

Doctoral theses in Arts

Material devices exposed to the dangers of the sensitive

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Abstract

More and more often, we artists work on our doctoral theses in academic environments that operate mostly under the parameters of the scientific method, which do not always suit our interests or the way we do things. But could we have our own models? What models could they be? Artistic practice as research is emerging today as a possible model. This text is based on a personal experience related to that: the completion of my own PhD, and therefore of the corresponding doctoral thesis. This thesis has tried to create knowledge from another place, i.e. from art, by acknowledging its value and reclaiming our own ways of doing things for this purpose, including subaltern knowledge, physical embodiments and implication. A thesis focussing on images of forced disappearance and their possibilities for enunciation, where the scientific distance that comes from observation without an observer becomes impossible.

Keywords

Doctoral thesis; art practice as research; enunciation; disappearance; knowledge; embodiment.

When we embark on a research project like a doctoral thesis, it takes us on unknown journeys where we go deeper into our passions and intellectual obsessions, something which can either sink us, or, on the contrary, help us navigate. What matters most is the process: accepting the risk and living with it, for no matter how it ends, the only thing we can be sure of is that after this journey we will never be the same again. Defending the thesis is equally uncertain. "The uncertainty of the unknown is as overwhelming as it is fascinating" (Ortiz, 2017:11).

At a talk by Jon Mikel Euba,¹ the concept of "defence" was brought up, and I found it somewhat troubling. I was struck by something that usually goes unnoticed: that this word implies being in an offensive position in the face of a supposed attack. I realised that this is how we perceive this moment, the culmination of the current higher education system and the starting

point on our journey as researchers. Universities are indeed focusing more and more on training us to be on the defensive. Theses are defended, and we acquire the “competencies” we need with each subject that we study. So when my turn came around, I decided not to call this nerve-wracking moment a “defence”; instead, I opted to use the term “thesis reading”, which does not place us in a position of conflict, but rather one of listening and open dialogue in order to get some feedback in this significant process. Thus, my presentation would focus on the edges, and it would be a lecture on the path that I have followed so far which is, in part, what the present text is about.



Ejercicios gimnásticos ejecutados por prisioneros de guerra.



Archive for *Campos Devanados*. Gymnastics session of prisoners in the La Magdalena Concentration Camp. Santander. s/f

I started the reading by pointing out some of the difficulties that I had faced when completing my doctorate. Some of the problems are linked to methodology; not the lack of it but rather having to work from a different place, conceiving and structuring research in the artistic way of doing things. For my doctoral thesis, *Enunciar la Ausencia. Imágenes de desaparición forzosa en prácticas de arte contemporáneo*, I took the approach of artistic practice as research, based on situated knowledge, coming to terms with my own biased position about it. This means that I have carried out both theoretical and artistic research, as well as works that, *as study cases*, originated and fostered the topics and concepts. These works were about the last periods of dictatorship in Chile and Spain, countries where I have lived and that I know well. In these countries, which are directly related to my context and biography, subjectivity and bodies have been exposed to repression, confinement, death and disappearance at the hands of the State, as well as to forced silence and the creation of discourses that have tried to erase what happened. The names of the works were: *Hilos de Ausencia: Genealogías y Discontinuidades* ('Threads of Absence: Genealogies and Discontinuities') (a collaborative work about a case of disappeared detainees during the military dictatorship in Chile, *the case of the 119* or *Operation Colombo*. This operation spread false news about the disappearance of 119 people, discredited the families and human rights institutions that were reporting the kidnappings, and denied the

existence of any disappeared person); and *Campos Devanados* ('Winding Fields') (which focuses on the concentration camps in post-war Spain, during Franco's dictatorship. These massive detention sites have been erased and silenced from History, and they lie hidden beneath ruins or new foundations). These two works are of fundamental importance for our research, and together with other artists' images and works, they converse, question, provide feedback and become part of the thinking and researching process. It should be noted that the chosen works do not respond to a historiographical study, nor are they related to a specific technique or place; rather they are used to assemble visual narratives that help think about the problems which are being dealt with. Hence the non-linear, non-chronological, non-sequential method used and shown during the whole writing process of the thesis, and then, that day...



