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What is This?

Representing Absences in the Postdictatorial Documentary Cinema of Patricio Guzmán

by
Patrick Blaine

*For nearly 40 years, Patricio Guzmán has explored the complex relationships between time, memory, and absence in postdictatorial Chile while infusing his documentaries with personal narrative and devices more commonly seen in literary fiction. His films have redefined the genre from the advent of the New Latin American Cinema through the 2010s and are characterized by marked subjectivity and the representation of absence in the postdictatorial context. His filmmaking, beginning in the early 1970s and ending with his latest film, *Nostalgia de la luz* (2010), constitutes the most complete attempt in any medium to document Chilean national life before, during, and after the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1990).*

*Por casi 40 años, Patricio Guzmán ha explorado la compleja relación entre el tiempo, la memoria, y la ausencia en el Chile de la posdictadura, mientras infundía sus documentales con narrativas personales y recursos mas bien vistos comúnmente en la ficción literaria. Sus películas han vuelto a definir el género desde el avènement del nuevo cine latinoamericano en su transcurso hasta los 2010, y se destacan por una subjetividad marcada y la representación de la ausencia en el contexto de la posdictadura. Su obra cinematográfica, comenzando con los principios de la década 1970 y acabando con su film mas reciente, *Nostalgia de la luz* (2010), constituye el esfuerzo mas completo en cualquier medio para documentar la vida nacional chilena antes, durante, y luego de la dictadura de Pinochet (1973–1990).*

Keywords: Patricio Guzmán, Chile, Documentary, Postdictatorial, Film

For nearly 40 years, Patricio Guzmán has explored the complex relationships between time, memory, and absence in postdictatorial Chile while infusing his documentary films with personal narrative and devices more commonly seen in literary fiction than in social documentary cinema. Also, and especially in the case of his best-known early film *La batalla de Chile*, he has used the filmic medium for political analysis rather than the mere denunciation or “agitprop” that dominated political filmmaking at that time. By doing so he has redefined the documentary genre in Chile and Latin America as a whole. What is more, his extensive and varied body of work could be characterized as the only continuous and comprehensive attempt in film or literature to create what historian Steve Stern (2006: xxviii) would call a “memory box” of Chile during the

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period in which he has been working. It forms a collection or archive of experience and resistant memory linked to the years before, during, and after the Pinochet dictatorship. On one hand, Guzmán's work is national in scope, but on the other it is also intimately linked to his personal, lived experience of the Unidad Popular¹ (Popular Unity—UP) government, the 1973 coup d'état, the long exile, and the impossible return. This is accomplished through a varied, multidisciplinary range of subjects and the critical use of the cinematic apparatus.

The director first garnered international critical acclaim for the three-part *La batalla de Chile* (1975, 1976, 1979), which centers on the sociopolitical conflict that was tearing the country apart during the last months of the Allende period. The film also formed an important part of efforts to raise awareness of the human rights tragedy taking place in Chile. From that piece through his most recent *Nostalgia de la luz* (2010), Guzmán has created an innovative oeuvre of cinematic historical memory that simultaneously addresses and intensifies the profound individual and collective absences caused by the experience of the dictatorship, all the while challenging the limits of the documentary genre.

In the feature-length documentaries that Guzmán created after the advent of the dictatorship there is a clear progression in both cinematic form and the treatment of his main theme of historical memory and efforts to reconcile democratization in Chile with the search for resolution on the part of the victims of the regime. As his project has progressed, he has made increasing use of a number of metaphors for memory "work," including archaeology, forensic medicine, astronomy, and the uncovering of murals. In addition to metaphors, however, he uses physical objects, art, songs, buildings, and a wide assortment of other physical anchors in a sort of filmic "method of *loci*"² for the recovery of lost memories and the forging of new ones. His films can be seen as an effort to link the political or social documentary with the poetic and/or the narrative, both of which have driven him since his college years (in which he published a number of science fiction stories) and his time in film school from 1966 to 1969 in Madrid.

Julianne Burton (1990: 3) defines social documentaries as "documentaries with a human subject and a descriptive or transformative concern," and this definition certainly fits all of the films that will be discussed in this essay. She further divides the subgenre into four modes: observational, expository, interactive, and reflexive,³ an order that tends to be developmental in a given national cinema. The most traditional use of the documentary as a didactic tool concentrates mostly on the observational and the expository. With the interactive mode the filmmaker converses with the subjects directly (usually in the service of a larger thesis), and in the reflexive mode the cinematic apparatus plays a more active role, as do "images of reflection" (1990: 4–5). She also accounts for films that mix modes, as many of Guzmán's documentaries do.

Zuzana Pick (1990) notes that beginning in the late 1950s, Chilean filmmakers began to take a more critical stance concerning class issues and development. She recounts that in 1955 the Catholic University (the country's most prominent private university) created its Film Institute, and in 1957 some members of the University of Chile's Cinema Club formed the Experimental Film Group. Perhaps the best known of these was Sergio Bravo, whose influential observational documentaries, such as *Mimbre* (Wicker) in 1957 and *Día de los organillos* (Day of the Organ Grinders) in 1959, opened a window onto the world of working-class subjects.

