, but now it’s clearer.

Now… with regard to your own work, what can you tell me about the redefinition or ‘recodification’ of language (which is the focus of my project)?

DE: Which work would you like to discuss?

AT: The work that interests me most is that which you did with the CADA, mostly your performance work, though if you’d like we can talk about your novels and later work.

DE: Right… well it was actually a process. I always wrote – that was always my place. I always worked with the CADA from a literary perspective, as a writer. It is true, though, that there were boundaries that were diffuse, and one often worked with other types of productions. But, basically I was interested in, at the beginning… (We are talking about 25 or 26 years ago so it’s difficult to reconstruct the energies of those years. There is a constant discourse about those times.) … So, what interested me most and what still interests me today is the interrogation or the questioning of signs – to work with what is available and to work and operate with that. It wasn’t about changing anything, but about thoroughly questioning everything that was available. For me that is what the CADA was - to work with certain elements that were available in reality and to question and sharpen them. And literature… it was exactly in what I was interested in - to take language, and carry it to its most conflictive side. This is what I say today, though tomorrow I could tell you something completely different.

AT: I’d like to talk a little bit about the role of the reader. Julio Ortega, in his chapter about you in Caja de Herramientas, uses the phrase “not opinions but options.” He also talks about the amplification of the ‘gaze.’ [la mirada] Can you comment on this?

DE: Well, that is evidently Ortega’s own reading, you understand of course. There can be multiple readings of the same novel - I can have one and you can have another. I can’t say much about Ortega’s reading because it’s his own opinion.

AT: Yes, I understand, but I’d like to talk about the idea of the role of reader or the spectator, which seems to have more to do with the actual process of reading or looking at art during this period. When Ortega talks about options he’s saying that its more complicated than simply reading A + B = C…

DE: Right, in literary terms, the reader is one that works with the text, and incorporates his own devices and his own energy into what the French call an ‘escrilector’, which
means more or less that the text is both read and rewritten. …So, the reader is more than just a reader who receives something predefined in the text, but rather the text defines itself with the help of the reader.

AT: In your piece entitled “Desacatos” [which is featured in Desacato, a book about the works of Lotty Rosenfeld], you say that “there are two nearly simultaneous manifestations: to see and to forget what has been seen.”

DE: In what context did I say that? Let’s see… Ah, I’m talking about the subject in the city. How, let’s say, city flows and elapses… effectively, how it is received and forgotten; how the subject is placed in the city, how he travels around it, acquires and forgets it. This act of forgetting is also an act of appropriation as well.

AT: The term desacato means ‘out of order’ [‘fuera del orden’], correct? You often use the expression desacato civil in this piece. What can you tell me about the idea of civil disobedience in the context of contemporary Chilean art after 1973?

DE: I think that Lotty Rosenfeld’s work was one that contradicted the norms, because… for example, traffic signs have a place, in some ways, in the law… so when Lotty intervenes with the signs, she creates a distortion where she puts herself, in many ways, at the edge of the law as well. In transgressing a traffic signal, there was a situation of criticism that in a certain way placed her at a legal boundary. So, in that sense she was very much out of order, or disobedient.

AT: Yes, and at the same time contradicting the traditions of painting, the gallery, the museum, etc… I am curious, how did you come to work on this book with Neely Richard, Raul Zurita and others about the works of Lotty Rosenfeld?

DE: That is a book that was financed by Francisco Zegers, who is a Chilean editor. He has published many books about visual arts, and at that time he was practically the only editor of visual arts publications. Anyway, at the time Lotty already had a pretty advanced trajectory, so this book came about to include her works, which did not have any text, nor did they have a clear context. Thus, Desacato was the first published work that rendered her work more advanced.

AT: And you worked with Lotty in CADA, but what happened after the CADA dissolved, came to an end? In fact, when exactly did it dissolve? Did people simply start to move in different directions?

DE: [We all went in] different directions, yes

AT: Do you still work together?

