

Staging Dirty War Memory:

Notes on Human Rights and Film in Post-Dictatorship Chile, 1990-2004

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CONTEXT:

This is an exploratory paper, in the spirit of a workshop on research in progress. In keeping with the spirit of the Agrarian Studies seminars, the written version is preliminary, more like a set of narrative notes than a complete annotated paper. I welcome feedback, and consider the analysis tentative. After completing my current trilogy project (the third volume should appear in 2009) and its corresponding Spanish-language editions, I hope to launch a comparative research project on cinema and memory making about “dirty war” in Argentina, Chile, Peru, with exploration of transnational and U.S. aspects, as well. What you see in this paper is one tiny exploratory slice of the larger project.

A key focus of the new project, if I undertake it, will be the social geography of empathy and othering on the one hand, and moral complicity on the other. The premise is that film is an important commodity of mass culture as well as artistic endeavor in Latin America during the last half-century. Film (and in some contexts, theater) can therefore offer insight on the making and exclusions of moral community in times of divided memory about “dirty war” and its legacies.

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Introduction:

This essay explores the interplay of cinematic art and Chilean memory struggles over human rights, the 1973 crisis of democracy, and the violent Pinochet dictatorship of 1973-1990. It focuses on three junctures in the post-dictatorship period: (a) the launch of democratic transition in 1990-1991; (b) the deepening memory impasse of 1996-1997; and (c) the widening terrain of memory struggle in 2003-2004. The descriptions of historical context below are based on the author's research for a trilogy, systematically documented and annotated, on the history and ethnography of the Chilean memory question during 1973 to 2006.

For each moment, I consider a work of high literary and cinematic value. That is, each work was formidable not only as art, but as a compelling "staging" of memory that could potentially move and win over an audience of viewers. The works are Ariel Dorfman's "Death and the Maiden" (1991), originally staged as a play and subsequently adapted into film by Roman Polanski (1994); Patricio Guzmán's "Chile: Obstinate Memory" (1997); and Andres Wood's "Machuca" (2004). All achieved acclaim in international circles, but sparked quite varied cultural receptions in Chile. Dorfman's play-film about truth and co-existence after atrocity was a curious non-event – it fell flat in Chile, and the rejection provoked discussion of why it failed. After all, it was timely, acutely dramatic, and successful abroad. Guzmán's moving documentary about the Allende period and the military coup as a formative generational experience – a life treasure impossible to forget despite political failure in 1973 and a culture of forgetting in the mid-1990s – had more success. It won acclaim and attention as a major niche-event and marker of memory struggle, although it could not break out into mass culture.

Wood's movie about children's lives and an idealistic school experiment in the Allende period turned into a mass culture event – a “phenomenon” that broke box office records.

For the purposes of this essay, a “non-event” is defined as an artistic work about the Chilean memory question that fails to resonate, when staged in theater or on screen, with its expected audience. A “niche event” is defined as a work that wins significant praise and attention, but whose public remains confined largely to predictable and highly motivated subgroups – a memory camp within the wider struggle to define the meaning of the recent past. The work does not cross over to unexpected groups or pull in a mass audience on television or commercial film theater. A “mass event” refers to a work that crosses established boundaries and even transcends them. The work becomes a cultural happening – it compels interest across distinct memory camps, and by persons who had not thought themselves particularly interested in the memory question.

The apparent linear aspect of the argument – an arc of increasing receptivity to the staging of the contentious past, from the non-event of 1991, to the niche event in 1997, to the mass event of 2004 – is misleading, if taken to imply steady progress in the culture of human rights memory. On the contrary, and as we shall see, the cultural reception of each work bore witness to the shifting “state of play” – progress, setback, constraint – within fierce memory struggles over truth, justice, and accountability related to atrocities under Pinochet's rule.

Beyond these works' value as barometers of the shifting balance of forces within a wider cultural struggle over the past within the present, their viewpoint strategies offer insight on the social geography of empathy. Who could be plausibly included as a sympathetic victim, voice, or agent of a memory that mattered, in the aftermath of the

atrocities of 1973-1990? Who fell outside the circle of valid memory ownership, and why? How did authors challenge or transform the social geography of empathy and identification, and with what degree of success? Did the works transform the agrarian question – so crucial in the drama of revolution and crisis during 1970-1973 – into an invisible theme, or into the subtly implied set-up to urban crisis?

The Curious Non-Event: Ariel Dorfman Abroad and at Home, 1990-1991

Dorfman's play and subsequent movie draw the viewer into the heart of the moral drama that unfolds when a society emerges from rule by state terror. After the times of atrocity and fear, and the official misinformation and lies that justified terror or denied its reality, perpetrators and victim-survivors must coexist uneasily. The balance of power, even if one leaves aside the ambiguities of moral complicity, does not permit a clear path to justice. The culture of lies and euphemism is not easily reformed. How does the burning desire for truth and some kind of reckoning or justice square with the murky reality of the possible and the customary?