As politicization in Chile increased during the 1960s, both subject matter and exhibition were adapted to more explicitly political ends, which entailed arranging screenings in conjunction with labor organizations and also coincided with Chile's first film festival, in Viña del Mar in 1967 (Pick, 1990: 113). These new social documentaries in Chile were a reaction against the uses of the genre up until that point, which had been mostly limited to propaganda for large corporations and the government with an urban, middle-class intended audience (110). Chilean social documentary tended toward a blend of the expository and interactive modes, demonstrating its origins in the New Latin American Cinema movement of the 1950s and 1960s, which was profoundly influenced by Italian neorealism and expressive realism (Greenfield, 1973), Cuban cinema after the revolution, and direct cinema. It showed a concomitant desire to film "raw" reality (often in the observational mode) and to serve as a vehicle for social criticism (Burton, 1990: 6).

With the arrival of Salvador Allende's UP government in 1970, the stage was set for an explosion of politically committed filmmaking. Chile's most prominent filmmaker, Miguel Littin, was appointed head of the state film enterprise Chile Films and hired Guzmán to direct the documentary film division. Guzmán and other young filmmakers there were greatly influenced by the Cuban cinema of the period and in particular the work of Julio García Espinosa, the original proponent of "imperfect cinema" in 1969 and the director of *Tercer mundo, tercera guerra mundial* (Third World, Third World War) (1972) (Guzmán, 1986: 53).

However, internecine fighting⁴ within the film community and a lack of funding frustrated Chile Film's potential just as Guzmán was solidifying his career. After returning from film school in Madrid, he had found his intention to make fiction films "outstripped by reality" (Guzmán, 1986: 57) and began to make documentaries about the political process during the first years of the UP. It was then that he began to form his most important ideas about the purpose of the social documentary, culminating in the groundbreaking *La batalla de Chile*. According to Guzmán (1986: 50),

What was going on was of such intense interest that we realized that our camera should encompass as much as possible. We needed to use a wide angle lens and to situate ourselves at as great a distance as possible from events while still being able to record them. We needed to make sure that the entire process was contained in the film—and not from a narrowly partisan point of view. We realized that it would be a mistake to analyze events from a single perspective, because the interesting thing was to represent *all* points of view within the Left.

Guzmán and his Equipo Tercer Año (Third-Year Team, referring to the third year of the Allende government) began shooting in February 1973 with stock donated by the French filmmaker Chris Marker and ended when they had run out of film, immediately after the coup (López, 1990: 274). Guzmán was imprisoned for 15 days in the National Stadium shortly afterward and managed to smuggle the reels out of Chile with the help of an uncle and the Swedish embassy. Of the main members of the team, all would escape the dictatorship with their lives except Jorge Müller, the film's cinematographer, who was disappeared in 1974. Guzmán finished editing the film in Cuba with the support of the Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (Cuban National Film Institute), working with fellow exile Pedro Chaskel, an influential figure in

Chilean documentary development who had taught both Raúl Ruiz and Miguel Littín and edited Littín's landmark 1970 film *El chacal de Nahueltoro* (The Jackal of Nahueltoro).

LA BATALLA DE CHILE

La batalla de Chile: La lucha de un pueblo sin armas (The Battle of Chile: The Struggle of an Unarmed People) was eventually released in three parts (in 1975, 1976, and 1979) and constituted one of the most important works of the New Latin American Cinema, winning numerous awards and international recognition and effectively supporting the Chilean domestic resistance and the exile solidarity movement. The film is divided into three parts: Part 1, "The Insurrection of the Bourgeoisie"; Part 2, "The Coup d'État"; and Part 3, "Popular Power." Each functions both as an individual film and as part of the whole, embodying the political dialectic of class struggle that it is analyzing.

The first part aims to show how an increasingly disruptive and militant counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie with U.S. support fomented the social polarization that united significant sectors of the middle class and armed forces against the working class. In the more ideologically complicated second part, the incapacitating divisions within the left interact with the destabilization campaign spearheaded by the upper classes. Finally, the third part is an "affectionate" homage to the passion and organization of the working masses during the UP period (Guzmán, 1986: 50–51). Much of the footage contained in the third part had been cut from the first two, and it also includes footage from Guzmán's previous film, *La respuesta de octubre* (October's Answer), about the popular response to the strike of the CIA-supported truckers and "bosses" in October 1972, which disrupted the distribution of food and other essentials and caused major shortages in an attempt to bring down the government (Ortega, 2003: 155).

La batalla de Chile's impact as a documentary was resounding, as Julianne Burton (1990: 27) notes, and it represented a unique "synthesis of documentary approaches" as well as a collaborative working method, "breaking history-in-the-making into discrete components" to analyze the multiple, complex historical processes occurring daily in Chile at the time. This assessment does not, however, fully explore the rhetorical and representative potential of the film.

López (1990) argues effectively that Guzmán seamlessly integrated a number of key narrative devices into the documentary that made it a truly innovative project, surpassing the paradigm of the genre in the New Latin American Cinema movement and indicating the direction that he would take with his later films. In her reading the film comes close to what Burton calls the reflexive mode. While it contains a large amount of pseudo-omniscient voice-over, as well as observations of rallies and brief interviews with a variety of social actors, it is not a linear exposition of "things as they are." On the contrary, as López points out, it is a "precise, calculated, intentionally political, Marxist dialectical analysis of those events that uses the narrative strategies of fiction as a legitimating device" (279). As an example, she highlights the temporal structure of the film, which uses flashbacks in order to give an impression of cause and effect. The flashback temporal structure is dramatically established

by beginning with the coup and then retracing the previous three years to reveal its causes in the unfolding political conflict. The first scene of Part 1 shows the Hawker Hunters of the military junta bombing La Moneda, the presidential palace, on September 11, 1973. The final scenes of Part 2 return to more extensive footage of the coup and the last words of Salvador Allende. As López notes, these two bookends tie the class struggles of the UP period to the eventual outcome or effect of the coup.

