Archives and Narratives for the Recent Coup-History of Chile

By Pablo Leighton

This paper describes diverse and conflicting narratives about the ‘covert action’ program of media propaganda undertaken by the United States administration against the Chilean leftist political movement and Government, from the mid-1960s and peaking in the 1973 coup crisis. To undertake this analysis, two types of texts will be examined. The first comprises reports from the administrations of the United States and Chile, which can be considered ‘official’ narratives. As the reports use declassified archival documents (publicly available at http://foia.state.gov, through the US State Department’s Chile Declassification Project that supplies more than sixteen thousand documents) they become a primary source. Furthermore, through institutional authorship or support they lose their ‘subjective’ status to become documents of objective ‘truth’ or authority. Secondly, Chilean and American narratives about the 1973 crisis that belong mostly to the social sciences will be examined. These depend strongly on the aforementioned narratives as well as on the original declassified documents, which they either evidence or discredit. These one-author and non-institutional narratives can be considered in a more ‘unofficial’ category, even though the authors claim that they stand for a thorough inquiry and pertain to have a larger scope and influence than one made by an average reader over a social event.

Three interconnecting ideas will frame the examination of these historiographical texts. The first one will explore the archival dimension of each item or narrator, looking to understand how the validity of what is narrated is addressed by institutional, foundational or research perspectives. The second will cover the historical contextualization that the narrations make under the explanatory framework of the Cold War – which has been instrumental to the construction of national discursive paradigms. The last framework will understand how the texts use the specific cultural territory of media propaganda as the privileged motive, practice and site of discourse dispute.

Introduction: Two References for the Recent Coup-History of Chile

Jacques Derrida has suggested that to a large extent in recent western history an illness or compulsion has evolved – what he has termed an archive “fever” (1996). Derrida argues that there is nothing less reliable or clear than the word ‘archive’. Reading the etymological origin of the word, he highlights how ‘archive’ can be understood as the place of residence for two terms: where things begin, and from where authority or social order is exercised. By his reading, all archives are at the same time revolutionary and conservative – archives are both producers and registers of a given event. Furthermore, in each foundational act exercised through an archive by a society, there is violence in the destruction of a previous culture through the denial or mis-use of former archives.
In this respect, the discussion of the Chilean coup crisis in archival documents and in reports on those documents is problematic for how it mostly reveals historiographical disputes arising from archival practice. The archives related to the Chilean process offer conflicting paradigms for interpretation. The only consistent element is that the archives are mostly determined by their reference to meaningful cultural powers such as the media. What the archives reveal is that the interpretation of significant events is affected by the content of the event, where an essentialised role is assigned to polysemous and not neutral cultural practices or, as Stuart Hall calls it, a “systematically distorted” type of communication such as media (1973: 1).

I. The Official Narratives

a. The Church Report

Genaro Arriagada, a Chilean Christian Democrat and political scientist, chief campaigner of the successful No vote option against Augusto Pinochet in the 1988 plebiscite and former Ambassador to the United States, considers that the Church Report (United States Senate, 1975) is “the most complete about that era” (Arriagada, 2000). This report is named after Senator Frank Church who headed the 1974-75 investigations run by the United States Senate on the covert operations of US intelligence in Chile between 1963 and 1973. Arriagada goes further and declares that the documents declassified by the US Department of State are not useful due to their lack of order or analysis.

As an official narrative, the Church Report could be considered ‘authoritative’, in the sense that it comes from an institution such as the Senate of the United States. In its introduction the report cements such a narrative claim by stating: “The statements of facts contained in this report are true to the best of the Committee staff's ability to determine them…The report does…convey an accurate picture of the scope, purposes and magnitude of United States covert action in Chile” (1975: Preface). However, the difficulty of even defining covert action is immediately admitted by the report, which confesses to not understanding the multiple hidden effects of these activities. Financial and other figures are used to fix the facts:

The Central Intelligence Agency spent three million dollars in an effort to influence the outcome of the 1964 Chilean presidential elections. Eight million dollars was spent, covertly, in the three years between 1970 and the military coup in September 1973, with over three million dollars expended in fiscal year 1972 alone (1975: section I.A).

