

Proper Names

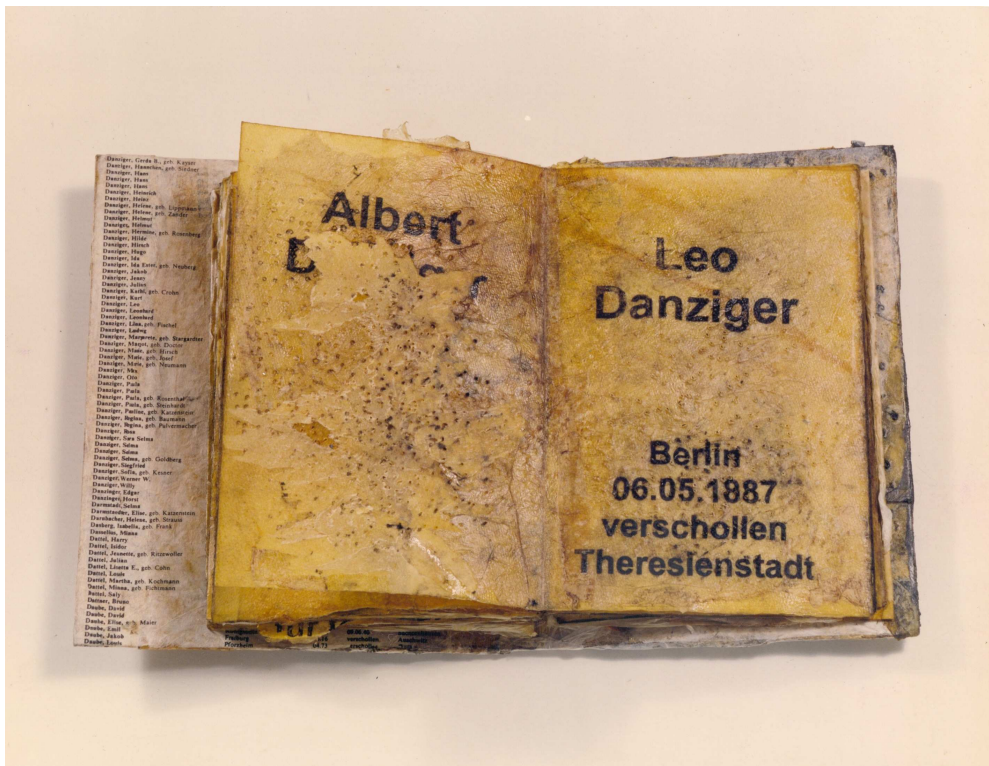
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The serie "Proper Names" (Nomes Próprios), by Leila Danziger, gathers all 76 names of German Jews with the same surname as the artist, who disappeared in the concentration camps of World War II. Extracted from the "Book of Remembrance" (Livro da Lembrança), kept in the "Library of the Jewish Community of Berlin", in Charlottenburg, these familiar and unknown names, printed in photogravure in 76 previously worked paper holders, compose a 420 x 200cm panel. When mounted, they create on the wall a compact surface, but differentiated through the names and the handcrafted treatment of the materials given to the supports in which they are inscribed.

It is crucial, therefore, in the making this work, the prior choice of a concept which deflagrates, in the artist, "the desire to give materiality to the names, reinscribe them in time and space, give them that which they lost: body", putting her before the challenge to transform a historical, extra-artistic occurrence, in a new situation, essentially aesthetic.

Unlike the modern tradition, in which the works sought their meanings based on formal, chromatics and spatial relationships, here it is sought equate in the field of art, semantic situations not always originating within their strict limits: a matter that seems to plasmate in varying degrees, a considerable portion of contemporary poetics.

"Proper Names" therefore contains a tension which exceeds the subjective-family sphere; surpass the historical moment evoked and transcends the universal drama of the human condition through poetic operations that interweave discursive contents with image: a polissemic field that grows and seeps through the faded cracks of aesthetic formalism, so traditionally strong in Brazil.



The first contact with the work is purely visual. We apprehend, perhaps, the aged and grimy appearance of the assemblage. We see its beautiful and paradoxical lightness, modulated by the frailty of the papers used in it. It is impossible, however, as we distinguish the names, dates and places, to continue apart from the work.

Intercepted by the word, the look now passes for each piece of "Proper Names". We then realize that we are before the same *genos*, a single lot, delimited by the artist's family name. Our total ignorance of the bodies and feelings that had animated these *names*, lending them, once, specific human and affective density, make them now excessively equals and despite their orthographic and phonetic differences, they are there only as traces. The graphics hiatus of these ciphers just named and mechanically printed, compress in the empty dozens of existences without biography or identity. They are interlineations in which silences of unique lives reverberate, throw into forgetfulness by the same tragedy that eternalized them in the common trench of a list of names preserved in the library of Charlottenburg.

The association of minimum information to the *names* in the list, such as date and place of birth and death, far from distinguishing them, empty them even more of the specific circumstances they once personified, as they indicate a common, historic fate (the collective end in the Holocaust promoted by Nazism) and ontological (the inevitability of death and the oblivion which it fatally represent to the individual).

The concept which informs this work of Danziger points us, from its spatiality, to the flow of time and permanent frailty of memory, concerns that cross the whole of her work: the progressive condemnation to oblivion from the sphere of what is lived and increased condensation of memory of the past, built by history. This is the thread which connects a past only collective to a present full of individuals, qualified from our own individuality. Thread which weaves an unconveyable and unique milieu; that which through death will disappear with us forever.

All this, however, should not be taken as a return to “literary” elements abandoned by modernist plastic (after all, the narrative in the arts remains paradoxically silent). What many contemporary artists seek, not always consciously and sometimes unsuccessfully, perhaps due to the narrow focus on the expression of private ghosts, are alternatives to the academization of part of the recent Brazilian production, based on purely formal relations, either chromatic or gestural. They can say little of the world in which we live. They have become easy and predictable if confronted with the inventive vigor of the genealogies they claim for themselves, because they are born entire, repeating, without any risk, effects of positive results achieved through genuine experimental procedures by their aesthetic predecessors since the '50s.

From a different point, “Proper Names” builds, with word and matter, images – taken here in one sense close to that of iconology, such as proposed by Panofsky in the first half of the century: images denotes more than that which we see (shape), because they symbolize.

Some of the most significant contemporary artists such as Beuys and Kiefer, seem to have found in the symbolic field, renewed by the questions of this end of century, the solution to the impasses reached by the majority of formal *strictu sensu* searches.



The material treatments given by Leila Danziger to “Proper Names” and to the books attain substance, especially from concepts with which the artist works. In the act of hurting, engraving, pigmenting papers sequencing them, either on the wall or on pages, there is before the recording and the production of a flow than the synchronous crystallization of a scene, such as occurred in the context of mimetic representation and of part of the modern production. Heterogeneous temporal lapses – life, history and the making itself –, semantized by the artist’s intervention, symbolically condensate, giving contemporary meaning to her work.

(Folder of the exhibition “Proper Names”, Thomas Cohn gallery, São Paulo, April/May 1998)