Viviana Silva. *Campos Devanados*. 2013-2016. Miranda de Ebro Concentration Camp, Burgos.

At the reading I did not narrate the so-called "chapters", nor did I follow the order of the document which, by the way, my director Selina Blasco and I have called a *material device* because it was conceived as an object to be used - it was written and organised into fragments, by means of essays which are, in turn, arranged according to shared questionings and problems, and then grouped as little books under a more general heading. However, since these essays are each independent and unique, they can be read either following the established order, or by mixing them up. Their contents make reference to each other, given that some of the issues are dealt with in greater depth in other parts of the document. It is therefore possible to follow a certain line of argument, if the reader so wishes, and delve deeper into it elsewhere in the document, just like a hypertext. This is always accompanied by a footnote that guides the reading, and invites the reader to set out on a journey. Therefore, it is not a traditional doctoral thesis, and it has a structure of its own. The digital version uses hypertexts and hyperlinks (just like this text) to allow the reader to move smoothly and freely through the documents, *to travel by clicking*, as well as listen to songs and watch news and videos. In the printed version, we used special types of paper to highlight some of the key concepts of the research-

concepts added as inserts and which are related to the titles of the essays. I point out essential words upon which I developed the works, as well as the document, and that are somehow the connectors between the story, the pieces of work and the archives used in this project. In addition to this, we changed the size and included large images to afford them their due relevance; by doing this we have tried to move away from the usual format so as to reflect the union of form and content as indicated in the text. In other words, we sought new forms and formats for realising a thesis in fine arts that are better suited to our practices and methodologies. Because how do we really want to do things? "Unfulfilled desire can be a powerful seed for changing stories". (Haraway, 1991:317).

When research is carried out from the fine arts, it works as an open field of knowledge where *experience* plays a predominant and complex role and the unique features of each case (i.e. context, our feelings, vibrations, and even the previous experiences of the person facing the images) are incorporated into the aesthetic experience and, as a result, into knowledge, which is fundamentally removed from technical-scientific reasoning. In this sense, art and artistic research respond, from the academic world, to a knowledge that is secondary to the scientific logic that dominates today's capitalist societies, since knowledge involves "a social relationship intersected by power relationships, which means it is no longer conceived as an external, understandable truth" (Cruz, Reyes y Cornejo, 2012:253-274). To paraphrase Juan Luis Moraza, we live in a society that bases its economic, political, cultural and social decisions on scientific knowledge. Science, understood as scientific method, the productive power that determines our lives, rejecting other notions that might stand in the way of its progress. However, this *society of knowledge* does not foster, share or distribute it, but rather leads to inequality, and knowledge is devalued to mere capital, to which access is not granted. Hence it is a social lie and a key definition for the triggering of certain processes associated with the logic of financial capitalism (2012:7). And although today the reputation of art as a promise of wisdom is not under discussion, both art and artistic research offer an alternative form of knowledge that is exposed to the *dangers of the sensitive*, whose features and forms of validation must be understood on its own terms. "One of the great strengths of the image is the ability to create at the same time *symptom* (interruption in knowing) and *knowledge* (interruption of chaos) at the same time" (Didi-Huberman, 2013:26).

To these problems I added my involvement in/with the research. Some people within the academic environment consider this a problem, an unorthodox approach for a doctoral thesis. I witnessed this in various different academic contexts, such as seminars and congresses, where peers from various disciplines in humanities maintained that there is no place for working from artistic practice and involvement. These discussions have