But the numbers are doubtful. The Committee itself suggests that those figures could be five times their stated value due to the irregular Chilean black market of the time. But if the figures are not accurately determined within the report, perhaps the activities that the money was able to make a reality are. “The goal of covert action is political impact” (1975: section I.A), states the report, and the money covered “a broad spectrum, from simple propaganda manipulation of the press to large-scale support for Chilean political parties, from public opinion polls to direct attempts to foment a military coup…The effort was massive” (1975: section I.A).
In becoming an ‘archive’, the *Church Report* positions the original declassified documents as difficult to interpret but politically informative nonetheless. This can be seen in the way that it describes itself:

This report does not attempt to offer a final judgement on the political propriety, the morality, or even the effectiveness of American covert activity in Chile…What responsibility does the United States bear for the cruelty and political suppression that have become the hallmark of the present regime in Chile?...On these questions Committee members may differ. So may American citizens…what is important to note is that covert action has been perceived as middle ground between diplomatic representation and the overt use of military force. In the case of Chile, that middle ground may have been far too broad. Given the costs of covert action, it should be resorted to only to counter severe threats to the national security of the United States. It is far from clear that that was the case in Chile. (1975: section V.E).

Further to this, the report suggests another premise: “The demise of the brief Allende experiment in 1970-73 came as the cumulative result of many factors – external and internal. The academic debate as to whether the external or the internal factors weighed more heavily is endless…The record on Chile is mixed and muted by its incompleteness” (1975: section III.E.3.B).

With regards to the Cold War context, the *Church Report* positions Chile as a paradigm or a case of national *exceptionalism*:

Chile has historically attracted far more interest in Latin America and, more recently, throughout the world, than its remote geographic position and scant eleven-million population would at first suggest…Chile's history has been one of remarkable continuity in civilian, democratic rule…Chile defies simplistic North American stereotypes of Latin America…is one of the most urbanized and industrialized countries in Latin America. Nearly all of the Chilean population is literate. (1975: section I.C.1).

The Chilean example, however, should not have not gone in the “wrong” direction according to Washington, which had, the Commission explains, “the desire to frustrate Allende's experiment in the Western Hemisphere and thus limit its attractiveness as a model” (1975: section III.E.1). As both accusation and theoretical argument, the committee nonetheless uses the allegory put forth by a high ranking US official who placed Chile as a world player with an albeit ambiguous value: “In this analogy, Portugal might be a bishop, Chile a couple of pawns, perhaps more. In the worldwide strategic chess game, once a position was lost, a series of consequences followed” (1975: section V.A). What this metaphor does not clarify is whether the two world powers were chess pieces themselves, or were rather the two players to scale that were disputing the game. Without clarifying the purpose of the analogy, the report asks the essential question in capital letters: “Was the United States DIRECTLY involved, covertly, in the 1973 coup in Chile? The Committee has found no evidence that it was” (1975: section I.A).

Oddly enough, the Church Committee binds the general effects of the covert action to the internal politics of the United States. But as the report was not conceived as a
document with a judicial or legal reach (a main feature of Truth reports around the world), the consequences are moral or simply analytical. It concludes merely that the covert action was in contradiction with US official statements and that “the more important costs, even of covert actions which remain secret, are those to American ideals of relations among nations and of constitutional government. In the case of Chile, some of those costs were far from abstract” (1975: section V.E). This, in reference to the US military involvement in the first and failed coup plan in 1970 and the murder of the Chilean Army Commander in Chief, René Schneider, loyal to Marxist President Salvador Allende.

Finally, the Church Report states that propaganda was the most important practice in the covert action in Chile, a program that “made use of virtually all media within Chile and which placed and replayed items in the international press as well” (1975: section III.C.3). With reference to the content of the campaign, the report mentions that “the freedom of the press issue was the single most important theme in the international propaganda campaign against Allende” (1975: section III.E.2), adding to the defamamtion campaign against him. Meaningfully, once the coup happened and freedom of expression was obliterated under the new rulers, the report says that the budget for propaganda was terminated.

b. The Rettig Report

The Chilean Truth report of 1991, similar to the Church Report, had the whole financial and institutional support of its Government. From this, it could be presumed that the official account of a commission with eight members holding such exclusive dedication and profile as those of the Rettig Report (Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación, 1991) could create less doubt or ambiguity than any research belonging to the social sciences or humanities. As its official name states, the Truth and National Reconciliation Commission (headed by former Chilean senator Raúl Rettig) had as objective to report the reality of human rights violation under Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship (1973-1990), and to create consensus around it. As responses to the initial report have revealed, however, that truth was not universally accepted, especially in its historical contextualization. It was rejected by the three branches of the Chilean Armed Forces (Armada de Chile, Ejército de Chile, Fuerza Aérea de Chile, 1992), although its format and end was imitated in dozens of countries with post-dictatorial or traumatic experiences of a genocidal character.