Dorfman distills the issues into a dramatic confrontation of three people: Paulina Salas, a survivor of torture and rape during dictatorship; Gerardo Escobar, her husband and a lawyer heading the newly appointed new truth commission; and Roberto Miranda, a doctor who gives Gerardo, stranded when his car fails in a storm, a ride home. Roberto Miranda's voice convinces Paulina he is the man who tortured and violated her. The unexpected encounter unleashes a powerful tension. The new truth commission will focus on the absent victims – the executed and the disappeared. Victim-survivors of torture like Paulina are beyond its scope. But they too had endured pain and cruelty at

the outer edges of the speakable – physical and mental torment to humiliate and destroy the humanity of the victim. Now Paulina has her chance – apparently – to defy invisibility and to seek truth and accountability. She has a gun, ties up Roberto, puts him on trial, and seeks his confession. Gerardo, the interlocutor of both sides in the struggle, is caught between his love for Paulina including sentiments of guilt about his sexual loyalty during her imprisonment, and his beliefs in due process and political realism, compounded by ambiguities in his own mind about the true identity of the doctor. The result is a compelling drama: an enormous tension that keeps on escalating and finally produces a confession, a threat of imminent execution of the doctor – and a sudden giving way to the grey zone of continued coexistence. In the last scene, the three figures find themselves together again by chance, at a concert hall to listen to Schubert’s “Death and the Maiden” – the music that had been a favorite for Paulina, only to turn into torment during her torture. The hint of healing and redemption – Paulina’s recovery of her Schubert – is again thwarted.<2>

Formally, the play is not definitively anchored in Chile, but in “a country that is probably Chile but could be any country that has given itself a democratic government just after a long period of dictatorship.” The Chilean connection, however, was not superficial. The writing and initial theatrical workshops and performance crystallized in 1990-1991, at the outset of Chile’s constrained transition to democracy, when Dorfman returned to Chile (temporarily) after living many years abroad. Although Pinochet had lost the battle for Chilean hearts and minds – a majority voted “No” in a 1988 plebiscite, and thereby forced a transition – he nonetheless held onto a great deal of power after the transfer to civilian rule under President Patricio Aylwin in 1990. Pinochet retained a

large minority following (over 40% of the public) that remembered him as the savior-hero of the nation during the 1970s and 1980s. He held firm loyalty among key power groups – the business class, the military, and the judiciary. He also benefited from institutional engineering, difficult to overturn because it was anchored in the (somewhat revised) 1980 Constitution promulgated under military rule. The rules of the game installed Pinochet as Commander in Chief of the Army until March 1998, blocked the civilian president from sacking him, established an electoral system that guaranteed over-representation of the Right and Pinochetistas in Congress, and kept on the books a 1978 Amnesty Law thwarting prosecution of many human rights crimes.

In short, the social base of the outgoing military regime remained very coherent and powerful, and the balance of de facto and institutional power imposed considerable constraint on democrats. At the same time, the memory question – the hunger for truth rather than misinformation about human rights violations, and measures of accountability and repair – was strategic to the politico-cultural legitimacy and moral foundations of a new democracy. Memory struggles related to human rights proved crucial in the battle for hearts and minds that finally brought down military rule, and in the legitimacy of a new governing Center-Left coalition seeking to draw a sharp contrast with the past. Under the circumstances, the themes of coexistence and complicity raised by Dorfman were on target.

President Aylwin responded to the highly adverse and uncertain circumstances of transition by creating a truth and reconciliation commission. Here, too, the allusion to Chile in “Death and the Maiden” was more than casual. Chile’s truth commission, more commonly known as the Rettig Commission (after its chair, Raúl Rettig), focused on the

executed and the disappeared. It addressed torture to an extent, by focusing on cases that culminated in the death of the victim and offering a general description that left no doubt that torture was pervasive practice, not an anomaly. Its scope, however, excluded most victims of torture – tens of thousands of persons like Dorfman's Paulina Salas. To be fair, Aylwin's creation of the Rettig Commission was a bold and even ingenious step within its time and context – a transition of tremendous adversity. The initiative met with resistance and hostility by the military and the judiciary, definitively established the factual truth of systematic human rights violations by the state under military rule, and laid a foundation for subsequent truth telling and justice seeking through judicial reform and interpretive legal doctrines that eroded intended effects of the Amnesty Law.

Aylwin, himself a jurist, insisted that courts had to establish the criminal facts and responsibilities of each human rights case before it could consider applying an Amnesty, and challenged the courts to use the Rettig Commission's findings and records for that purpose. Eventually, the hollowing out of the Amnesty Law by interpretive legal doctrine would go much further – by interpreting disappearance as a permanent kidnapping past the 1978 time boundary of amnesty, for legal purposes, unless proved otherwise; and by developing jurisprudence on the primacy of international legal norms, by virtue of treaty obligations and the Chilean constitution, when in conflict with domestic law. Such implications were not all apparent or inevitable in 1990-1991.

