

# Mimetic Homage: The Cordillera of Dreams

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## Abstract

Ileana Rodríguez is a distinguished humanities Professor Emerita at Ohio State University and an Associate Researcher at the Nicaraguan and Central American Institute of History (IHNCA). Professor Rodríguez has dedicated her research to the intersections between politics and female/masculine genders, and their interdisciplinary cross-overs. Her latest published works are: *Modalidades de memoria y archivos afectivos: Cine de mujeres en Centroamérica*. (2020); *La prosa de la contra-insurgencia. 'Lo político' durante la restauración neoliberal en Nicaragua* (2019); and *Gender Violence in Failed and Democratic States. Besieging Perverse Masculinities* (2016). In her latest book she explores the relationship between image and attachment in Central American female cinema. It is her proposal that esthetics engender solidarity, and that in reading the body of participants—and in studying the broken voice that edges into a moan, altering the standard form of syntaxis—the strength of the survivors is somehow reinstalled in the historical events they remember. In this text, dedicated to Patricio Guzman's last documentary "The Cordillera of Dreams" (2019), Rodríguez explores the aforementioned gesture and suggests that the physical beauty of the natural world is a source of hope for those that gaze upon it, and at the same time, further testament of Guzman's deep affection for his country, Chile, to which he has dedicated much of his production. In this sense, he once again sets the scene for key moments in Chilean history, and the strength of the citizenry in *making* their own history, although in spite of those that would prefer to forget.

## La Cordillera

In my youth I felt no curiosity for the Andes. My generation was too occupied in creating a new society. The mountains, they, were not revolutionary – Patricio Guzman.

A thin brown line drawn with trembling hand in my primary school geography books, tracing the continent's backbone — a bifid dorsal spine kissing up to the sea as it reaches its extreme southern end in the regions of Aysen and Magallanes. The tail-end of the world, leaving scarcely a path between land and sea. The lean strip of land was the Republic of Chile. Hailing from a land of lakes and volcanos, and having traveled on the great plains of the North American Mid-West, a place of lost horizons, that little brown line was of little consequence to me, until I stepped off the plane at the airport in Santiago, and came face to face with it. "Astounding, a sensation that halts all judgement, leaves you breathless, and may even stop your heart" is what I felt the first time I saw the Andes Mountains. The aesthetes call that, the sublime (Malabou, 2013).

Patricio Guzman's film *La Cordillera de los Sueños* (The Cordillera of Dreams) once again made me feel that same sense of wonder. Takes and cuts back to the same view are the building principle of the film's composition, a musical phrase in every tone, melody and cadence. A voice over, somewhat excessively slow and cavernous, as though from a sick man, periodically comments on the images and composition and brings us back to ruminating on the meaning of the word *dreams*. *Dreams* in this context is far from the idea of rest, in the comfort of the cloak of darkness. Rath it refers to a lost illusion, an angst riddled obsession and foreshadows enigmatic through disperse logic and images that pop seemingly out of nowhere when taking to bed; they disturb the conscience, and demand interpretation

Patricio Guzman's obsession can be interpreted in the light of what Cathy Caruth (2013) advises at the conjunction of psychoanalysis and history— trauma produced by the latter; images revealed by the same. Freud recommends an archeological dig: to dig up the object inscribed into the unconscious,

only for it to emerge twinkling in the obsession of encrypted languages, definitive, only to once again sink to the forgotten depths. Jacques Derrida (1995), upon reading Freud's words, calls this "the archival impulse" (*Mal d'Archive*) or archive fever produced by the history of the XX century, concealed, destroyed, forbidden, redirected, or reinterpreted. Power never conceals appropriation: the singularity of the object or event is made perfectly apparent in its repression, the same that leaves an impression, a pathway that serves to evict the memory of itself. This is the convenience of coalescing psychoanalysis and history—individual and collective—to track those events that escape awareness and that, paradoxically, are formed by their descent and later deemed analogue to what is buried, only to emerge in dreams as riddles. In the words of Derrida, in archive fever we find the desire to both remember and to forget: the latter is memory and erasure which in itself tracks and drags the object back to the surface, that reinscribes in the found event the very same burial mechanism executed in its interpretation. In the film, the Andes take on this swinging dynamic:

When I arrived in Chile this time, I was greatly attracted to the idea of exploring the mountains. But I soon realized that they hid something from me. Behind the rocks there's a presence. Maybe they resonate with the echoes of the coup. It invokes something close and intimate in me. I've never spoken of the loneliness I have felt since that fateful 11<sup>th</sup> of September, 1973. It's a hidden anguish, as though the support under my feet had collapsed, like a tremor in the earth.