been constant, and have led me to a permanent state of stress: the stress of resisting the kinds of theses based on purely scientific models that deem the idea of speaking from embodied knowledge, accepting our subjectivity and emotional involvement, as a mistake. And all this despite the fact that research in both humanities and the social sciences has been carried out from situated knowledge for over two decades now, thanks to feminism. For those of us who identify with this, the only way to find a broader scope is to be in a particular place, explaining the starting point and the relationships in which we get involved (Haraway, 1991:313-346). This idea situates the political as the basis for the production of knowledge, giving rise to a socially engaged and responsible kind of wisdom that involves us, that embodies us. Still, a part of the academic environment favours the search for objectivity as the one unequivocal truth, and considers the observer as an external being who does not take part in the research. All this has been rejected in this thesis, because we believe that everything goes through our bodies, subjectivity and ideology. Therefore, since there can be no observation without an observer, we cannot carry out our research with this longed-for impartiality. In this regard, I am reminded of Martha Graham's *Deep Song*, a choreographic piece that was inspired by the Spanish Civil War and that we had the opportunity to see at the Reina Sofía Museum in April 2017. After her presentation, the company's dancer, Blakeley White-McGuire, referred to knowledge as being embedded in her body. We could see this in every move she made, in her dance and later in the interview she did, where visceral rhythm and pain erupted from inside her, firing her entire body into motion. My doctoral thesis also became completely embedded in my body.



Viviana Silva, *Hilos de Ausencia*, 2014. Process images.

Having said that, we can look for balance, to try and “lighten” the ideological-emotional load. We work on our theses within academia, so we agree to stick to certain guidelines, accepting this place. But we also accept that there is always a position, and margin for movement. We speak from a place and we aim for a place; we move and by doing so we shift and activate the boundaries. This is why the proposed structure is experimental; why I omitted a hypothesis and conclusions², and therefore the knowledge

that was acquired by means of oral history, and the experiences in/with the works and their exhibitions, are important sources of knowledge, cited in exactly the same way as theoretical and academic books. This is a way of making the research my own, and looking for a point of connection and balance between my work as an artist and my work as a researcher. I thus recognise that knowledge comes from various sources which should not be understood as spaces exclusive to the institutions. A subtle gesture of movement.

While all structures must obey a selective canon that is based on inclusions and exclusions, and though, to some extent, we help validate the prevailing order when we enter the academic environment, we decided to replace this order as a kind of gesture, by incorporating our own forms of knowledge.

When working on a thesis that entails artistic practice as research, another issue is finding how best to connect one's own practice with the written text. Even though we are trying not to be self-referential, it is important to put the works in their rightful place. Moreover, we have to be very careful not to completely tear them apart, so that they do not lose that unique quality of the artwork as referred to by Susan Sontag, keeping in mind that "they are an experience and not a statement nor an answer to a question" (1996:48). They are living material, and so we cannot and should not explain them entirely —this adds another layer of difficulty to the lack of distance between the act of doing and critically observing what is done. These doings are embodied works because they have been experienced and shared in their relations with people and their spaces.



Claudio Pérez. *Necrosis*, 2015.

*Those who have memory are able to live in the fragile present time.
Those who don't, do not live anywhere.
Patricio Guzmán, 2010.*

Working with the dialectic of memory and oblivion; presence and absence in contemporary art practices; the experience of pain and its (re)presentation; political and social problems so complex and sensitive that they lead to opposing, irreconcilable positions where wounds remain open - all of this makes both the choosing of the images and works that will be used, and the writing of the thesis, a delicate task from the outset. Working out how to approach one's own practice is similarly problematic.

When you work amid these tensions, when you carry out and share collaborative artworks with people whose bodies were tortured, with families who are still looking for their missing relatives, then you are at the eye of a storm where all the voices and emotions come crashing down upon you. Similarly, when you go to a place knowing that it used to be a concentration camp, your perception changes completely.

By working with *open history*, with open wounds and the metaphors of sewing, stitching and basting, I have had to get closer to these conflicts and tensions. To do so, I had to create some sort of covering or clothing to sew over my own emotions.

Distance thus becomes impossible. But why should it be possible anyway?



Artist For Democracy. *Chile Vencerá! (Chile Will Be Victorious!)* Installation in Trafalgar Square, London, 1974. / The Names Project Foundation. *AIDS Memorial Quilt*. Washington D.C. 1992.