López also argues that the voice-overs provide a dialectical counterpoint to the images in some sequences. For example, in Part 2 after the voice-over announces the UP's intention to arrive at a stabilizing agreement with the *Demócrata Cristiana* (Christian Democrat—DC) Party, the footage shows Salvador Allende's announcement that the DC has refused his invitation to join the cabinet. Another example foretells the fate of Chile's "unarmed people." After a voice-over describes a raid by 200 soldiers searching for leftist weapons caches in a cemetery, the film cuts to acutely class-conscious women who presciently predict that the next step will be to send in planes to wipe out the poor, most of whom support Allende and who express their desire to be armed for self-defense against the military. Perhaps the most poignant example comes seconds before the end of Part 2, when the footage shows the repression following the coup but the voice-over notes that "the battle of Chile has not ended." In this way Part 3, which is mostly homage to popular mobilization under the UP, is simultaneously recontextualized as portraying the source of what will become resistance to the dictatorship. The rhetorical use of the present perfect tense at this crucial moment takes the film beyond a simple historical documentary about the UP period and the coup and gives it an active role in the struggle under way to regain democracy at the time of its release.

Another key element that López mentions is the self-conscious ("reflexive") use of the camera. Particularly memorable is an interview sequence in Part 3 with a wealthy right-wing family. Rather than maintain the shot on the speaker, the roving hand-held camera pans around the room almost autonomously, centering on their material trappings and unsympathetically impugning their opulence.

Finally, as López (1990: 277–228) points out, the use of long takes and sequence shots rather than montages sets the film apart from earlier Latin American documentary works such as *La hora de los hornos* (The Hour of the Furnaces) (Octavio Getino and Fernando E. Solanas, 1968) and allows the film to follow a predetermined analysis of sociopolitical conflict points throughout. This device is used most often in Part 3, and the gaze of the camera tends to wander while interviewees are speaking. This action simulates the human gaze but tends to gravitate toward ideologically oriented objects. For example, as a factory worker speaks about the loyalty of the working class and class consciousness, the camera moves around the shop and focuses on the workers' tools. Ernesto Malbrán (also featured in *Chile, la memoria obstinada* [Chile, Obstinate Memory]) speaks about the conflicts created by nationalization of industry in a capitalist bourgeois economy. As he speaks, the camera moves from him and the blackboard where he is writing to a number of publications on a nearby table, including a copy of the leftist *Chile Hoy*⁵ with a cover that reads "DC BUSCA CONFLICTO DE PODERES" (The DC Seeks a Conflict of Powers), referring to the conflict between the legislative and executive branches that culminated in the coup.

The organization of the collective's filmmaking was both complicated and unique and was arrived at after considering several other possible frameworks: chronological, section-by-section (the economy, education, etc.), and the "nucleus method," which would use a single event such as a factory takeover as a starting point to explore its causes and effects (Ortega, 2003: 154). Eventually the team decided on "a dialectical sum of all of them" (Guzmán, 1986: 54–55). The screenplay-flowchart that they arrived at was nine pages long, and the filmmakers' challenge was complicated by their having only a limited amount of film stock. Chris Marker, who had donated the stock, wrote to Guzmán, "What you're trying to do is insane, it's impossible, it's just too big" (Guzmán, 1986: 55). The director explains: "The theoretical outline we developed divided Chilean reality into three major areas: ideological, political, and economic. Our point of departure was a Marxist analysis of reality, which we then applied in small chapters that accounted for the seventy-odd divisions in the outline." The result was strikingly original and complete but yielded an unwieldy mass of material that the director would later edit in Cuba.

The three major areas that Guzmán and his team sought to emphasize in the Chilean situation overlap somewhat, but they serve to distinguish the different types of content in the project. The film is often edited to show the relationship between them. Of particular interest is the portrayal of the creative strategies employed by UP supporters to thwart the opposition's attempts to depose the democratically elected government. The film contrasts enormous unified street demonstrations in support of the government featuring raucous, jumping refrains such as "¡Él que no salta es momio!" (Anyone not jumping is a mummy [right-winger]!) with the ultra-right's destructive, CIA-trained thugs or shock troops sowing chaos and pelting police with rocks. It also highlights popular resistance to the right's efforts to disrupt the national economy, showing how the neighborhood *juntas de abastecimiento y precios* (supply and price committees) and *almacenes populares* (people's stores) counteracted economic sabotage, speculation, hoarding, black market profiteering, and the October 1972 bosses' strike and enabled the survival of the government by denouncing hoarding merchants, selling off their goods, collectively unloading trucks to stock community stores every week, and fairly distributing rationed goods procured by the UP government. Similarly the film shows workers in the *cordones industriales* (industrial belts or zones) sharing raw materials and other resources among nationalized industries, and their comments make clear that those involved understand the economic and ideological implications of their activities.

While demonstrating strong class consciousness, the film also shows that the left was not a unified front. Scenes in which UP supporters debate with each other or with government officials portray the profound disagreement that existed between different sectors of the UP over matters such as nationalizations of industry and occupations of large agrarian properties. This political infighting and division is particularly clear in Part 2. A memorable scene occurs during a meeting between workers and officials of the Central Única de Trabajadores (Central Worker's Union Federation—CUT) in which the workers express frustration at the pace of change while the union defends government policies. The CUT official argues that not nationalizing certain industries will increase the chances for the UP government to secure international monetary support, an argument that the workers find wholly unsatisfying.