The Rettig Commission, although far reaching in its consequences over time, was also a carefully calibrated measure – keenly aware of the boundaries of the possible while trying to lay a foundation that would shift them. The presidential initiative narrowed the symbolic circle of maximal victims of dictatorship to the dead and disappeared. The

overall context focused maximum empathy and urgency for repair on relatives of the disappeared, especially women, who bravely struggled for the truth since the 1970s and who had achieved a strong symbolic resonance during mass struggles against dictatorship in the 1980s.

Why, then, did Dorfman's play fall flat in the Chile of 1990-1991 – and why did the movie adaptation again fail to resonate in 1994-1995? After all, the play emerged precisely when the hunger to document and reckon with unacknowledged truths was very powerful. Television news and other media in 1990 put forth graphic evidence of mutilated remains of the disappeared, and challenged Pinochet as responsible. In March 1991 – only a week before the play's appearance in Santiago – the nation tuned in and people of varied perspective were moved when Aylwin, as president, presented the Rettig Commission's disturbing findings on massive human rights violations by the military state, and on the failure of the judiciary to respond appropriately to moral and legal disaster. Aylwin apologized in the name of the state, with teary eyes and an emotional voice, and the moment resonated even among those whose disposition had been critical or skeptical. In sum, a willing public existed for some kind of reckoning with hard and denied truth. Nor can the artistic quality of the work, particularly its dramatic and moral tension, be lightly dismissed. In London the work won the Olivier Best Play Award, and in New York it attracted major stars – Glenn Close, Gene Hackman, and Richard Dreyfuss – for the Broadway production.

A partial replay of the puzzle occurred several years later. In 1995, shortly after the movie release, Chileans again confronted the memory question when the state engaged in a highly public cat-and-mouse chase for months before finally managing to

enforce a Supreme Court ratification sentencing former secret police head Manuel Contreras to jail in the double-murder of Orlando Letelier and Ronni Moffitt in Washington, D.C. in 1976. The dramatic tension of the movie version by Roman Polanski was formidable, and Polanski secured well known stars – Ben Kingsley and Sigourney Weaver, in addition to Stuart Wilson – for the film.

The hunger for truth and the artistic quality of the play was what made the non-event interesting. Critics have put forth two basic lines of explanation: artistic, and politico-cultural. One questioned whether the work was truly innovative, artistically, and suggested it fell into a standard and morally simplifying narrative. The other suggested that it suffered from politico-cultural context, that is, the actual lack of will by Chileans to confront the memory question bequeathed by dictatorship.

I respectfully and appreciatively dissent from both lines of analysis. Each has merit – some grains of truth – but each also falls short. The artistic line of discussion is useful in so far as it contrasts Dorfman's work with the experimentalism appreciated by avant garde theater viewers. It is also useful in so far as the figure of Gerardo the human rights lawyer is too one-dimensional to capture and dramatize the ambiguity of life in the moral grey zones of constrained democracy. At this level, too, the play arguably ratifies a standard denunciation of insufficiency rather than challenging the viewer. But the artistic critique is insufficient in other ways, because it sidesteps other aspects. Instead of replicating the standard trope of absolute rupture – death or disappearance, and the wound it leaves behind for relatives – Dorfman challenges us to search for empathy and identification with a living victim-survivor whose humiliation was deeply intimate and dehumanizing and shameful, but whose response defies the standard image of the

appealing victim, innocent and stripped of power. Paulina is more like a volatile force of nature – powerful and aggressive, and at times overwhelming, as well as wounded and vulnerable. Also, the eschewing of radical avant garde questioning of representation in some ways begs the question. It may explain why leading-edge critics might not be so excited about this work, compared to others, but not why a wider public, particularly for the movie release, would fail to connect with a work of such dramatic quality.

The politico-cultural line of discussion is useful in so far as it asks what Chileans were willing to “remember” or see and confront, but it does not go far enough. The point is not that Chileans were interested in forgetting in 1990-1991 or that they could not confront the truth of the past. The point is that in confronting the past and the present of adversity, democratically minded Chileans had constructed a social geography of empathy and identification that rendered victim-survivors of prison and torture very hot to handle, politically and morally. At the time, the geography of empathy entangled with issues of moral complicity and moral compromise in ways that rendered identification especially vexing in the case of living survivors of torture, and that rendered acceptance of moral critique especially vexing when originating from Chileans living abroad. At the time, the two most well known prisoner-survivors were Luz Arce and Marcia Alejandra Merino (“la “Flaca Alejandra”). They were leftists who had broken under torture after the coup, turned into secret police collaborators, experienced crises of conscience, and used their insider knowledge at the outset of democratic transition to provide crucial testimony to the truth commission. In short, they embodied the problem of the moral grey zone, and the prisoner-survivor community itself divided sharply on whether to accept them as victims and as allies in the cause of truth and justice, or to denounce them

as traitors and collaborators. Also, there was a way in which former political prisoners themselves were in the 1990-1991 context “complicit” with placing a first priority on their executed and disappeared comrades – and worked synergistically with the Rettig Commission.