DE: I still work with Lotty, yes. We’re still working on a couple of things, even today.
AT: One of the things I haven’t had the opportunity to ask anyone else about is the idea of ‘the occident,’ which has been mentioned in several texts. For example, Ortega refers to ‘identity fractured by the occident.” This interests me very much because I took a class at the Universidad de Playa Ancha about Chilean culture in the face of globalization. We talked a lot about the lack of critical thinking that accompanies postmodernism and the effects of a globalized economy. I haven’t spoken with anyone, however, about this theme in connection with groups like the CADA and the Avanzada or the lack of criticism under the censorship of the dictator. I would like to know your opinion about the lack of critical thinking in Chile in recent years.

DE: I think that the whole idea of postmodernism is literally meaningless. When one loses meaning or feeling in life – when the subject is less tied to the notion of community, to common projects, the very idea of a common project is shattered. There are many projects, many subjectivities that do not necessarily intervene with each other… there is an extreme fracture. But, I think that somehow recent occurrences would give another historic perspective - above all, with Bush’s interference in the Middle East. This apparent political rupture rearms itself. It rearms itself because it effectively creates a pole of huge tensions, in the sense that at least it (re)opens up critical thinking, for example antiwar, anti-intervention, that already was a bit weak… All those factors of neo-colonialism were falling because of postmodernity, because of globalization. You see, there is now a new centre of denouncement, resistance to interventionism, in light of the latest occurrences. So, therefore, there is a ‘macro’ system - an international macro system that has changed the whole situation from - in my opinion - the attack on the World Trade Centre, and more clearly, with the intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq. There is another social feeling. On the other hand, you have the US and British blocks (and Europe, in another sense, which wasn’t as clear before.) This, then, organized a certain critical thinking, and now there is a wall with which to collide. There wasn’t a wall before - there wasn’t a possibility of crashing (precisely, the Berlin Wall.) Evidently it had opened all the problems of postmodernism, but now I think that it ‘rearms’ a block of meaning, fundamentally given by the situation in the Middle East.

And now in Chile we are faced with the human rights situation - so again we are at a clear point, which is Human Rights, or what would be our gaze upon the past, upon the times when the CADA was formed, when the CADA constructed its work. And today, thirty years later, Chile must look over its history again. Chile is reviewing its history and writing a new version, position of what happened during those years. What remains a problem, again, are human rights, which passes with this situation. I don’t know if perhaps forgetting is a possibility, or how one would end this. Anyway… I don’t think that today the political universe (or the theoretical universe or cultural universe) is that uninhabited. There are cultural problems, there are political problems, and on the basis of these one can organize an idea [or criticism.]

AT: Now I would like to talk a bit about the idea of ‘history’ – a word that seems to come up a lot in these texts. A lot is said of the idea of a Chilean history without origin, for
example, or a national history or identity with little credibility. What do you think about this?

DE: I think identity is very ‘mobile’ term. You can’t just say, “this is my identity, and it will stay like this forever.” I think it’s not possible to say once and for all what identity is. I think that as identity constructed, it is under construction - in permanent flux. It is always in movement, even though there may be prescribed factors that will remain. But, on the other hand, there are some historical events that are static. But, to speak of a fixed, rigid identity … I don’t think so. It is always changing. There is no such thing as a fixed identity.

AT: Yes, and the idea of the market? The Neudstat interview talks about democratic transition and present market problems. Can you comment about the control of the market in comparison with political control?

DE: Well, I think that it is an international problem that stems from the intervention of the market in the subject’s daily life. That is, the problem lies not only in the political systems but, especially, in how that system intervenes in the day-to-day life of each subject – until what point, and to what effect. And effectively you’ll see that the Chilean case is an exception, because all of the politics of the free market were put in place during the dictatorship, without citizen intervention. It was something very authoritarian, so we have a free market system that is more strict and deeper than in any other Latin-American country. One can’t purchase in Argentina, or Mexico or any of the other countries. So, this has produced a new type of subject in Chile, because, for example, Chileans wanted private universities. Our strong tradition of public universities is an example of what is being lost. And all the regulations dictated by the market are very complicated. The point is, that the market designs a new subject – one that is hyper-materialistic, where the object or commodity reaches a paradoxically exaggerated dimension, and is therefore depoliticised… because effectively it is tied to the notion of indebtedness because of constant necessity, and life ends up being a question of major or minor debt. This also happens a lot in the US, with the dependence on credit cards. But actually it’s the body that is chained to a debt. It’s not ingenuous or free, right, because part of the energy of the subject character is connected to the debt. Pay the card, pay the card, pay the card...