The Rettig Report, aware of discursive quarrels, threatens in its first pages that it will not state anything about the facts dealing with the coup d’etat of 1973 – “if they were or not justified, nor if existed another exit for the conflict that originated them” (1991: 27). But four pages later it dares to briefly define “the factors that…were more important to generate the polarization and the crisis…From the 1950s, the country –as many in Latin America – witnessed its internal politics insertion in the fight among the superpowers or what is known as Cold War, which due to its loading of opposed interests and ideologies at world level, it implied in itself a polarization” (1991: 28). That an Allende victory was looked at as a victory of the Soviet Union and as defeat and menace for the United States is made clear by the report’s explanation “that the Government of this last country immediately planned and executed an intervention policy in the internal matters of Chile” (1991: 30). What explains then the recent
history of Chile is another history or a larger ‘context’, possibly quantifiable in military, geographical might or even in inhabitant numbers.

In the last section of its short historical contextualization of the 1973 coup, the Rettig Report maintains an element that it apparently cannot obviate nor measure, quantify or weigh in its real factual influence, especially in comparison with other social processes: “Finally, it cannot be forgotten...the role played by the media...from both sides...the destruction of the moral persona of the adversaries reached unbelievable limits, and weapons of all kind were used for that end...Being that the political enemy's figure was presented as worthless at both extreme positions, its physical annihilation seemed just, if not necessary, and not a few times it was called upon openly” (1991: 32).

c. Hinchey Report

Fifteen years after the publication of the Church Report and one year after the Chile Declassification Project, an amendment written by US Congressman Maurice Hinchey ordered the CIA to respond in a report to three questions asked about Chile. They were concerned with the CIA’s responsibility in Allende’s ‘murder’, Pinochet’s path to the presidency, and human rights violations more broadly. The Hinchey Report (Central Intelligence Agency, 2000), much shorter than the Church Report, is worthwhile for how it re-establishes the leading role that Church and other narratives assign to the CIA, and as archival practice. The report explains that it:

…reviewed relevant CIA records of the period predominantly from recent document searches; studied extensive Congressional reports regarding US activities in Chile in the 1960s and 1970s; read the memoirs of key figures, including Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger; reviewed CIA’s oral history collection at the Center for the Study of Intelligence; and consulted with retired intelligence officers who were directly involved...CIA’s response to the Hinchey amendment should be viewed as a good-faith effort to respond in an unclassified format to the three questions, not as a definitive history of US activities in Chile over the past 30 years. (2000: section Summary of Sources/Methodology).

The question about Allende’s death is remarkable for its answer. It represents the world puzzle over how Allende’s alleged suicide failed to fit the heroic and tragic narrative built around Chile. The report’s treatment of this matter seems to be more of an effort to settle this particular uncertainty in a definitive way rather than to find direct CIA involvement. In the CIA’s institutional response to Hinchey’s request, the intervention is bound to the time frame before Allende’s ascension, and gives weight to the local actors in conjunction with an ‘abstract’ US inspiration:

He is believed to have committed suicide as the coup leaders closed in on him. The major CIA effort against Allende came earlier in 1970 in the failed attempt to block his election and accession to the Presidency. Nonetheless, the US Administration's long-standing hostility to Allende and its past encouragement of a military coup against him were well known among Chilean coup plotters who eventually took action on their own to oust him (2000: section Summary of Response to Questions).
More significant is that the CIA leans on another report, the \textit{Rettig Report}, to confirm the truth of the facts: “The Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation in 1991 also concluded that Allende took his own life. There is no information to indicate that the CIA was involved in Allende's death” (2000: section Supporting Material).