The confession comes at the close of the film, a shot in slow motion pans horizontally to gaze with pleasure on the open sky, a cliff with a tiny protuberance, like a blackhead, a small blemish, a fly on the petrous grey surface. A change in the shot and subsequent closeup, we can make out a climber moving up the cliff-face. It's a dizzying scene as we follow up at the same steep angle, a reverse archeology if you will, indication of the difficulty of going up. In the next five shot changes we are given new appreciation of the height. or depth, —depending on whether we are given a low or high-angle shot— until a long shot once again loses the climber, a turnaround that converts our alpinist back

into a black spot on the rock, a reiterated mimetic process of what is erased and disappears, and to me, an image of archeological exploration on the surface, moving upward, like what is depicted in the film *Nostalgia de la Luz* (2010), twin to *Cordillera de los Sueños*. In both, the spectator becomes ensorcelled with the intangible, with the vastness of the enchantment and, of course, obsessed with an object emerging in another form. Guzman looks for his lost country, but all that can be found is its vast geography—mountains and deserts as inscrutable as the firmament.

...the mountain range is a mystery, and as such, warrants no explanation, it simply is. It is and always in a state of hallucination. A hallucinated material that rises. It rose, and here we are. When I speak of comprehensive, tragic, marvelous beauty, I speak of strength, and also speak of tenderness. There is nothing so tender as the flood meadows: famous wetlands, rife with birdlife. How the grasses, yaretas move and sway... and the wind. Today we have the Raco winds. One senses a different smell, the smell of the Andean rocks, a rock of the very first hills, entirely acidic. If one really wants to get to know the Andes, and truly love them, they have to learn their origin, the origin of the wind that moves through them and communicates with us through music, but also through smell, the aroma born on the air: a smell of stone, a smell of vegetation —Francisco Gazitúa.

Tessitura a la Eleni Karaindrou: smell and wind, wetlands, yaretas, the Raco or Puelche wind, never seen nor experienced by a Central American like me who, nonetheless, am rocked, lulled by the sound of that wind, the oboe and the quena, of a well-spoken word. The mountains, witness, defense, repose, support and barrier that lyrically part the mountains from the sea, leaving a narrow path between them. Love for a place this is, I insist, strictly speaking nothing but geography, a feeling that evokes the very *being* of the mountains, and a sense of *being there*, of accompaniment: "I would like if it were possible, to reconstruct and start again", says Guzman, but a return to the old national sovereignties is, I'm sorry to say, written and coded into what Enzo Traverso (2019) calls post and neo fascism. Leviathan, ordoliberalism, in

which financial capital dictates the rules and the elites act as sheriffs, agents of financial powers and executive committees in companies handling ordinary public affairs.

### “We dream of Chile from afar”

Post-fascism can be seen as the result of a failure of revolution in the XX century (Traverso, 2019, 173).