AT: Yes. Tomas Mulian talks a lot about this. I read ‘Consumption Consumes Me’ (El Consumo me consume) last year. In it, he talks a lot about the culture of consumption – of shopping malls and credit cards, etc.

DE: Right, it is not a frivolous thing; it is structural, because it affects all of your daily life. Your day-to-day life is tied to the idea of a perpetual, never-ending debt, because after consuming one product you have to consume another… and another…. And the debt takes on a life of it’s own. It has as much life as your own body. It’s a perpetual thing. And that’s is what these societies bring. It is very complicated.

AT: Do you think that culture, art, literature, etc. also suffer under this system?
DE: Yes, definitely, because what the free market needs is fast consumption, in order for one to begin consuming something else, so effectively there is a disposable reality; all the activities that are more critical are not going to have a place in these types of projects. Everything is fast, fast, fast…

AT: If I may change the topic for a moment… we don’t have much time left. I’d like to talk about the notion of the body, with regard, for example, to your work with the CADA. What Nelly writes, for example, about the body as a medium – as the boundary between the individual and society.

DE: Well... there was a moment when the body formed a part of the landscape, corporal or physical nature could also be part of the cultural stage. That was the job - to work with the body as a mark, as a sign, as a medium of intervention.

AT: What can you tell me about your own transition from literature to performance, etc.?

DE: No, it wasn’t a transition - it was an expansion. I arrived on the scene formed by literature - I had studied and worked in literature. It was more like an experience, expansion of mediums; I never defined myself as a visual artist or performer. I did a few videos but the truth is that I never considered myself as a producer. It was an experience in which I wanted to go further than literature, but I couldn’t have done it without writing or literature as a point of origin. Writing, or literature specifically, was always my referent. But the truth is that at the height of the time of intellectual searching, there was a context of people exploring, working with new materials. So yes, there was an ‘expansion’ in my own work, but in the end I refocused on literature again.

AT: About your video work… I read in an interview with Juan Andres Piña printed in “Chile arte actual”, that you were one of the first people to use video as a non-conventional instrument. How exactly did you start to use video?

DE: Look… in those years this media had only just recently arrived – video, reproduction, serial copies, etc. And I though this would be a very interesting area to work in, though I lacked extensive knowledge of all the new media. In the end that is what limited me and caused me to leave it, but generally speaking it was a rather a passionate experience to have produced something in a different format than the novel.

AT: What do you think of the accusations that associate video equipment, cameras, etc. with capitalist ideals – ones that contradict many of CADA’s main principles?

DE: Look, I don’t have problems with the technology that each generation produces; I think new technologies liberate and tend to democratise. Between the typewriter and the computer, I prefer the computer. Between a letter and an email, I prefer emails. It seems faster, easier. That’s not the problem. I think television is extraordinary, as a creation….
These are all cultural human creations, but the point is, how are they manipulated? How are these technologies and systems manipulated? And to what end? I have always thought that it is interesting to take these advanced technologies and work with them in a critical way. But I could never…that is, there were always criticisms focused on video as a medium. I thought it was a bit crazy, in the sense that this kind of thinking was too conservative. I think that technologies exist in order to be used. What counts is what you choose to do with those technologies. That is the question.

If you can do something with these technologies, the system inevitably takes over and manipulates them. Television is not the problem. The *programming* of television is the problem – what is programmed, what is done with this new media. And effectively it is an alienating medium, one that is rather disposable…

If you watch television, most of the programs are horrible and alienating, but the media in itself it is very interesting. At the time, video seemed extraordinary to me.

**AT:** Do you know the writer Rey Chow?

**DE:** No

**AT:** She talks about the idea of the ‘native’ as the ‘Other,’ and about the notion of identity, as opposed to that of the other. She also talks about the victimization and marginality of the native.

**DE:** Yes… I think a lot about the recognition of the ‘Other’ in my own work as well – the other, *otherness*… Difference, basically, not in hierarchical terms – superiority or inferiority – but rather *difference*, and its political and aesthetic energies. That is what interests me, to put one self in a different place, to stand in another place.