The methodological difficulties I faced were also connected to this: how to sew, weave and assemble all this material, all these stories. They were also connected with the *doings* which, in terms of my device, confirm how theory and practice have gone hand in hand in this research project.

Deciding on the final order and structure of the text, which as I have mentioned can be modified, has been quite a challenge. Curiously, even when we are immersed in our theses and spend the entire day reading, looking at images online and in catalogues, "living" in libraries and archives, sometimes it feels as if the text is just slipping through our fingers. But we

know that, if you put the work in, that oft-cited “eureka” moment always comes in the end, and, in my case at least, it would invariably show up at the most unexpected moments and places: on my way home, walking around, but mostly, in my dreams, at night.



Catalina Parra, *Imbunche*, 1977.

My doctoral thesis gradually began to awaken, amid my own sleeplessness. In the end, it was revealed, little by little, by the ghosts, visions, and images that appeared in my dreams.³ *Ghosts peek out between the stitches* has been one of the most important ideas. I know for certain that my thoughts have been blurry memories, whose fragments I have slowly sewn together like pieces of fabric. Just like the works that I create, where each piece has been stitched with a thin, fine thread: the thread of life, the thread of history, the thread that allows us to knit and weave our own reality. The thread that sometimes holds our soul together when it is hanging by a thread; the same one that holds the hope of the mothers, wives, sisters and brothers of the disappeared detainees. The same thread that can sew up the wounds on our skin, be they self-inflicted or otherwise. The same thread that the *Chilean arpilleras*, the (usually female) embroiderers of hessian fabric, used in their patchworks to speak up against fascism. *Weaving Stories; Sewing Wounds; Making Memory; Knitting to Not Forget*, are all names of some of the essays in my thesis, essays woven from the fragments with which I have written. *Doings*, metaphorical but concrete actions that I have used to work on our shared memories.

Todorov stated that the traumas of the collective memory should be treated just like psychoanalysis treats those of the personal memory, where recovery is not triggered by repressing memories but rather by bringing them to the present (2013:23-24). Recovering these memories and making them present has been the *leitmotiv* of many of the works in this research project, and of the research itself. *Naming the names*, embroidering the

names, as if we could attach the reference of what is being named in such a simple yet powerful gesture. Pointing out the loss of a dignified life (in line with Judith Butler, 2006), but because it was stolen away from us! In the end, what we have done is to create a dialogue with images and pieces of work that seek narratives of the memory and human rights, focusing on those images that, from contemporary art, enunciate absence, in the cases of forced disappearance, which is the main concern and question of the study.

Disappear. The starting point was my obsession with forced disappearances, which came about due to the fact that I am from a country where over 40,000 violations of human rights were systematically committed, and where there are still 1,200 disappeared detainees (Valech Report, 2014),⁴ all at the hands of a state apparatus and public institutions that have still not been brought to justice. A country that still makes “nuisance” or unimportant people disappear, such as [José Huenante \(in 2005\)](#) and [José Vergara \(2015\)](#). A dictatorship that set up some [1,132 torture centres](#), and whose imposed model generated a huge social gap where those at the top earn 40 times more than those at the bottom, according to current data (Pérez Soto, 2013).⁵ I discovered this history during my teenage years, when I used to sneak out to read a banned book (*Testimonio Sufrido - Suffering Testimony-*) that gave rise to my obsession with trying to understand what was happening around me. This obsession reappeared when I chose to move to Spain, where I studied some of its history, focusing on that which was missing: the kind of history that cannot be found in books or conversations or images. I realised that censorship and silence run even deeper in Spain. It is no small matter to find yourself in a country where there are still 114,226 disappeared detainees from the Francoist dictatorship (ARMH, 2015),⁶ and where there were over 180 concentration camps (104 of them permanent) (Rodrigo, 2006), a fact which no-one talks about. Places where power was exerted but which have since been erased from History; places that could give us certain clues about why, for example, Immigrant Detention Centres are currently permitted, which nobody talks about either.⁷