As in the \textit{Rettig Report}, the CIA uses the Cold War context to justify what happened, insinuating the responsibility of the counterpart in the global and Chilean conflict: “The historical backdrop sheds important light on the policies, practices, and perceived urgency prevalent at that time. The Cuban revolution and emergence of Communist parties in Latin America had brought the Cold War to the Western Hemisphere” (2000: section Supporting Material). The imprecision of the historical and ‘archival’ justification of the CIA stretches between divergent arguments: the Cold War; the local actor’s autonomy; that the CIA “learned of the exact date of the coup shortly before it took place” (2000: section Supporting Material); and that US president Richard Nixon, who the agency records as the decision-maker for the intervention into Chile, was dead by the time the report was undertaken. Finally, the CIA summarizes its action in the propagandistic field, without leaving aside the ‘context’: “The overwhelming objective - firmly rooted in the policy of the period - was to discredit Marxist-leaning political leaders, especially Dr. Salvador Allende” (2000: section Summary of Response to Questions).

\textbf{II. The Unofficial Narratives}

\textbf{a. From Ambassador Edward Korry}

The account given by the Ambassador of the United States in Chile between 1967 and 1971, Edward Korry, has been broadcast in film and television documentaries that expose the theory of a strong and direct intervention of the United States in Chile, associated with the political left (Henriquez, 1998, Huismann, 2003), or that alternately demonstrate that the US had a minor role in the Chilean crisis, associated with the political right. In both cases these narratives place him as a crucial character with a privileged point of view, either by stressing his independence from decision-makers or by framing his role as key witness.

In his own version of the Chilean crisis, Korry exposes an archival dimension by revealing first that the “Chile narrative”, as he calls it, was a mishap caused by “the CIA Director, Colby, who had started all this by accident. He wanted this…Congressman…to know that the CIA was great and they should give them money, so he took credit for the government coup in Chile…That’s how it started” (Korry, Fermandois & Fontaine, 1998: 42). For Korry, from this accident a fictional narrative is born:

“Trying to make sense out of the cumulative nonsense written about Chile is like walking into the middle of a bad mystery film. Lots of clues clutter the scenario, but the film ignores them so it can end with simple-minded solutions. Critical facts lie on the cutting room floor, censored, excised, buried or unperceived. Ideology, partisanship or brazen self-interest sweep them into the memory hole” (1998: 6).
Korry’s best proof of his argument is in how that narrative was told by the media:

How, for example, does one explain that the most powerful influence on world-wide opinion at the time, the BBC World Service, took 16 years before pronouncing Allende’s death to be a suicide (and very quietly too), not the murder it had been reporting for so long? And why did the New York Times wait almost a decade to question its assertion of murder, the basis for much of the world-wide uproar which followed Allende’s death? Why, it must be asked, did this happen despite the truth being widely known? How, moreover, could honest editors believe that a handful of CIA agents, with less money to dispense in 1969 or 1970 than any congressman running for office in the USA, could do very much in a place like Chile? (1998: 6).

Korry omits that the Chilean dictatorship itself did not help to clarify that suicide by making a secret of Allende’s autopsy and funeral. Nor does he consider the value of the CIA money in the Chilean black market, and later says, “the CIA was an organization, an organizer of contacts…So you had so many different accounts that the actual sum was in the tens of millions” (Korry, Fermandois & Fontaine, 1998: 7).

Korry’s writings published in Chile have almost two pages of footnotes, in which he reviews every detail of his personal conflicts with those involved in the denounced narrative, including the Church Committee. The Church version seems to weigh so much on him that he affirms that the US should never have intervened in Chile:

If I had foreseen the disgraceful, behavioural dysfunction of the Washington elites, of academic historians and political scientists, as well as editors and reporters who willingly collaborated in the orgy of later myth making, such a manoeuvre might not have been attempted (1998: 17).

Actually, the most serious damage to him by the ‘Chile’ narrative could be the polysemous use of another type of record: “The Times dug out of its archives a very rare photo of me in dark glasses, coincidentally usually worn by General Pinochet” (1998: 21).