**AT:** And the idea of marginality and its relevance to Chilean art practices of the 80’s and 90’s? Perhaps you could speak about, for example, your work with the brothel and with prostitutes? …”The Kiss,” for example.

**DE:** Well, those years were marked with certain context… one can’t think without taking context into account. Effectively, the entire country – or a large part of the country – was in a very repressive situation… under severe oppression. So, the idea was to work with different social situations, different situations of oppression and repression. So, that was my work with the beggar in “The Kiss” …a bid to work with an unexpected, fleeting encounter…the city as a surprise. On the other hand, there was the recognition of different *types* of oppression – political oppression, social silence… to find, in other words, certain lines of relationships between different types of repression, different types of otherness… there isn’t just one, there are many.
AT: Would you say that your work aims to expose or shed light upon these areas of marginality? Your work with Paz Errazuriz, for example, *El Infarto del Alama*… what was the purpose of that book?

DE: To work in those spaces. To expose the most silenced of areas, and to work productively and critically with that reality.

AT: And what about the media? What kind of writing and critical commentary was out there… what was seen in the *Mercurio*, for example, versus underground magazines like CAL?

DE: Look, in Chile there are not many publications or mass media, and the few that do exist are basically in the hands of the right wing. They are consortiums – *El Mercurio, La Tercera, La Segunda, Las Ultimas Noticias* the regional papers - practically all of them belong to the same right wing conglomerates. There are certain independent publications, yes, but none achieve the same level of power as that of the *Mercurio* or *La Tercera*, which are in the hands of… well, which are very clearly marked with certain ideologies. So, it is a problem… it is a serious problem. Obviously with newspapers like *The Clinic* or the magazine *Rocinante*, or other publications that don’t belong to these conglomerates, one can’t compare their power with that of the established newspapers. So, in this country we have this serious problem, which is that there doesn’t exist other newspapers that originate from other political sensibilities. Therefore, we are only delivered papers whose political origin is of a clear, unmitigated and irreversible right wing perspective.

AT: And what about the “underground” publications?

DE: Yes, there are magazines…. Well, under the dictatorship there were obviously a lot less, and with a limited capability of distribution; but in that moment they also reached a special place, because there was an anti-dictatorship sensibility that was looking for them. Today it is more complicated, more complicated because in democracy the epic or heroic element is gone, and basically the general information of this country lies in the hands of the right.

AT: I find this all very interesting because I was enrolled at the UPLA [Universidad de Playa Ancha] as a student of journalism. I was impressed by several of the classes in the department, especially *Comunicación y Cultura*. In that class we learned a lot about the notion of criticism and critical thought, and about the manipulation of public opinion. I found it very interesting that Chile’s aspiring journalists were being taught this point of view.

DE: Yes… and then they graduate and go make money for the *Murcurio* or *La Tercera*. Journalists are certainly in a very complicated situation.
AT: We only have five minutes left. Perhaps we should speak more about your own novels. Which one do you think is most relevant to this subject? When reading about *Los vigilantes*, for example, I was interested in the idea of a historical model, or the model of a family unit – the mother, the father, the son; I was interested in the idea of vigilance itself and of the witness. Which work do you think is your most important or relevant in this sense?

DE: Look, evidently all the books I have written have, in each moment, seemed indispensable to me. If not, I wouldn’t have written them. But, looking back, I think one novel that was very important for me to write was *Por la Patria*, my second book, which worked with the theme of authoritarianism. It was a piece, where I worked in many ways on the relationship between power and the body. So… that is a work that over the years I have found quite relevant – for me – to have written. Of course, I can’t say which of my works was the best or the worst, but rather which was the most intense, which took the most conceptual and esthetical work; I would say it was my second novel.

AT: And of the works that you made with the CADA?

DE: I think our most decisive and most important piece would be *No +*; I continue to believe it is the most social. I keep thinking that it is the most social because of the piece’s objective, which was later inscribed in the masses. That was the idea.

AT: And what influences, if any, did your work with the CADA have on your novels?

DE: I don’t think there was any real linear connection, because they [the art actions of the CADA] were more direct experiences. But, I have always worked with the idea of the city - that helped me a lot.