The opposition, for its part, attempted in nearly every way (legal and extra-legal) to bring down the Allende government before finally resorting to the coup. A crucial scene, which Guzmán uses as a bridge between Parts 1 and 2, is the July 1972 attack on the presidential palace by the army's Second Armored Regiment in a failed coup attempt. In it Leonardo Henrichsen, an Argentine cameraman, films his own death as he is fired upon while capturing footage of the uprising. His camera captures the gun pointed at him, a bystander warning him to be careful, the smoke coming out of the soldier's pistol, and finally a dizzy movement from one side to another as he drops the camera. The voice-over announces that Henrichsen has captured the true face of the Chilean military some three months before the coup.

In its unflinching analysis of the defeat of the popular forces, *La batalla de Chile* critiques not only the right, the military, and U.S. imperialist intervention but the left, whose errors and weaknesses ultimately left an "unarmed people" defenseless against ferocious violence. At the same time, it lays a foundation of resistant memory that not only forms the basis of Guzmán's films during the transition to democracy but remains relevant today as a historical document of an attempt at socialist revolution by democratic, nonviolent means—a profound divergence from much of Latin American history in the twentieth century.

MEMORY WORK AND THE POSTDICTATORIAL TRILOGY

After the transition to democracy, through a creative use of the documentary form, three of Guzmán's films attempt to counteract both the forgetting encouraged by the transition and the sense of political disenfranchisement that has resulted from it (Ricciarelli, 2011: 51). These are *Chile, memoria obstinada* (1997), *El caso Pinochet* (2001), and *Salvador Allende* (2004). The three films function as a unified project that seeks to create a new, more complete and truthful national history while serving as what Marcial Godoy-Anativa (1998: 21) referred to as "a critical commentary on the absence of referents for collective remembrance in Chile today." Rather than serving as an impediment to the project, however, this absence becomes one of the key concerns of the films. Each film contains a thematic nucleus that links it to the others and to the general topic of the post-dictatorship. These nuclei are memory, justice, and the history and legacy of Salvador Allende.

Chile, la memoria obstinada utilizes formal innovations that make it one of the most important and best-received documentary films of the postdictatorial era. The premise of the film is relatively simple on the surface. Since *La batalla de Chile* had been banned by the dictatorship and did not achieve distribution afterward, it had not been seen by the majority of Chileans, although many pro-democracy activists had viewed it on video.⁶ To remedy this, Guzmán visited Chile and showed the film to diverse audiences and recorded their responses in addition to seeking out surviving participants in the UP-era film. The narrative methods employed and the range of reception make the film more than merely a cultural document. They push the boundaries between film and life, encouraging the constructive intrusion of politically charged anachronisms in the form of recreated music or events from the past in order to disrupt

the official erasure of history. They also allow for the active creation of new memory by both the film's participants and its viewers.

This creation of new memory directly confronts what Tomás Moulian (2002) calls the "whitewashing" performed by Chile's political elite (the Concertación) as a distasteful but necessary means of ensuring the political viability of the transition. In his 1998 essay "A Time of Forgetting: The Myths of the Chilean Transition" he argues that the deep-seated structural weaknesses engineered into the 1980 constitution by the military government created a "protected democracy" under the "guardianship" of the military. He finds that the Concertación was essentially "blackmailed" into an about-face from its campaign rhetoric by Pinochet and his supporters, who unambiguously threatened military action if their interests were threatened in any meaningful way. Consequently the Concertación failed to prosecute military human rights abuses and continued the neoliberal economic model imposed by Pinochet. To preserve its political legitimacy, it needed to erase this incongruity, and memory was a major obstacle to this end. Thus, instead of encouraging a true reckoning with the past and the conflict and reopening of wounds that this would surely imply, the consistent impulse during the transition was to avoid disagreement and to create a highly questionable "consensus." This process included Concertación media policies that favored the conservative-owned and -controlled media outlets and contributed to the disappearance of the array of leftist independent media that had emerged during the dictatorship (Bresnahan, 2010: 281–284). Moulian (1998: 22) writes:

By transforming themselves into instruments of forgetting and agents for the legitimization of the order imposed by Pinochet, the PS (Socialist Party) and the PPD (Pro-Democracy Party) have forgotten their own history. The Popular Unity was a coalition based on antibourgeois politics, and during the dictatorship, the left criticized not only the lack of political democracy but also the neoliberal model the dictatorship was bent on imposing. It is incongruous to grieve for the dead and celebrate the memory of Salvador Allende and at the same time be the administrators of a society that exploits its workers, concentrates property into a few hands, sells off assets to foreign capital and restricts democracy. This is the double oblivion of Chile today.

Therefore Guzmán's intervention with *Chile, la memoria obstinada* was opportune and active rather than purely reflective.

Historical memory is also antithetical to the ideology of neoliberalism, which depends on "forced obsolescence," creating a past and present essentially devoid of substantial meaning, as diverse authors, especially Nelly Richard (1998) and Idelber Avelar (1999), have pointed out in their work on the postdictatorship period. For Avelar, the neoliberal market was almost as important a sociocultural force as the dictatorship itself, whose policies were often driven by and even predicated upon neoliberal socioeconomic engineering. Avelar argues that "the anachronistic, obsolete commodity, the recycled gadget, the museum piece, are all forms of survival of what has been replaced in the market" (1999: 2). The use of such forgotten objects in Guzmán's films, especially in *Salvador Allende* (2004) and *Nostalgia de la luz* (Nostalgia for the Light, 2010), sharply counteracts this effect and specifically addresses their consignment to

near-oblivion. Those very few remaining objects related to Salvador Allende (his wallet, for example), in particular, are endowed with an almost gravitational aura precisely because of their rarity.