Korry also develops a discourse about the relationship between the United States and Chile, within the Cold War context. His argument is, however, undecided between a USSR that wanted to arm Chile – an “unacceptable” condition – and, simultaneously, how unfeasible it was for the Soviets to finance Chile as a new ‘client’ state. More importantly, “Chile also reinforced an acute awareness of the limitations on the US ability to manage all things, our famed can-do approach to anything – an attitude which attained its apogee in the early 1960s when we shot for the moon in many enterprises” (1998: 4). Korry claims that “all relationships are and must be two way...The flow of ideas in many fields of public policy today are from Chile to the USA” (1998: 4). However, this narrative changes when Korry is interviewed, because to accept the power over American politicians could be an exaggeration: “Chile was simply a means by which they settled important problems in the United States through a good show” (Korry, Fermandois & Fontaine, 1998: 15).
Again, more fundamental to Korry than to prove or not the US intervention within Chile is how the narrative was bred. His claim that he argued against an early coup in 1970 was because of the danger of “a massive world-wide campaign manipulated by Moscow, to blame the US, the CIA and “imperialism’” (1998: 25), as he said happened with Allende’s death in 1973. Finally, Korry’s account connects the US propaganda effort with his argument of a blurry line between kings and pawns. It serves him in particular to show coherence between his desire “to convince Chileans they had to be responsible for Chilean politics” (1998: 41), and how the opposition to Allende, specifically the former Christian Democrat president, Eduardo Frei senior, requested from the US a total hands-off policy, with the exception of one item: “I asked President Frei…‘Do you want the United States to do something specific?’ And he answered, ‘No, nothing, except propaganda.’ That was that” (Korry, Fermandois & Fontaine, 1998: 27).

This line of reasoning serves Korry’s essential argument, not explored by any other narrative according to him – that US intervention in Chile was justified and limited by Allende’s threat against the media: “Lest anyone think, as the Church Committee’s releases sought so successfully to persuade world opinion, that these funds were designed to ‘destabilise’, the facts are that they were limited to the most reputable, most sober pillars of the Chilean centre – to keeping alive at least one daily newspaper, one radio station and those committed to democracy as it was defined in the West” (1998: 22).

b. From academics Fontaine and Fermandois

As social scientists, the director of the Chilean think-tank Centro de Estudios Públicos, Arturo Fontaine, and political science professor at the Catholic University of Chile, Joaquin Fermandois, offer a narrative that feigns objectivity through the way it is archivally and discursively constructed. But it is salient to note that they are not participants of the history they narrate. When they highlight the leading role of Korry and his value as a source, by interviewing him and using his institutional and personal documents to prove their theories, Fontaine and Fermandois do not possess a privileged point of view about the reality of the Chilean crisis. In their accounts, they do not clarify whether being a participant in the events (as in the case of Korry) can invalidate one’s appreciation of facts, nor how to interpret with ‘exactitude’ his primary perception as a source. Further, they trust that by reducing or denying the importance of the US role in Chile to thwart the worldwide hegemonic narrative that states the opposite, their discourse becomes automatically a methodology without contradictions.

Fontaine (1998) accepts the Cold War discourse, but as a two-way street of influence, rather than as a ‘puppet show’ manipulated by the States. The names of Chile’s recent leaders had achieved fame in most distant parts of the globe, making ‘Chile’, as a nation, a self-sufficient narrative. But from Fontaine, one can deduce the idea that a national responsibility exists in accepting the narrative and the action of the Cold War. He argues that “[t]hese texts show that, in the long run, others have the power over us that we are willing to give them” (1998: 12). If Fontaine’s idea is taken to its fullest extension, Chile deserved to be a victim of the US. He reveals himself when defending Korry’s thesis regarding Allende’s pressure over the media that opposed him. As Korry did, Fontaine morally justifies US intervention in national politics,
while limiting its reach. When Fontaine explains in technocratic language Korry’s intention, he joins the Ambassador’s narrative:

> What most seems to concern him is that, via measures of economic regulation, the big firms would lose autonomy and deprive the opposition press, radio and television of the advertising revenue needed for their subsistence. The very same aim is achieved without the need for expropriation…If economic suffocation was the opposition’s Achilles heel, this gave rise to a strategy for the United States: namely, keep the communications media and opposition forces alive by assuring them the necessary resources (1998: 4).

Fontaine completes the circulation of the discursive power of the right when he reinforces a national political identity opposed to Allende that survived, paradoxically, thanks to foreign support.