Exactly 26: 37 minutes into the film, it swings round, so beginning the second movement, from the gentle image of a delicate tree reflected in water, it fades to a sequence shot of an explosion, in blacks and greys, intense spirals saturate the screen for a long cinematic minute. Mimetic homage still subjugated by the vulgarity underlying violence. The effect of Augusto Pinochet’s military coup of Salvador Allende’s government in 1973 had on the Chilean populace weighs heavily in the air. Patricio Guzman was the young filmmaker of the time, 33 years old, movie-star handsome and one of five – a tiny group for such an extraordinary undertaking – that filmed *La batalla de Chile*<sup>1</sup>. The coup, one of the lethal events of the end of the XX century that, according to Derrida, constitute the archive fever. Chileans in that moment were witness to, and integral part of the destruction of their own country, an economic project that left at the mercy of nothing but their geography. The immensity: universe, Andes and desert, all aspects of the collapse that unmade the country, but in particular, the youth that came of age at that time and subsequently catapulted out of the country, expatriated and in exile. Those that run where there’s no outside, enunciates Catherine Malabou, suffer the effects of an “ontological implosion”: they become something else, irreducible and unrecognizable to themselves – a metamorphosis or transvestism, where they enter a “clandestine existentialism”, unrecognizable not so much in a change in appearance, but more for a change in nature and internal structure. A metamorphosis by destruction, in the harshest terms, is “the form taken when it is impossible to run” (Malabou, 2013; p. 17). A destructive plasticity, “with no compensation nor scar, cutting life in two, into many segments that will never find each other again” (Malabou, 2018; p. 14). To voice Patricio Guzman:

It is now 46 years since I left my country. Over all that time I have filmed 20 movies about Chile. I got used to making movies from a distance, but I never stopped feeling alone, or stopped working isolated in the midst of ordinary life. Deep in my soul I have never managed to clear the smoke of the burning ashes of my home.

To my amazement, absent of externalities that becomes an absence of internalities, a separation: the plastic opportunities for change close! Guzman is a “nationless ontological expatriate”, distanced from himself, emptied of social identity. As Malabou (2013) notes:

Coldness and indifference are characteristic of destructive plasticity, of that power to change without exception, with no technology and no other meaning than astonishment. The new identities of neurological patients have a point in common: at diverse degrees they suffer from attacks in places that incite emotion, uniformly manifesting an absence that is often bottomless and unfathomable (p. 26).

We heard it in Guzman’s voice and in his frequent return to his lost country: the staging, *the poetry* of the destruction, measures the depth of sentiment. Chile is now that narrow path marked in brown on school maps that, as children, we saw were situated between the mountains and the sea. All that is left now, as in the gospel, is to count the stars in the firmament, sand in the desert and stones on the mountains. An obsession to return, yes: a compulsion for repetition. In Derrida’s words, psychoanalysis is the witness of the century, a desire to archive that reveals an absolute desire to remember; one that submerged, only needs a monumental print on the Andean mountains, sunken into the collective subconscious revealed in the script – the unfathomable made stone.

The hidden and the submerged: what is more visible/invisible than the boundless infinity of space? What greater metaphorization than a story of digging in the desert in search of a bone that is no longer, but has left an imprint in the very place it disappeared! To go back into a past that, in the same act of interpretation, always repeats the manner in which the past was erased: it repeats the repression in one of the places of trauma. Maybe the re-

petition is not simply a turn around the event as the origin, but rather a turn around the interpretation of the event as the origin – but, origin of what? Said live and direct by Pablo Salas (cameraman): “the military *shit* on us, they *shat* on us by sicking that bug on us”. Chile in effect signed and ratified the triumph of neoliberalism: an end of the story according to Francis Fukuyama (1988) because,

The XX century saw how the developed world descended into a paroxysm of ideological violence, when liberalism first fought the remnants of absolutism; then, against the Bolsheviks and the fascists, and finally against an updated Marxism that threatened to lead straight into the definitive apocalypse of nuclear war. But the century that started with a confidence in the triumph of what would ultimately secure, upon its conclusion, a circular return to its point of origin, the process didn't finalize in an “end to ideology” or a convergence between capitalism and socialism, but rather the impassive victory of economic and political liberalism. The triumph of the western “idea” is evident in the total exhausting of systematic viable alternatives to occidental liberalism (pp. 6-7).