CHILE, LA MEMORIA OBSTINADA

Chile, la memoria obstinada (Chile, Obsolete Memory, 1998) is arguably the most powerful and inventive of Guzmán's postdictatorial trio, laying the groundwork for the others. As previously mentioned, it centers on his trip to Chile in the mid-1990s, when he filmed audiences' reactions to *La batalla de Chile* and testimonials from surviving participants in that film. In addition, Guzmán attempted to emphasize and disrupt some of the profound changes the country had gone through by reenacting a number of key events that border on performance art in the postdictatorial context. The documentary approaches the question of memory from various perspectives, showing the ways in which memory sometimes resists and sometimes succumbs to attempts at erasure.

The narrative begins with the story of Juan, one of Salvador Allende's bodyguards on the day of the coup, who accompanies Guzmán on a tour of the restored Moneda, posing as a member of the camera crew. He recounts the aerial bombing of the edifice, physically acting out some recollections in various places in the building, and his testimony is mixed with photographs of the same locations during the coup. New shots in color from a balcony overlooking the Plaza de la Constitución (behind the Moneda), including a distinctive Neoclassical finial in the corner of the frame, are intercut with black-and-white shots from *La batalla de Chile* from the same place. The plaza jammed with an energetic crowd jumping up and down in unison in the first shot is clearly contrasted with the vacuous plaza of the present, filled with solitary people hurrying to appointments and *carabineros* (Chilean police) changing the guard. According to Jaume Peris Blanes (2009: 162):

Thus Guzmán recreated a shot that, in the absence of the masses that had given it consistency 20 years before, seemed insubstantial, empty, and arbitrary. In this way he alluded in a subtle way to the evacuation of popular participation that had made the reproduction of the shot from *La batalla de Chile* possible and that, in 1996, lacked the meaning that the original shot had possessed in the 1970s.

Beyond the aesthetic "loss of object" that Peris Blanes (2009: 162, following Richard) ascribes to this aspect of the film, however, there is a political implication, whether intended by Guzmán or not. The lack of popular participation in the recreated shots from *La batalla de Chile* mirrors its absence in the political life of a country that was reorganized during the dictatorship in a way that socially and economically muted the people's voices, essentially endangering even the survivors' viability as historical entities and erasing their political agency.

Similar scenes include a group of former bodyguards on foot slowly accompanying a car down the street just as they did with Allende's presidential motorcade. Pictures of the original procession are contrasted with this event as the empty postdictatorial street emphasizes the absence of both Allende and

the cheering, elated crowds that so often flooded the urban spaces of Santiago during the UP years.

Finally, in perhaps the most provocative act captured in the film, Guzmán arranges for a band to march down the central pedestrian walkway of the capital, Paseo Ahumada. There they play the official anthem of the UP, *Venceremos* (We Shall Overcome), in its first large-scale public performance since the coup. The passing pedestrians, who include people from all of Chile's social strata, react with a mixture of jubilation, trepidation, and haunted disgust. The raw emotions evoked by the music show the extent to which Chilean society has neither healed nor even come to terms with a political past that lies just beneath the surface. They also reflect the power of reviving "disappeared" memories through sounds, sights, and emotions that are otherwise devoid of meaning for younger generations (Neustadt, 2004: 132).

Chile, memoria obstinada reveals that the class tensions that inflamed Chile during the 1970s were still quite prevalent during the transition, as they are today. The film was screened for groups of students from the wealthy sectors of Santiago, as well as those from a more humble background. The difference in audience reception is readily apparent. Those from the upper economic strata, marked by dress, speech, and political sympathies, tend to question the lack of objectivity in *La batalla de Chile*, whereas those from the more popular sectors are clearly quite moved. Perhaps more than any other portion of the film, it is this glaring difference in primarily class-based attitudes that indicates that many of the old social divisions have not yet healed. The most left-leaning students do express a definite desire to begin the work of constructing a new Chile. Their teacher, Ernesto Malbrán,⁷ who had appeared in *La batalla de Chile*, states this most eloquently, noting that, while the dream of the UP was shattered, to stop dreaming would be worse yet.

In the case of *La memoria obstinada*, the central physical object that acts as a springboard for memory is the film *La batalla de Chile*, making the aesthetic operation more complex than in the later *Salvador Allende*. The complexity arises from its materiality both as a physical artifact reproduced from the original prints smuggled out of the country and as a set of moving images that, through the cinematic apparatus, reproduce in the present a very different time in Chile's national life, charged with contentious meaning.

Because it had not been commercially⁸ exhibited in Chile, Guzmán's screenings of *La batalla de Chile* made visible memories that had been actively erased by the dictatorial regime and the transition's ethos of leaving the past in "its place." In the new, self-reflexive film *Chile, la memoria obstinada*, these reactivated memories, combined with the rhetorical conditions of their production through the interaction with the older film, are challenged and merged with the 1990s viewing audiences' own personal memories.