Controversy and ambiguity about the victim-perpetrator boundaries in the case of some prisoner-survivors, and a sense of urgency among many prisoner-survivors, as custodians of precious inside knowledge, about documenting the truth of what happened to the dead and disappeared: these circumstances, in combination with acute sense of the risks and strain of transition, meant that in politico-cultural terms it was very difficult to swallow and accept the *kind* of challenge of identification and empathy posed by Dorfman.

In this perspective, Dorfman was indeed too avant garde and too “foreign” to resonate, and the situation would repeat itself, in a somewhat different mix, with the production and release of the movie version in 1994-1995. Responses, as with so many Chilean memory themes in the 1990s, tended toward a kind of schizophrenia: “We would like to love this play-movie, but really we cannot and we’d like to explain why not.” As Chile’s celebrated playwright and psychiatrist Marco Antonio de la Parra put it, “We Chileans were more like the doctor-torturer than the protagonist who suffered the torture.” (“Los chilenos eramos más el médico torturador que la protagonista torturada.” p. 219, *La mala memoria*). One might adapt this to say that in the circumstances of 1990-1991, even democratic middle class Chileans disgusted by the doctor and committed to a reckoning with the memory question found themselves more prepared to identify with Gerardo than Paulina – that is, they found themselves morally misunderstood and

unfairly accused. These obstacles to identification with the drama of the prisoner-survivor were muted – not nearly as searing or intimate – for the transnational audiences of the North.

A Niche Event: The Lost and Found Generations of Patricio Guzmán, 1997

[A brief note to Agrarian Studies seminar participants: In the interests of time and space, and to allow for a more in-depth treatment of Wood's "Machuca" in the next section, I will be brief and a bit cryptic in the section, whose focus is Guzmán's 1997 documentary, "Chile: La memoria obstinada" (Chile: Obstinate Memory). The Latin American oriented participants in the Agrarian Studies seminar may well have seen the documentary. I will be happy to elaborate, of course, during our seminar conversation.]

In May 1997, the Goethe Institute of Chile organized a "First International Festival of Documentary Cinema." For two weeks, multi-generational audiences (300-500 persons, in the larger events) kept crowding the halls to catch one of the eighty screenings of documentary films, some of them supplemented by panel discussions. Many focused on Chile, and some were the first public screenings in the country.

Among the most celebrated films were those by exiled cinema artist Patricio Guzmán. His new documentary, "Chile: Obstinate Memory," brilliantly explored the generational meanings of memory and silence. On the one hand, Guzmán's film homed in on middle aged and elderly survivors of the Unidad Popular era – Salvador Allende's bodyguards and a secretary; an activist who had appeared in the young Guzmán's "Battle of Chile" trilogy in the 1970s; an aged refugee from Hitler's Europe who suffered the disappearance of his son under Pinochet; pedestrians reacting with shock, irritation, or

delight to an ingenious sound experiment. The camera observed responses in downtown Santiago when a young musical band marched and played “Venceremos” (“We Will Win”), the optimistic and catchy theme song of the Unidad Popular whose melody and memory had turned into a cultural taboo. The words, body language, and emotions of some of Guzmán’s survivors gave a new twist to memory as unresolved rupture, by turning the Unidad Popular experience (the electoral coalition of Salvador Allende, and the associated sense of unprecedented experiment and social idealism) into something to be treasured. More than a prologue to disaster, it was a heartfelt memory of the right to have dreams and ideals.

On the other hand, Guzmán’s film also explored memory as generational void – by recording the intense and varied reactions of youths when they saw for the first time “The Battle of Chile,” Guzmán’s once prohibited trilogy. The rawness of “Battle” – words, images, emotion, and propaganda in the heat of an epic struggle – evoked the Chile of the 1970s they could not know directly. By putting on display the tears, debate, identifications, and bewilderment of youths when they first viewed the trilogy, “Obstinate Memory” gave ingenious form to silence as an overpowering and present absence. The young knew that the Unidad Popular era and the 1973 crisis were foundational, yet had come to know it mainly as void and negation. The Festival reproduced the film experience by drawing overwhelmingly young crowds to screenings of “The Battle of Chile.” [sjs a sjs: see files related to ch. 4, bk 3 of sjs trilogy]

Guzmán adopted a first-person voice, both individual and collective, as he “found” two lost generations – his own 1960s/1970s generation, whose still remembered and treasured dream refused to fade away despite repression and suppression; and the

1990s youth generation that understood the 1973 crisis was foundational, needed somehow to come to terms with it, yet found itself trapped in a cultural moment that seemed to push memory aside. The instantaneous responses to Guzmán's musical experiment – the playing of the Popular Unity theme song on a downtown street – captured the tensions of memory as obstinacy in time of silence. Everyone seemed to recognize the tune immediately; it evokes private unacknowledged memory of another time that refuses to be buried and still defines loyalties and identities. But the music also provokes consternation – it defies the impulse to forget and bury a distant and conflictive era that ended in disaster.