The motivation is to *enunciate absence*. Enunciation, as a basic unit of speech, expresses the elements that are part of the question or problem in order to find the potential answers: “a seed that appears on the surface of a tissue”, in the words of Foucault (2002:133), who continues with “atom of discourse”. The thesis looked for that “seed”, enunciation, acknowledging that art —when understood as social praxis— has the capacity to convene and ultimately bring back these specific absences. A political problem that is related with fields of vision, and, therefore, with art and our perception, as well as with H/history, the present-past and memory.

But when does the past begin, and where does it end? Is there perhaps a point in space-time that we could delimit? Can we draw a line to locate its beginning and end?



Patricio Guzmán. Stills from *El Botón de Nácar*, 2015 and *Nostalgia de la Luz*, 2010.

Probably not. But a line tracing the silhouette of a loved one, to invoke their absence, is perhaps the origin of drawing. A line to make up for such absence. According to this legend, drawing and painting were not born from the perception of reality, but rather from memory and the drawing thereof to alleviate the pain of loss, to remember. In other words, a handprint that is inscribed on the wall, in space. Inscribing on fields of vision by using images was what I did with my work and this thesis in order to talk about this obsession of mine. Giving shape to a breeze, to ghosts that still wander around because there has been no complete truth or justice to let them rest in peace. Searching and creating a record of what was previously unrecorded, because there are still **1,600 graves** yet to be exhumed in the concentration camps of Spain (Etxeberría, 2016), and the Pacific Ocean is still teeming with the remains of bodies dumped there, some of whom were alive, some blown up, scattered all over the sea...

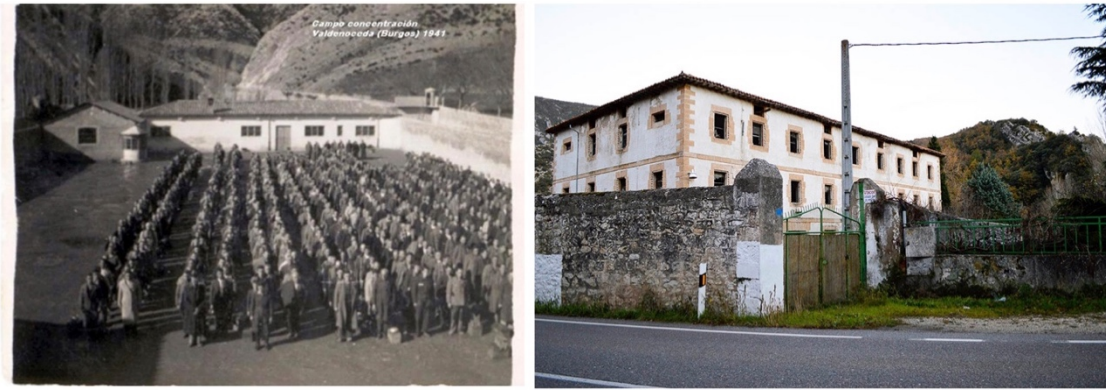


Viviana Silva, *Hilos de Ausencia* ('Threads of Absence'). 2014.

This research project starts from the act of *doing*, from life experiences where talking about and listening to those histories and forms of knowledge that had otherwise been excluded, forgotten, and erased are instead brought into the fold. We therefore work with embodied forms of knowledge that make our bodies tremble whenever we think about these experiences of violence. If our bodies shudder when remembering, if they hesitate before the uncertainty of the evaluation and judgement of the academia, then I believe it is important to accept and record this, and make it a part of History. Our nerves should be included!