Joaquin Fermandois, on the other hand, more deeply extends the critique about this US intervention over the narrative associated with the world’s and Chile’s Left. Fermandois explains that Chile was in the ‘eye of the storm’ of the Cold War, but not due to its economic or military weight: “[T]he political image of the country did radiate strongly on this continent. With the spectacular election of Allende this reality multiplied and expanded, especially towards Western Europe and even the United States” (1998: 5). Fermandois’ academic enquiry requests the reader to be sceptical of the ‘agent’ theory even though “the capacity for influence that a big power such as United States has is quite large” (1998: 7). Fermandois, the US intervention shows Chile as an actor and even as a possible manipulator. He says that “these Chilean ‘partners’ are not puppets…They have their own motivations and they ‘distort’ every message, ‘order’ or stimulus emanating from Big Brother. The bigger partner also depends on the needs and perceptions of the smaller one” (1998: 7).

However, a similar responsibility would be placed back on Chileans when they supported, consciously he says, US intervention. Fermandois even partly sustains the thesis of the Church Report, usually associating the role of Chile as a ‘pawn’ with regards to the ‘evident’ internal logic of the coup together with the approval message of the North Americans. Based on Korry’s archives, Fermandois says, “the very documents presented here are eloquent proof of the North Americans’ feeling of impotence at not being able to influence the development of this Southern land, despite its resources and the hopes placed in its policy” (1998: 8). On the contrary, Chile would have a cultural power as a model or “demonstration value”, he adds. The author exposes further proof of Chile’s world value through its performance in the media, that is to say, the simultaneous transmission and construction of its narrative globally: “Together with the Pentagon Papers…the Hearings on Chile constituted an astonishing example of how a great power could publicly reveal its motives and policies, in the midst of tremendous feelings of guilt and accusations of a lack of morality on the part of the Government…there is no doubt at all that the “Chilean case” constituted a moment in the North American crisis” (1998: 10). The author, nevertheless, allows contemplation for the fact that the Chilean model narrative can be false, especially if it was built by an American cultural power that through the same narration affirms that the Chilean crisis was the product of an American intervention.
Fermandois concludes that the media played a role, but he does not mention how it worked. He instead sticks to the media’s post-coup expressions of Chile as a world model or excuse for the US:

…a new starring role for the Chilean case. Following the spectacularity of the Unidad Popular in Chile and the “anti-utopia” Chile of the military Government, a passive role was now added, albeit one with some protagonism, which it played in the North American political crisis of the 1970s. This culminated in the mass media with the reference to Chile in the televised presidential debate of September 1976…The emotions this image provoked, can be seen in the film Missing, which in the 1980s captured the emotions of a large public and which plays on the idea of North American manipulation (Fermandois, 1998: 11).

c. From researcher Peter Kornbluh

Peter Kornbluh, scholar at the National Security Archive of the George Washington University, has requested the US Department of State to declassify secret documents under the Freedom of Information Act. This author offers another narrative, discursively opposed to that of Fontaine and Fermandois. Nevertheless Kornbluh carries out an archival exercise as well. When the first declassification of Bill Clinton’s administration occurred, Kornbluh argued that these documents “shed light on corners of the story that previously had been suspected, but not proven” (1998). He states that the record, for example, contradicts the US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s long excuse that the plan to provoke a coup and to halt Allende’s election in 1970 had been called off one week before General Schneider’s murder. For Kornbluh, it is enough proof that a Top Secret memorandum reveals that Kissinger decided to put pressure on Allende without caring about deadlines (1998).

Kornbluh also quotes another incriminatory cable in which the US Government, despite its own archiving of the document, expresses its desire to conceal its action in Chile: “It is imperative that these actions be implemented clandestinely and securely so that the…American hand be well hidden” (as cited in Kornbluh, 1998). Overall, the archival practice of the US Government itself would be the most revealing of its actions. For Kornbluh it “is a tacit admission that the United States can only rectify its shameful role in Chile’s past by making the secret evidence available for use in the present” (1999: 24). Proof of this could be seen in the self-awareness held within a US State Department memorandum: “In the minds of the world at large, we are closely associated with this junta, ergo with fascists and torturers” (as cited in Kornbluh, 1999: 24). For this author, the declassification aims to show to the world that finally the US was dissociating itself from Pinochet’s crimes.