The politico-cultural context of 1996-1997 was retreat from the memory question by morally complacent political elites during the Eduardo Frei Ruíz-Tagle administration, after the dramatic Manuel Contreras imprisonment saga of 1995. In other words, the Center-Left coalition that steered democratic transition since 1990 continued to govern, and continued to remain formally committed to truth and justice and social repair work related to human rights, but had lost the will to push for new advances. Its priorities lay elsewhere. Increasingly, the burden of initiative had shifted to civil society groups determined to press the memory question despite the retreat of elites. This double context – on one hand, adversity not only from the military and Pinochetista loyalists but also ruling political elites, and on the other, continued determination and organizing by memory groups in civil society despite the sense of being politically orphaned – helps explain the reception of Guzmán's moving film. It was warmly and enthusiastically embraced by the memory camp pressing on with the struggle against *olvido* [forgetting], and by youth sectors dissatisfied with moral complacency and *olvido*, even though it

verged dangerously to nostalgia rather than offering political inspiration in the here and now. Significantly, however, the film could not break into television or the commercial movie circuit, because its core market was a niche of the highly motivated, and because elites would not welcome or promote wider circulation in television or cinema. [sjs a sjs: your research files have the quote by television nacional execs saying to pg, forget the idea of airing this; the time's not right.]

On both counts – the film's artistic sensibility, and the cultural reception of it – “La memoria obstinada” says much about the balance of forces and social empathies that shaped memory struggle and impasse in the mid-to-late 1990s. We will return to this point in the conclusion.

A Mass Event: Andres Wood's Children of 1973 Catch the Imagination in 2004

The balance of forces defining the memory question in Chile changed dramatically by 2003-2004, and opened the cultural door wider for themes that would have seemed semi-taboo and niche oriented in 1996-1997. The shifts, under way since 1998, accelerated during 2002-2004 and resulted from both internal and international dynamics. The overall effect was a weakening of Pinochetismo's practical and cultural power, and of “heroic memory” of the military past. A struggle to define lines of containment against victims seeking redress for violence and injustice of the recent past continued, but boundaries and priorities of containment shifted, given the new balance of forces – to protecting civilian collaborators rather than military perpetrators from the taint of human rights justice, to protecting economic gains and legacies of the military era rather than resisting fiercely justice in human rights crimes. Pinochet's London arrest

and detention during 1998-2000 was an important part of the story of these shifts, but it is not the whole story. Also important were civil society initiatives by human rights memory activists who pressed hard for a “wedge effect” to widen memory work to include victims of torture and sexual violence during political imprisonment, and to include serious criminal justice proceedings against perpetrators; the increasing institutional weight and boldness of human rights judges, especially during 2002-2004; the creation and report of a new truth commission, known colloquially as the Valech Commission, to focus on torture of political prisoners during 2003-2004; and Pinochet’s eroding grip on the Army after his retirement as Commander in Chief in March 1998, the latest date permitted under the legal rules of transition his regime had negotiated. Notably important, too, were the synergies between such nationally based dynamics and transnational ones including Pinochet’s London arrest, jurisprudence of international law, jurisdiction, and primacy related to human rights, and revelations of Pinochet’s secret fortunes at the Riggs Bank in Washington, D.C.

In sum, the retreat from the memory question that vexed the human rights camp in Chile in 1996-1997, the moment of Guzmán’s documentary on “Chile: Obstinate Memory,” had dissipated greatly by 2003-2004. The cultural distancing from prisoner-survivors of torture as persons whose moral claims demanded empathy had also dissipated. The terms of debate about the memory question in the 1990s had shifted notably. On the one hand, ideas of memory as a “shared tragedy” and as “unfinished work” that defied rapid closure gained more traction, even in military circles and the Right. On the other hand, what the “memory question” constituted widened out to

include themes of social inequality, and cultural curiosity about the 1964-1973 Frei-Allende era as something other than a run-up to catastrophe.

These sensibilities intersected with the release of “Machuca,” a movie that turned into a major cultural phenomenon. Below I reproduce – in a different font – the description of the movie and its reception that will appear in volume 3 of my trilogy.

The memory question was a cultural argument not only about military rule, but also about what came before and after. What was the relationship of the new turn-of-century Chile with its founding moment, the crisis of the old Chile of the 1960s and 1970s? During 2004-2006, cultural defensiveness about touchy topics lessened. Memory as a shared tragedy translated into a disposition to revisit the old Chile somewhat less encumbered by polemics of disaster. Likewise, the sensibility of unfinished business began casting memory of the democratic transition in a new light.