Baudelaire suggested that the hand of the artist trembles when facing the dizziness and euphoria of the creative moment, and our fear of this leads us to make use of means where such faltering is not visible. Van Gogh also stated that the hand should not tremble; that hesitation and doubt are not desirable, and that the artist should work and draw the line on the paper quickly, even though Van Gogh's own hand would also tremble at times (Ortiz, 2017:23). As far as I'm concerned, my proposal is quite the opposite. It was a case of looking for an artistic means or material where our nerves, emotions and fears instead become visible. Because, as Mallarmé put it, "one should not paint the thing, but the effect it produces" (Ortiz, 2017:18).

The effect it produces was also connected with the idea and very distinct materialisation of the concentration camps. This materialisation takes place through photography, where the idea of capturing the time, the remains, and the place as a crime scene is detained in a moment. The photographic image shows an absence, because it not only captures what is happening but also what the camera's shutter has captured and registered at a given moment. "The timeless image on the photograph has in common with ghosts and spectres that perverse and ambiguous record of the present-absent, of the real-unreal, of the visible-invisible, of the appeared-disappeared, of loss and what remains" (Richard, 2006:165-166). A record of the spectral to address the memory and remnants of those places that caused the disappearances, which in turn are disappeared places. In both practices, as well as in the works used in the thesis and the research itself, what is important is that these images confirm the presence of absence, and that they belong, we could say, to a critical art, which, in the words of Chantal Mouffe (2007), "can help challenge the dominant hegemony".



Campos Devanados. 2013-2016. Valdenoceda. Archive and photograph by the author.

While there is a great distance between scream and silence, the pieces of work that were included in this research project often seem silent, due to an interest in subtle, poetic works —they are, however, quite the opposite. They are screams that are demanding to have a place. “The image speaks, it trembles; the image burns” (Didi-Huberman, 2004). We too burn and tremble in the face of those who continue to seize History.

These actions, gestures, artistic and academic displacements were ultimately a form of resistance: resistance by means of images, understood as triggers for ideas and concepts. Because through them we can piece together new imaginaries which make it possible for us to name all that is or has been prohibited, and shift the established boundaries. Doctoral theses that resist the imposed paradigms and that generate, or can generate, new models with which we can identify. Notions of wisdom that urgently need to be incorporated into knowledge, because, just as *the image saves a notion* (Didi-Huberman, 2008), the place occupied by art is understood as a space where we can work *in and for the battle of the imaginaries*.

To bring this text to a close, it is worth mentioning that, as of now, death is the only thing we can be certain of. And disappeared detainees who cannot be located, whose investigation cannot be closed, are beings in suspense, neither alive nor dead. Consequently, this research project had no conclusions. It had no conclusions because art itself cannot close or conclude anything; therefore, a research project that is based on artistic practice cannot do so either, especially if it was about forced disappearances. So, what conclusion could we possibly make? Will our bodies perhaps stop trembling?

Although the thesis in question did not have any conclusions, it did have an epilogue as a form of reflection. In it, we agreed that, maybe, the reading thereof proposes an epistemological journey from art, passing through memory and its possibilities of enunciation. A territory where images and

their narratives question the rearticulation of our subjectivity and the task of rewriting H/history, our own one. If the power of art lies in the fact that, by doing it, we can question the hegemonic models and propose other possible images, other possible worlds, we work on it from an art that resists, that absorbs the wound and makes it its own, to sew it and stitch it up, in the daily flow of memory, in the place of absence.

So, facing the question “how should absence be enunciated?”, after reviewing and outlining this question with pieces of work by diverse artists that I believe offer wonderful possibilities for enunciation, I maintain that, in my opinion, the only more poetic, real and visible way that would allow us to do so is the image and action described in Virginia Villaplana’s *The Instant of Memory* (2010): *planting red poppies in the gutter*.⁸ After becoming familiar with her work and reading her novel-documentary, this image comes back to me constantly, especially in spring when I see red poppies in many places —poor, small, insignificant places— and in them I see the bodies in the graves. This same idea reminds me of Anita González, one of the most well-known female activists in Chile, who, at 92 years old, is still looking for her five disappeared relatives, demanding justice for them. On the opening day of *Hilos de Ausencia* (‘Threads of Absence’) completely lucid and with her unique smile on her face, she said: “Disappeared detainees are beings in suspense, who do not have the right to live or to die, not even to be given a flower” (González, 2014). I believe that it is time for us to start planting flowers: there is plenty of work to do.