To say coup, neoliberalism and constitutionality from 1980 onward, is to speak of a Chilean nation as a stable enclave ready for foreign investment. The coup wins, because through the coup, the country was sold. In a country without freedom, the only freedom was through enterprise. They took it all. This is, for Guzman, the “beginning and the end of the country I loved”: Chile, is no longer Chilean. In some provinces 80% of land is privately owned. It is a *post* Chile

Hard, market modeled prose. Enzo Traverso (2019) agrees with Jorge Baradit and Pablo Salas, both participants in the documentary. The financial dictatorship demands complete submission to politics. Lying elites and careerists replace statesmen and stateswomen lacking in ideas and values, corporate representatives that govern with a post ideological pragmatism entirely dependent on opinion surveys. In this scenario, judicial-political and corporate-economic rationality coexist and remove the political body from the picture via a governance technique that Foucault called governmentality. The *nomos* they embody and the legal code they follow are all governed by supply and

demand, not politics. Traverso calls this a post fascist landscape. The main antagonists are terrorists and migrants, demographics of postcolonial origin. It is a state of exception, where all opposition is presented as a threat to national security.

Salas started by filming the events in Chile over the course of 1982-83. He has an archive spanning over 37 years, with images that can be used to reconstruct the country's lost history. Its spools, cassettes and disks accumulating in a tiny space where time has probably wreaked havoc, some taken using outdated and obsolete technology – there is likely no way to even look at them now. The images of protests seem fake looking at the sheer intensity of the resistance, resolve and courage of the Chilean people. In the tapes we heard their songs, slogans, saw their photography, fighting spirit with the police on the run, hosing them with water, beating people as they sing or read in chorus, tanks in the streets and the screams of people in pain – an archive of evil that freezes the heart. Salas and Guzman, and myself, are marked by the same utopia and we cry over the dead together. But Salas assures that they only filmed about 5% of what they did during the dictatorship. No torture was captured on film, deaths were missed, exile unreported and the intimidation – although everyone is aware of the excesses now, the grave errors, and crime without remorse. It was an end to the story, a defeat of all manner of ideologies lain at the feet of liberalism which paved the way for a world subjugated by numbers, and debit and credit agreements – second half of the XX century: Chile 1973. The eye-witnesses claim it is so, and theoreticians ratify their claims. For Fukuyama (1988):

The end of the story would be a tragic moment. The struggle for recognition, the will to risk life and limb for a purely abstract goal, the ideological struggle on a global scale that demanded audacity, courage, imagination and idealism, would be replaced by economics, unending solutions to technical issues, the concern for the environment, and satisfying the sophisticated demands of consumers. What I feel is a strong sense of nostalgia for a time where history actually existed (p. 31).

They overdid it, from afar, says Salas hanging his head. But they are happy with the current economic system, a system that changed lives but at astro-

nomical costs: lakes are now privatized, highways lead to the airport and high-income neighborhoods bypassing Santiago. People live better, and they all have mobile phones, but injustice hasn't changed, just with no dead or missing people.

Filmed, spoken of, photographed and drawn the coup is compulsively reproduced and simultaneously a death wish, the kind Freud himself would hear from soldiers as they returned from war, reticent to talk about their experience; a fear of death that reiteratively returns to haunt and interrupt history, the manner or modality of memory that depicted what they couldn't remember and, in that act, made history by erasing it – creating a history composed of erased memories and the traces thereof. Derrida calls this a fever, an impulse or archival malady: an archeological search made up of the constitutive historical suffering of the XX century. Reading Freud and Derrida side-by-side “makes it possible to rethink the nature of history from the perspective of its possible deletion” (Caruth, 2013: p. 75). Archive fever “cloaks or destroys, forbids or disperses, “represses”” (*idem*. P. 76) – be it through interpretation, by act of force or both. The protagonists of the coup as a troubled Baradit expounds, take pride in having waged the ethical battle. They eliminated those wicked, anti-patriotic, baby-eating Chileans, destroyers of their own country. What they left behind was a sad, mute Chile, of parks made cemeteries, and individuals that travel alone, in unknown directions.

What came after was a state-corporation, a neo-liberal governance according to Partha Chatterjee (2020), built on the preferences of aggregate individuals living in groups with common perceived interests. Statistical techniques generate probabilities from calculus and appropriate algorithms, perennially updated to match. The statistical method is what provides exact information on the interests and drivers of the population, provides information on consumer behavior, investors, voters, taxes, pensions, religion; and it is the only means with which the state-corporation can convene people. Statistics and marketing appeal to desires and prejudice often backed by disinformation and irrational trends. Herd mentality and crowd psychology is nothing new, but today studies in those disciplines are reduced to irrationality, and impulses that enter into play in modern politics such as studies in tribalism, ethnical conflict, religious identity and cults of personality; the method of transforming impul-

ses into things, things into numbers, numbers into policies and marketing. The previous diminishes the potential of political irrationality, what Antonio Gramsci dubs a “passive revolution” and via games with algorithms governs the deeper impulses of its consumer-citizens.