In earlier cycles of memory struggle, during the dictatorship and into the 1990s, the Chile of pre-1973 played a star role in the framework of salvation. The old Chile and its demagogic politicians culminated in madness: the social upheavals of the Frei-Allende era of 1964-1973, brought to an unbearable climax during the Unidad Popular government of 1970-1973. In this framework, the crisis provoked by Allende and the Popular Unity – the economic chaos, the war climate, the imminent bloodbath, all so palpable by August 1973 – explained how military takeover in September saved ordinary Chileans just in time from a catastrophe, and how far reaching the country’s social, economic, and political accomplishments under military rule. The pre-1973 Chile also offered an exculpatory context for controversy over human rights. What happened in the 1970s was a “war” destined to produce some “excesses” by subordinates – and false

propaganda by the enemy. Most alleged human rights violations did not really happen. Those that did happen were a regrettable byproduct of war and amounted to a modest social cost within the great work of national rescue. The crisis of the old Chile and its politics of mobilization, especially the strife of the Unidad Popular era, constituted the trump card of justification – and denial – by proponents of military rule.<56>

Given the perverse manipulation of pre-1973 history into excused atrocity, and given the urgency of saving lives in the present, for the emerging human rights camp the Unidad Popular era came to constitute a semi-taboo, an area of relative silence in public memory struggles to win over the national imaginary in the 1970s. Activists who sought to document the truth of massive state violence and persecution sought to avoid the trap of entangling the human rights issue in diversionary polemics about the Unidad Popular. Within the Center and the Left, moreover, the catastrophe of 1973 and the attendant critiques and self-critiques of political choices and responsibilities, were painful and divisive. Here was another reason for touchiness about the Unidad Popular and the wider Frei-Allende period. Within the oppositional memory camp under military rule, a processing of the period and its political failure did take place. But deep readings of pre-1973 history tended to remain confined to “sect” memories, more an activity of reflection and dialogue in political party and intellectual circles or other communities of trust, rather than a theme to pursue aggressively in national memory struggles. Even in the late 1970s and 1980s, at the level of the national imaginary what was most important to promote was the sense of having learned from the pre-1973 failure – of having awakened into a new appreciation of democracy and human rights, as values to be treasured and won. During the democratic transition of the 1990s, when memory struggle remained polarized and vulnerable to impasse, and when partisans of memory as salvation and Pinochetismo remained strong, revisiting the Unidad Popular era was still haunted by the specter of catastrophe and rejection. Such revisiting of pre-1973

devolved into claims by a specific memory camp – the partisans of salvation claiming pride of achievement in military rule, the victims of repression rendering homage to ideals and dreams worth having and that motivated their loved ones.<57>

The sensibility of shared tragedy opened wider the door of cultural curiosity. It softened the defensiveness that shuts down interest and blinds the eye. Was there a story in the Chile of pre-1973 beyond the familiar run-up to catastrophe? Already in 2003, the thirty-year anniversary of the coup seemed to call forth a certain hunger for a fresh look at the lost world of 1973.

In August 2004, on the eve of the September memory season, the brilliant film “Machuca,” directed and co-written by Andrés Wood, spoke to the yearning. It broke the box office record for a Chilean film release (59,520 viewers during the first Thursday-Sunday cycle) and began a run highly successful for the Chilean market (over 650,000 cinema viewers, before release of the DVD edition). Two years later, the film still held a strong place in the cultural imagination. Viewers of the interactive television program “Chile Elige” (Chile Elects) cast two million votes to select, among thirty nominees, the all-time best Chilean film. “Machuca” won with a fourth (24.6%) of the vote.<58>

The ingeniousness of “Machuca” was that it blended the honesty of a child’s viewpoint with an undeniable authenticity. It thereby escaped political didactics while achieving insight into the tragedy and dreams of an era. We see the tumultuous Chilean world of 1973 through the eyes of Gonzalo Infante, a boy eleven years old at the prestigious private school in Santiago known as Colegio Saint Patrick. The school’s rector, Father McEnroe, embodies the experimental idealism of the times by promoting a social integration project. Poor children are brought into the school and exempted from tuition payment. A farm worked and managed by students will presumably pay for the tuition scholarships. Gonzalo befriends Pedro Machuca, a student from a nearby shantytown to whom he gives bike rides. They also hang out with Silvana, a feisty girl

who helps her father sell miniature flags at demonstrations for and against the Popular Unity government, and who teaches the boys how to kiss.<59>

The children carry the film and they enable viewers to shed defensiveness. The screenplay casts aside predetermined political readings by reproducing the fragmentary understandings of a child coming of age. It spends time with the trials and quests of early adolescence – friendship, taunting, games, parties, fantasy, romance – while providing glimpses of sociopolitical menace. The wall sign rejecting civil war, the street weapon brandished by a sister's boyfriend, the sudden violence at a demonstration, the school meeting where parents argue heatedly about social integration, from time to time the menace intrudes, at first lightly, then with more force, until the climactic scenes burn away any remaining innocence. The casting aside of a heroic political reading is also enhanced because the adult world is so mediocre in Gonzalo's eyes, especially in the socially respectable circles he knows best. Inadequate to the larger needs of the moment, most adults simply adapt as best they can. Gonzalo Infante's Mom sleeps with a well connected wealthy lover who supplies her black-market goods. His Dad aligns with the socialist political winds, but he is no hero – he is eager to leave the country. Pedro Machuca's Mom is dynamic and appealing, but his Dad is a drunk who knows life will not improve for those at the bottom. The toilet cleaners of society will always be toilet cleaners. Salvador Allende is seen in a less than glorious moment – on television with Leonid Brezhnev, during a frustrating visit to Moscow seeking aid.<60>