EL CASO PINOCHET

El caso Pinochet constitutes a return from the self-consciously reflexive mode of *Chile, la memoria obstinada* to a more traditional expository model with some subtle discursive positioning of the spectators, putting them in the position of a "jury". Taking as its central axis the general question of postdictatorial justice

and the specific figure of Pinochet, it follows the tumultuous and ultimately unsuccessful detention of Augusto Pinochet in London in 1998 on a Spanish extradition warrant issued by Judge Baltasar Garzón, which set a precedent for universal jurisdiction in international human rights law. The case marked not only an end to the former dictator's immunity from prosecution but also the beginning of an emblematic, drawn-out series of legal battles in Chile over Pinochet's competency to stand trial that were never resolved before his death in 2006. The film strongly counters efforts by the right to whitewash the dictator's image and shows him to be a divisive figure in national political life even 10 years into the democratic transition.

The film ranges between footage of the Chilean criminal investigations, British court decisions, London activists, figures from the case, and testimony by survivors of the military regime's abuses, with some limited impersonal voice-over. The absence of a cinematic interlocutor effectively puts the spectator in a jury-like position to watch as the events unfold and justice is granted or thwarted at various turns. *El caso Pinochet* has the effect of showing both the emerging efforts to achieve justice through the national and international legal systems and their inadequacy when confronted by powerful interests.

Testimony to the dictatorship's crimes is provided almost exclusively by women; only one male family member and one male victim are interviewed. The women provide testimony of torture, rape, and loss at the hands of the military regime. Guzmán also highlights strategies of resistance undertaken by the women, ranging from deciding to go on with life after the loss of loved ones to the "telephone game" in which political prisoners role-played imagined telephone conversations about their future lives in freedom.

The interview format in *El caso Pinochet* consists of medium shots of the "testifying" victims with a stationary camera. Jorge Ruffinelli (2001: 330) notes that the film is perhaps the most austere of Guzmán's documentaries and writes:

The only shots and camera movements that exceed the modality of the testimonial in favor of visual experiments are the *group compositions* of the victims. Even though the personal testimonies are realized separately, isolated from the group, Guzmán doesn't miss the opportunity to highlight the group. Together, the interviewees fulfill the function of any "group photo"—of family, friends, mourning, or struggle. The camera moves around them and behind them, as if to emphasize the presence of *unity*, of "*esprit de corps*." They are not defeated people or defenseless victims.

Interestingly, the same pattern of predominantly women's testimony about human rights violations appears in Guzmán's other films. In *Chile, la memoria obstinada* the men make only oblique reference to the crimes perpetrated against them,⁹ and Carmen Vivanco, who lost five detained/disappeared family members to the regime, gives the most riveting testimony. In *Salvador Allende*, the men interviewed talk about politics but not about the crimes of the dictatorship or torture in particular. Likewise, in *Nostalgia de la luz* it is Valentina Rodríguez, daughter of two disappeared parents, who speaks openly about her experience for the first time in her life (see Guzmán, 2012), while her grandparents remain silent.¹⁰ Although this gender imbalance in testimony and denunciation is particularly marked, Guzmán himself does not directly address or explore it in any of these films. Perhaps he felt that women's testimony provided a stronger

emotional impact, or perhaps it was difficult to find men willing to share their experience because of a greater reticence on their part to admit to the violation that torture implies.

While *El caso Pinochet* is mainly concerned with the legal case against Pinochet, it also addresses the plight of the families of the disappeared in great detail. Underscoring the difficulty of providing testimony for courts or films, a mother and daughter speak together about the fact that the mother had never told her daughter about the abuses she suffered, although the daughter had always suspected that this was the case. These traumatic, exposed nerves clearly affect the family dynamic of the victims, and thus even silence causes its own scars.

The ultimate rhetorical aim of the film is to involve the spectator deeply in the play-by-play emotional tumult that resulted from the Pinochet extradition proceedings. The legal battle is further illustrated by a faux game of chess, compounding this effect. The film (and implicitly the effort to prosecute Pinochet) does not end there, however. Instead it ends with domestic efforts (led by Judge Juan Guzmán Tapia) to strip Pinochet of his self-imposed immunity and continue investigations of the detained and disappeared.

When the British reject Pinochet's claim of immunity but allow him to return to Chile for health reasons, Guzmán uses Pinochet's arrival to a massive military welcome, where he triumphantly rises from his wheelchair to hug his former colleagues, as a visual transition of the legal struggle to Chile. The film ends with the continuing efforts to prosecute the former dictator in his home country, an effort that continued until his death in 2006. Despite the fact that these efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, the end result of the British-Spanish extradition proceedings was to severely damage the relative impunity that he had enjoyed up until that point.

SALVADOR ALLENDE

With *Salvador Allende*, the final film of the postdictatorial triptych, the pendulum between the national and the personal swings the other way. The film's main preoccupation is to create a biography of Salvador Allende, given, as Guzmán notes, that none exists and the official archives remain sealed. Even though the director explicitly places the film within the genre of biography, it is decidedly nonlinear as it follows the general trajectory of the former president's life, using physical markers of his legacy from the present to introduce archival footage from his past.

Its second scene begins with Guzmán literally stripping away the white-washed surface of a large rock wall near the Santiago airport. The wall is blank and grayish-white, but the paint is starting to loosen and peel away. What Guzmán reveals beneath, by chipping it away with a rock, is traces of a colorful pro-UP mural¹¹ that was covered by the dictatorship. Metaphorically, he is showing that the suppressed memory, color, and popular expression represented by the mural have been incompletely erased and, with time, will resurface. Through this enormous but hidden marker of memory, Guzmán is able to segue into an interview with Alejandro "Mono" González, one of the most prominent muralists of the UP era and a contemporary of the Surrealist painter Roberto Matta. Guzmán shows González at work painting a wall with the same

crew that painted with him during the late 1960s and early 1970s. This scene and others make it clear that the film is just as much about what the director calls the “waking dream that we lived with Allende” and the exile that followed as it is about Allende himself. It also shows resistant memory at work, as the voice-over notes that the muralist embodies continuous, living memory in Chile that has resisted erasure.