### ***“The cordillera, through its strength and character, is the metaphor for the dream”***

Traveling through his neighborhood, his dilapidated childhood home, all that is left are the masoned cobblestones quarried from the mountains themselves and used to pave the roads, silent witnesses of the horror inflicted by the tanks that rolled over them. Witnesses that bear the names of the fallen over scores of years, “with the years, I’ve shifted to look out on the mountains. They intrigue me. Maybe they are the gateway to understanding the Chile of today”. Santiago, a city backed onto the eternity that is the mountainous cordillera, neither understands nor seeks to comprehend the millions of years they embody. Moving deep into the Andes, progressing through time, discovering hills invisible to the Chilean view of the mountains, seen from the central valley, from the perspective of an earlier world, volcanoes with the lined cones, evidence of a history of eruptions that took place when grandparents were children, the mysteries hidden in the glinting streams that festoon them, are all the work of the camera and captured in the film.

A cultured imaginary, the Andes are the ark, huge stone vessels safekeeping our most treasured verses of their slopes, glaciers and purest water. There within lay the footprints of twenty thousand years of ancestors, the Quechua culture; the other half came in from the sea: “The artist is the guardian of the beauty of their country: they must safeguard it wherever it is found. A country that has abandoned 80% of its territory is bound to protecting its mountains, to protecting that 80% of itself” – says Gazitua, another of the participants in the documentary. To the sculptor Vicente Gajardo, the mountains, a giant fence, have two dimensions: their width, and their length – greater length than height despite their reaching up to eight thousand meters into the sky, a reference more cultural than physical, a presence that you breathe in, contained in a landscape hemmed in between hills and the sea, confined. To the writer

Jorge Baradit, the mountains are the defensive barrier that separate Chile from the rest of the world. And the sea becomes the opposing wall creating an island out of the country, isolating and protecting on the opposite side, forming strong and potent local cultural identity.

It is hugely revealing to walk, ride or drive into them, to take in this country that lives right next door to our country. In some places the mountains are as wide and encompassing as the valleys of Chile, and if one were to peer over to the Argentinian side, you would see the huts and lean-tos of shepherds with their goats and sheep, dotted here and there – lost in the monumental nature of the landscape. Travelling on the right side of the plane, one can see Mount Aconcagua, the *Great Teton* of the prop-like cordillera of mountains. The modern world trespasses on their majesty through pictorial representation, like Guillermo Muñoz's mural in the Santiago metro, an expatriated artist who perhaps, like Guzman, dreams of Chile from afar – direct takes of the mountains are superimposed over drawings of the same, and the Andes become a photographic image, a drawing, painting, an impression substituting the real thing in visual representation, and serve as a backdrop to the

accelerated progress of pedestrian modernity – earth and water, brown and white, their natural flow juxtaposed with the echoes of heels as they stride over the cold tiles. A green line runs down from them, seen at night or early morning, and loaded with copper destined for delivery at port. The line furtively rolls through invisible towns, inhabited by invisible people marching away with Chile's wealth, a furtive thief, much like the Beast<sup>2</sup> carrying immigrants from one country to the other. Looking from a distance, a single note is played on the piano. The mountains remain in place, witnesses to what is preferred hidden. Those young men and women born in 1973, bend their heads over their cell phones, and of that old nostalgia, they want nothing

## Notas

1 Parte 1: *La insurrección de la burguesía*, 1975; parte 2: *La lucha de un pueblo sin armas, el golpe*, 1976; parte 3: *La lucha de un pueblo sin armas, el poder*, 1979.

2 N. de E.: Se conoce como "La Bestia" al tren que transporta migrantes en la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos.

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