When the coup happens and Gonzalo loses his last bit of innocence, he is also not a hero. Gonzalo has arrived on his bike and witnesses the brutal repression in Pedro Machuca's community – the homes are violently raided and subversive material set afire, soldiers rough up the residents and treat them like criminals while pushing them up against walls, arguments and chaos break out. Silvana screams and hurls herself on her father the flag seller, to protect him during a ferocious kicking as he lies on

the ground. Soldiers had discovered the miniature Communist flags he sold at leftist demonstrations. The soldiers try to continue the beating, but they cannot stop her screaming and her flinging body. One suddenly shoots her dead to bring the bedlam to an end. Amidst the shocked silence, a soldier grabs Gonzalo and orders him to move to an area where residents are being held. Terrified, Gonzalo escapes by invoking his class privilege. “Look at me,” he tells the dark skinned soldier. The soldier stares at the fair skinned and freckled boy, looks down to see the Adidas tennis shoes unaffordable to any poor person, and stares at Gonzalo again. The soldier realizes the kid does not belong in this place, and sends him off on his bike. Gonzalo weeps as he rides away. Is he grieving – before forgetting – in ways the adult country cannot?

What added power to the film was authenticity. Wood reproduced the visual details that brought a lost world alive – from the cans of condensed milk so prized and sweet in a culture of scarcity and social class discrimination, to the linchacos (batons tied by leather) used as street weapons, to the allanamiento (house raid) scene re-enacted by real pobladores and depicting soldiers in real Chilean uniforms. The social integration experiment at Saint Patrick was based on the true story of one of Chile's most famous and dynamic schools, Colegio Saint George. Father McEnroe, the rector whose rocky experiment ended with military intervention of the school, was really Father Gerardo Whelan, to whose memory the film was dedicated. In the 1960s and 1970s, before the junta implemented a project of social class segregation that expelled poor people to distant neighborhoods, there had indeed sprung up zones of mixed social geography. Particularly in the Las Condes area of eastern metropolitan Santiago, prosperous families lived within blocks of migrants and squatter communities. Boys of different social classes sometimes played soccer together in the plazas. In several progressive Catholic schools, not just Saint George, there had been true “Machucas” – the new slang for lower class children who integrated schools of the privileged. The film

inspired La Tercera to track down “Machucas” and tell their fates. Some had experienced difficulties, did not complete a university education, and held rather modest social positions, such as working in a supermarket or running a precarious micro-enterprise. One, Amante Eledín Parraguez, had gone on to advanced studies, published poetry and a memoir, and taught at Saint George. The melding of art and life came through when the memoir quoted Father Whelan’s standard response – paralleled in a dramatic moment in the film – to objections by some parents and students to his experiments. “And we all are free to choose the school we like the most; if someone does not like what we are doing, let them go!”<61>

“Machuca” was a cultural phenomenon. What stood out was not simply the box office appeal, but that so many sectors embraced it as a story moving and insightful – evocative of something important belonging to everyone. The embrace occurred notwithstanding its understated yet clear sympathy with the egalitarian ideals of the era, its unflattering view of socially privileged families, and its depiction of the violent brutality of the coup – aspects that in the 1990s would have produced resounding controversy and rejection by the Right and Pinochetistas. When the school is intervened by the military and Father McEnroe loses his post, the children discover they value him more than they might have realized. At a tense moment in an interrupted religious service, they follow Pedro Machuca’s lead by rising to say “Goodbye, Father McEnroe.” Earlier, when parents heatedly argue about the social integration experiment, Pedro Machuca’s mother, with an eloquence of expression evocative of 1973, states the injustice reproduced by the debate. The subtext poses a challenge to a legacy of social inequality still powerful in the present.

When I was a girl, I lived on a landed estate over by San Nicolás.

My father was one of the *inquilinos* [peasant tenants] who cared

for the cattle. When something happened to an animal, they deducted it from the provisions they gave us at the end of the month. Why the loss happened did not matter. The guilty one was always my father. I came to Santiago at fifteen because I did not want my children to be the guilty ones all the time. But it seems that things are the same here in the city. The guilty ones, we're always the same. So that's the way it has to be. . . . I just ask myself, when will things be done differently?