Two other points about this archival paradigm are worthy of mention. The first is in how the declassification could be considered a cultural practice without material consequences. The archives can be censored by large black markers, the scope of their release can be very limited, or they can lack legal reach. Kornbluh reminds the reader that the only punishment that the CIA director Richard Helms received when he was found guilty of refusing and/or failing to answer the Church Committee’s questions was a fine of two thousand dollars (2003b). Secondly, a historiographical statement by Kornbluh could be one of the most precise, synthetic and uncomplicated of all
narratives about Allende’s ‘mysterious’ death: “He died in a fire-fight, apparently shooting himself in the head to avoid capture” (1998).

With regards to the relations between Chile and the US within the Cold War context, Kornbluh offers ample material. The same exercise of quoting the adversary helps him to build an image of Chile’s exceptionalism. One document stresses Allende as “the first democratically-elected Marxist head of state in the history of Latin America” (as cited in Kornbluh, 1998). He transcribes the opponent’s words: “Chile...has become something of a cause célèbre in both the Western and Communist worlds. What happens in Chile is thus a matter of rather special significance to the United States. Distant and small as it is, Chile has long been viewed universally as a demonstration area for economic and social experimentation. Now it is in a sense in the front line of world ideological conflict” (as cited in Kornbluh, 2003b: xiv).

To further prove Chile’s exceptionalist narrative and to even sustain the political right’s argument of Chile as a world actor, Kornbluh brings up the role of the owner of Chile’s newspaper El Mercurio, Agustín Edwards. He refers to him as “the richest man in Chile – and the individual with the most to lose financially from Allende's election” (2003a: 14). Kornbluh quotes from the memories of Henry Kissinger to explain that Nixon acted thanks to Edwards.

The author concludes that Chile became the catalyst for the first public session of the history of the Congress of USA on covert action and that “[a]fter so many years, Chile remains the ultimate case study of morality – the lack of it – in the making of U.S. foreign policy” (2003b: xv). That case study, says Kornbluh, became known as the Chile Syndrome for US covert actions, supplementing the Vietnam syndrome of national reticence of US military actions in foreign countries (2003b).

Nevertheless, Kornbluh’s argument is one that talks of direct US intervention. As he understands it, the archives demonstrate the existence of an economic blockade, debated for years by historians. “The mix of economic sabotage, political propaganda and army prodding worked. At every turn, his policies encountered well-funded adversaries” (1998), Kornbluh argues referring to Allende’s fall. Amidst so many interpretations of archival documents, Kornbluh is the only author who refers to the popularly known “Nixon's September 15 instructions to the CIA to ‘make the economy scream’” (2003a: 17). In his own words, Kornbluh claims that this permitted the necessary coup climate to overthrow Allende (2003b).

In the end, Kornbluh places propaganda as central to understanding the US intervention. From one document he quotes: “The key is the psyche war within Chile...We cannot endeavour to ignite the world if Chile itself is a placid lake. The fuel for the fire must come from within Chile. Therefore, the Station should employ every stratagem, every ploy, however bizarre, to create this internal resistance” (as cited in Kornbluh, 2003b: 19). Nonetheless, Kornbluh admits that the covert propagandistic action had its limits. With the post-1973 “massacre”, he says, “even the CIA's best propaganda could not hide the reality on the ground” (1998). As a final verdict, Kornbluh argues that the US declassification of documents can be simultaneously a model for Chile and a national liberation act. More importantly, through the archives, the propaganda can be reversible when it is known as such:
“Chileans, long misled by Pinochet’s propaganda, will learn the secret history of their own country” (1999: 22).

d. From journalist Patricia Verdugo

The last narrative belongs to a book: Allende: How the White House Provoked his Death (2003), written by the Chilean journalist Patricia Verdugo, author of numerous bestselling books on human rights, including one of the most sold books ever in Chile, The Caravan of Death. Verdugo offers many of the arguments identified, as the title suggests, with the account of direct US intervention in Chile. There are, however, several elements in her work that other authors or commissions do not offer, even though her narrative has been labelled as ‘journalistic’, which for many social scientists would imply restricted objectivity or depth.