Thus, in *Salvador Allende*, one of the key mechanisms of accessing memory and recreating narrative is the seeking out of the few material traces that remain—almost like the bones of saints—emphasizing the absence of so much history through the scarcity of physical links to memory. The film begins with a private viewing of the personal effects of Allende, collected from his body on the day of the coup. These include the presidential sash, a wallet (containing two blank deposit slips), a glasses pouch, a Socialist Party manual with his name written in it, and a simple wristwatch. Separately, in a glass cabinet, is the only object available for public viewing: one half of Salvador Allende’s glasses, cracked, with flecks of black residue on the lenses. That these are almost the only remaining personal effects of the man who was president of the Republic of Chile just some 35 years ago is shocking. The dictatorship’s project of physical erasure was a persistent one and resulted in the destruction of Allende’s personal residence on the day of the coup.¹² One Allende object separate from the pitifully small national collection that did survive, however, is a family photo album that captured the ninety-second birthday of Allende’s nanny, “Mama Rosa.” The album is used as a point of departure to discuss both the historical circumstances of Allende’s childhood and the development of his personality.

The only reason that this artifact survived is that it was literally buried by Mama Rosa in order to protect it from the dictatorship. Mama Rosa’s daughter, who disinterred the album, shows it to Guzmán. She is now an old woman herself, having grown up with Allende. The album itself is heavily damaged from being buried for so long but contains some of the few surviving personal photos of Allende. Once again, as with the personal effects, the absence of other items emphasizes the almost complete lack of physical evidence that this national icon existed. This film places enormous importance on the documentation of testimony from the survivors of the dictatorship’s great human and material purges and serves as a constant reminder of the enormous loss suffered by the Chilean people in both political and personal terms. The documentary film, therefore, occupies a vital space in their recognition and reconstitution at a time when many of the original participants are aging, eventually taking their memories—and national history—with them.

The Allende family, more than any other group, has keenly felt the problem of the erasure of the former president because of the circumstances of his burial in 1973. Mercedes Hortensia Bussi de Allende (“La Tencha”), the first lady, was not permitted to see Allende’s body, which was buried quickly in Viña del Mar in an unmarked grave. His body was disinterred and reburied in the General Cemetery¹³ in 1990 near many of Chile’s other presidents. The tomb, like the statue of Allende later erected behind La Moneda, has served as an active site for collective memory. Memorial marches on the September 11 anniversary of the coup (a national holiday established by the dictatorship but abolished in 2000) ended there, after also stopping at the memorial to the detained and disappeared located near the cemetery’s entrance. Interestingly, when Pinochet

died in 2006, his family had his body cremated for fear that any grave would be vandalized. This effectively denied the general the resting place among Chile's heroes that Allende was eventually given.

In the end, Guzmán's film is as much about the impact that the former president had on the director's and others' lives as it is about Allende the historical figure. The idea of Allende as national metaphor, as lightning rod for historical momentum, is approached through the vagaries of memory.

NEW DIRECTIONS: *NOSTALGIA DE LA LUZ*

Guzmán's latest film, *Nostalgia de la luz* (2010), can be viewed as the culmination of many of the devices and themes utilized by the rest of his work but also as the marker of something new as the associational boundaries of historical memory are pushed to their limits and brought into new territory. The film's narrative axis explores relationships between astronomy, time, and history in the north of Chile, where the most distant past of the universe coexists with pre-Columbian mummies, the wreckage of modernity, and the more recent tragedy of the dictatorship. In doing so it draws connections between the efforts of astronomers, archaeologists, and family members of the disappeared, who still, after 37 years, search for minuscule pieces of their loved ones' bodies in the Atacama Desert (Ricciarelli, 2011: 187). It is a meditation on the nature of the past, on memory, on human origins, and on future generations. The film is also Guzmán's most self-referential and begins by discussing his boyhood interest in astronomy, linking his nascent interest to the precoup days when "science fell in love with the skies of Chile."

Nostalgia de la luz represents a new milestone in Guzmán's aesthetic development and utilizes many long, silent shots that feature nebulae, landscapes of the Atacama Desert, moonscapes, and their connection to the human. Most of these are striking for both their natural grandeur and the lack of any signs of life. At other times, hand-held shots accompany people walking or digging in the hard, salty earth. In this way the expository is deftly mixed with the observational. Additionally a number of shots demonstrate the mechanical workings of enormous telescopes and their extraordinarily intricate internal apparatuses. A sparse symphonic sound track accompanies all this, and a soft, contemplative voice-over read by the director often serves as a transition between jump cuts. At times Guzmán plays the part of interviewer, pushing the film into the interactive category. However, interviews occupy proportionally less time than in the postdictatorial trilogy.

The Atacama Desert, on which the film centers, is often compared to the surface of the moon, even containing a place called Valle de la Luna (Valley of the Moon). The Earth's moon, with its historically anthropomorphic connotations, appears repeatedly in the film. A particularly interesting sequence follows a discussion of human origins in the stars in which black-and-white shots of the moon are followed by an extreme close-up of a human skull that bears a striking resemblance to the pockmarked celestial body. The pan moves down the porous surface of the cranium to reveal the immediately recognizable eye sockets and nasal cavity.