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Notes

¹ I am referring to Jon Mikel Euba's talk *Writing out Loud*, on the occasion of the publication of his book of the same title. This talk was carried out at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM) in May 2017 and was organised by the Department of History of Art and the UCM Research Group: "Research, Art, University" (970772).

² The term 'hypothesis' (from ancient Greek) is *something that is supposed*, and which is afforded a certain degree of probability in order to obtain an effect or consequence. Its validity depends on its being subjected to various tests, based on the theories drawn up. A hypothesis can be used as a provisional proposal that does not need to be strictly demonstrated, or it can be a prediction that must be verified using the scientific method. Its degree of reliability depends on how much or how little the empirical data supports what is being proposed. In turn, a conclusion, in logic, is a proposition at the end of an argument after the hypotheses, without offering an opinion, making sure that the premises are true and that they implicate the conclusion. In our case, we do not have unique truths, nor do we verify assumptions using the scientific method. In terms of conclusions, we deal with them at the end of the text.

³ Walter Benjamin wrote that "truth content does not appear by being exposed; rather it is revealed in a process which might be described metaphorically as the burning up of the husk [...] a destruction of the work in which its external form achieves its most brilliant degree of illumination" Walter Benjamin (Didi-Huberman, 2013:10).

⁴ In 1990, the Rettig Report was produced in Chile, as a means for the Government to recommend reparations to the victims of the recently ousted military dictatorship. The decree was officially approved in 1992, which led to the creation of the *Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation*. A few years later, in 1999, the Government summoned a *Round Table on Human Rights* to try and make progress in terms of discovering the fate of the disappeared detainees, a topic that had never been dealt with before. In 2001, the *National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture Report (Valech Report)* was produced, whose 2004 report shows the data behind all this process.

⁵ According to the Chilean Internal Revenue Agency (Servicio de Impuestos Internos – SII), 99% of the Chilean population lives with an average income of 680 USD, while the other 1% earns 27,400 USD, an amount that is 40 times higher. Moreover, there is inequality within the 99% as well: 81% lives only with an average monthly income between 338 USD and 1,096 USD, at most. Reference: Carlos Pérez Soto, 2013.

⁶ The Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (ARMH) keeps a record of 114,226 men and women that are still in mass graves in Spain. This number is the result of an investigation started by Judge Baltasar Garzón, before his expulsion from the Spanish National Court (Audiencia Nacional). This makes Spain the country with the second-highest number of victims of forced disappearances whose remains have still not been recovered or identified.

⁷ In 2015, records show that 6,930 immigrants passed through one of the seven Immigrant Detention Centres (the 'CIEs') that have existed in Spain since 1985. Report published on October 19th, 2016. "These are the seven CIEs in Spain: almost 7,000 foreigners went through one of them in 2015". Retrieved from the newspaper *20 Minutos*: <https://www.20minutos.es/noticia/2866400/0/asison-cie-espana-casi-7000-extranjeros-pasaron-2015-hay-siete/> [May 20, 2017].

⁸ *The Instant of Memory* is an artistic project and publication, where the artist Virginia Villaplana researches and documents the mass graves that still exist at the Valencia Cemetery, where over 26,300 people that opposed the Franco regime were executed between April 1st, 1939 and December 31st, 1945. These graves have not been exhumed and nor have the bodies been identified, and the time of this project's realisation (2006-2009), they were subject to the real estate speculation of the cemetery itself. This piece of work emerges from the image of a personal memory, of a road and a story. When the artist was six years old, her grandmother would take her every Sunday to lay flowers for their relatives, poppies that they picked in the fields over these graves, while she told her about her family history. Years later, this memory-as-image triggered a series of emotions in the artist, as well as aesthetic and political concerns, and these can be found in the publication of the same name, referenced in the bibliography.