The first element that stands out is one that no author analysed here has offered so far. Beyond the declassification, Verdugo makes clear that the creation of the archives is a legal duty in the United States, without explaining the source or the law that determines this. Two other sections stand out for their narrative power. Firstly, Verdugo raises the “key meeting” of September 14, 1970, between Nixon, Edwards and the president of Pepsico, George Kendall. Verdugo speculates over the tones of the session: “Kendall could request [from] Nixon what he wanted: Nixon had been his employee and had reconstructed him politically…until taking him to the White House” (2003: 59). Then, her narrative about the CIA in Chile reaches the levels of a ‘thriller’: “It is necessary to stop for a moment at the agent that was sent to Santiago… If you write the name of David Atlee Phillips in any internet searcher, the results will give you the chills...this man scores in his record the overthrow of...Arbenz in 1954, a key role in the unsuccessful invasion to Cuba in 1961… And there are strong indications that he would be the CIA agent that, under the alias “Maurice Bishop”, met with Lee Harvey Oswald” (2003: 82).

As for her other archival practices, Verdugo argues that, contrary to what the Church Committee declares, the amounts of money supplied by the United States were much greater than the specified multiple of five caused by costs on the Chilean black market: “One million 665 thousand dollars…at that time was a fortune. If we multiply it by 200, the price of the dollar on the black market, we get 333 million dollars” (2003: 119). The total figure of the intervention of seven million dollars “arrives then to one thousand 400 millions to black market price” (2003: 137).

Finally, in a significant section, Verdugo explores who in the political spectrum represents the notions of ‘pawn’ or ‘player’ within the context of the Cold War. Verdugo cites the leader of the Chilean right-wing National Party, Sergio Jarpa, who reacted furiously when the declassified documents began to be known. Quoting an edition of El Mercurio in 1999, Verdugo explains that Jarpa was adamant that the US had no interventionist role in Chile and that before 1973 he told Kissinger that the US “shouldn’t do it, because this ‘business will be arranged by ourselves’” (2003: 141). Still, this notion that associates ‘pawn’ to the Left and ‘player’ to the Right becomes confused when Verdugo speaks of the cultural power of certain media. Although Chilean, the newspaper El Mercurio was able to influence a superpower and concurrently be dependent on it, at least financially.
Conclusions

Derrida argues that the archive represents the complex relationships between remembering and forgetting that take place, for example, when the act of archiving also seeks to overlook the pain of memory of trauma (1996). The Chilean 1973 coup d’etat led to what the *Rettig Report* calculated as the murder of around 3,000 citizens out of a total population of 11 million, an event that many Chileans directly witnessed and yet, even with universal recognition, still continues to be contended historiographically. As a cognitive and explicative effort, the narratives exposed have looked for enlightenment about these events from the archives or have pretended to become as such themselves. The main gesture of exposing documents of the past in the present – a leap in time that faces the problems of not contemplating the documents as factual matter but as ‘archives’ – can be thought of as maintaining a spectral quality that is neither present nor absent, visible nor invisible. The archive, as “a trace that always refers to others whose eyes can never be confronted” (Derrida, 1996: 84), more than helping to clarify or recreate events, has opened – in the Chilean case of political conflict leading to state violence – a hegemonic dispute. The narratives examined have looked for an elucidation of the phenomenon (certainly not universally referred to as genocide) from a conjugation of the past tense that is indeed no more precise than direct or ‘subjective’ observation of the events themselves. Overall, these narratives are constructions of memory that as theories are rarely recognized to be also cultural practices.

Secondly, that the media practice of propaganda has been a key aspect according to all these narratives, builds the main site for this dispute in Chilean society and culture. The polysemous word *propaganda*, especially when the term is considered to denote culture more than ideology (meaning a juncture of practices and ideas) questions the fallacy of media objectivity, neutral technology, and the discourses that employ it to their advantage. The term crosses many other boundaries between traditionally divergent fields, such as art and politics. More importantly, the very concept of propaganda can affect the exercise of the social sciences in their attempts at historiographical reconstruction. As Stuart Hall argues, cultural practices can also be the points to be won or lost within a battle, the site of consent and resistance, where hegemony arises and is secured (1981: 239). This paper has sought to directly expose narratives generally considered as the most quoted, representative, thorough and current about the Chilean coup crisis. The order, selection and the possibility of handling them as ‘archives’, nevertheless, make this writing, an indirect tracing of the events – a storyline as all others.

References

Note: all quotes from references with titles in Spanish were translated by the author.


Hall, S.,


Kornbluh, P.,