A clear stylistic commonality between this new film and Guzmán's previous work is the use of physical objects and places as memory anchors. One of the first scenes focuses on a house full of simple objects from the late 1950s and early 1960s (napkins, lace curtains, furniture, etc.), accompanied by the director's voice-over talking about his childhood in Santiago before the "revolutionary wind" that changed Chile irrevocably with the egalitarian dream of the UP embodied by Salvador Allende. This time of personal and national innocence is one of the sources of nostalgia that the film refers to. In the 2010 film, however, this method is pushed to its maximum capabilities as telescopes, stars, human remains, and even the Atacama Desert itself become repositories of memory. Following the scene of the antiquated Chilean home, a visual representation of stardust fades to the scene of a deserted observatory in which the voice-over discusses the simultaneous quashing of democracy and science during the dictatorship. In this way the pile of abandoned equipment becomes a metaphor for the ruins of a democracy that was haltingly reinstated at the same time as astronomy in Chile. This rebirth, shown through images of enormous new telescope facilities in pristine condition, happened in the same desert that still preserves traces of some of the worst atrocities of the military government. In a way it is a metaphor for postdictatorial Chile itself, where the fundamental social and political structure favoring the traditional oligarchy underlies the resurgent civil society. Of the Atacama, Guzmán says, "It is a condemned land, impregnated with salt, where human remains are mummified and objects are frozen in time. The thin, transparent air allows us to read this book of memory page by page."¹⁴

The utter immensity and absence of life in the desert permeate the film, as does the emptiness of space. In fact, the desolation of these places seems almost hyperbolic in comparison with that observed in the postdictatorial trio. This is further emphasized by the few noninterview shots that contain people, mostly women searching for bones in the desert, who are often shot from far away, accentuating the nearly unfathomable space they are moving in as well as the grinding, difficult nature of their task. The women materially represent the intractability of the emotional, social, and legal problems posed by the human rights atrocities in Pinochet's Chile and the near-impossibility of any sort of final resolution.

Finally, one other novel aspect of the film is the attention given in the end to the passing of generations and the hints of a narrative of recovery. Acknowledging the aging and dying off of the older generation, one of the women working in the desert says, poignantly, "I think they are happy that there are fewer and fewer women . . . because we are a problem for society, the legal system, for everyone. . . . We are the lepers of Chile." However, in one of the final scenes, Valentina Rodríguez, daughter of two disappeared parents, has a different assessment of the situation. She now has children of her own and works as an astronomer. Her children have not been directly touched by the horrors of state terrorism, and this gives her comfort. She also finds refuge in the stars, knowing that she, her parents, and her children are all part of something much larger, something that will continue long after they are all gone. In this sense the continuing waves of memory take on the aspect of ripples on a still pond and with the passing generations grow fainter and fainter. At the

same time, the student protests of 2011, one year after the release of *Nostalgia de la luz*, point toward another more contestatory possibility: active recovery of the popular mobilization that marked the UP period in the interest of greater democratization and social justice. Guzmán's films have been significant contributions to the creation of a living memory of struggle.

NOTES

1. The Unidad Popular was a coalition of the Socialist, Communist, and other left-wing parties of Chile that supported the presidency of Salvador Allende and a peaceful, democratic transition to socialism.

2. The scholastic (medieval) mnemonic device that links information or memories to physical spaces and often to objects within those spaces.

3. Burton gives much credit for the development of this model to Bill Nichols.

4. Guzmán notes that the political split within Chile Films mirrored the split in the left in the country as a whole. The majority of the UP argued that the transition to socialism could be carried out peacefully within the existing state institutions while the more radical UP sectors and the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario (Revolutionary Left Movement—MIR) believed that the right would resort to violence to stop it. In their view, intensifying class struggle would lead to the breakdown of the state apparatus and possibly to civil war. Both Guzmán and Littín held the latter view and left Chile Films when the UP government withheld film stock to try to force a resolution between these two camps (1986: 60–61).

5. *Chile Hoy* was a leftist publication edited by Marta Harnecker, who was exiled to Cuba after the coup and played an influential part in the political conceptualization of *La batalla de Chile*.

6. In addition to videos, varied, often semiclandestine cultural productions such as *arpilleras* (narrative quilts), poetry, performance art, graffiti, the plastic arts, fiction, testimony, radio, and magazines contributed to creating memory and sustaining resistant expression during the dictatorship (see Bresnahan, 2010).

7. Incidentally, Ernesto Malbrán played Father McEnroe in Andrés Wood's seminal 2004 film *Machuca*.

8. After 1990 there were some public screenings in venues like universities, but it was not screened on TV or in theaters.

9. Jorge Müller Silva's father discusses his son's disappearance briefly.

10. Her grandmother, Edita Salvadores de Castro, provided testimony in the PBS *Frontline* production "The Judge and the General," released in 2008, while her grandfather said nothing.

11. Under Allende, the hundreds of murals created by UP art brigades were an important form of public art.

12. Similar acts of theft and vandalism were perpetrated in the three houses of the poet Pablo Neruda, although, in contrast, to the case of Allende, many of the poet's possessions have been recovered and all three sites are now working museums.

13. In May 2011, Allende's remains were once again exhumed in order to definitively confirm that the cause of his death was suicide, ending a controversy over whether he shot himself in La Moneda rather than be captured or was murdered by the military. He was buried for the third time in a small ceremony on September 8, 2011.

14. This translation is taken from the subtitles.

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