The wide embrace of the film also occurred notwithstanding the indeterminate and post-heroic political messaging, and the unsparing depiction of failure, that left room for conservative viewers to reinforce their outlook. The film's social sympathies did not translate into political preaching or identification. Even if conservatives gained a new appreciation of the era's tragedy and dreams, they could still conclude that a military coup was necessary, and that an experiment of social class integration was foolish. In an earlier time, such aspects might have pushed the Left or the human rights community into public polemic or critique.<62>

"Machuca" turned into a memory knot on the social body – a compelling call to see with fresh eyes the past within the present, now in the context of a "shared tragedy" sensibility, while still attracting distinct readings of the legacy. Conservative newspapers (and their columnists, not all of them conservative) joined in hailing the film as a must-see achievement, while printing a few letters to the editor objecting to political manipulation. Criticism of an open-endedness that might reinforce conservative social prejudices was muted. Critiques tended toward the minor quibble that recognizes a towering achievement, or a bit of doubt about implications of some artistic choices. Did the movie mislead about some details of what really happened at Colegio Saint George? Did it veer too close to a stereotype of the "bad" upper classes? Did Pedro Machuca's

continuous use of a torn sweater, not a school uniform, strip the poor of their dignity or did it constitute useful artistic license? In the end, such objections proved a minor current. The artistic decision to sense the era – the climate of social barriers simultaneously tumbling and reasserted, with a showdown looming – through a child's eyes defanged political objections and allowed the magic of the story to work. Significantly, youths who had not lived through the era proved intensely interested. The film served as a generational memory bridge of sorts. Many sent e-mail messages to Wood and declared the film helped them understand their parents better.<63>

Perhaps most important, the pobladores and extras who worked on the film found themselves moved, sometimes to tears. The depiction of an allanamiento (house raid operation) of a población with significant realism – a scene largely absent from audiovisual media during the democratic transition – proved especially powerful. As with the Valech Commission [the new truth commission in 2003-2004 on political imprisonment and torture, a theme not taken up systematically and comprehensively in the original 1990-1991 truth commission on death and disappearance], it was as if something precious and silenced had finally come out into the open, as citizen testimony and recognition. “Many people cried,” recalled director Andrés Wood, who had not anticipated the emotive aspect of the film making and learned its meaning as he went. He found himself sensing “that we were doing something important for people,” experiencing “a sensation that we are touching sensitive spots [fibras] that had not been touched before.”

Timing mattered. Aside from its undeniable artistic value, “Machuca” caught the cultural moment – and strengthened it. It connected to a sentiment of desire, a certain yearning to fill the void that cut across memory camp lines. In 2001, when Wood first began working on the idea of a film about the Saint George experiment, he had “zero expectations” about its mass appeal. He hoped to reach a wider public, but “when I told

people that I was doing this, [they would say], ‘Why are you going to go back and get involved in this? People are not interested in looking back.’” He thought the film would end up with a niche market – those who lived through and found meaning in the experimentalism of the old Chile, and schools such as Saint George – not a cross-over market of mass appeal. Even after a strong premier run in Spain raised expectations and boosted publicity and marketing in Chile, Wood remained cautious about cultural reception. The Chile of 2004, however, was culturally more open than that of 2001. Sensibilities of memory as shared tragedy and unfinished business had grown more influential. The Valech Commission process and the Riggs Bank revelations unlocked the mind to new reckonings. [The Riggs Bank matter refers to an exposé originating in the U.S. Senate of Pinochet’s secret financial accounts. The Riggs affair rocked Pinochetista loyalists, because it confronted Chileans with a reality of corruption at odds with Pinochet’s cultivated image as an austere servant of patriotism as he understood it.] More Chileans were willing to return to the society that exploded in 1973, and to find something of value in it.<64>

“Machuca” embodied and consolidated the new sensibility, but it did not create it. As we have seen, the constraints of memory culture in the 1990s had begun eroding after 1998, and the thirty-year anniversary of the coup brought to the fore that yearning for the authentic that finds in a lost social world something appealing and fundamental. The Chile of the 1960s and early 1970s exploded in a terrible calamity, but it was also more than the run-up to calamity. It was also a world whose musical creativity, technological promise, sports heroes, youth culture, religious stirrings, and sociopolitical experiments and mobilization infused life with a sensation of unprecedented possibility. People could make history and culture anew, and the once humble or excluded could sit at the table of possibility. Book culture, like “Machuca,” captured something of the new interest in returning to pre-1973 Chile with more than demonization or defense-against-

demonization as the principal point. During 2002-2006, historians produced books, sometimes in collaboration with grass roots communities, that rendered vivid a lost world of possibility without sidestepping the internal divisions and sociopolitical dynamics that ended in catastrophe. The “little history” of daily life and culture in 1973, the audacity of proposing a uniquely Chilean and democratic path toward socialist revolution, the making of shantytown dwellers into key social actors in addition to workers, the agrarian reform that for a time blew away hunger in Mapuche Indian communities while unleashing a ferocious power struggle, the strategies for incorporating military forces into alliance with a democratic-national project, the culture of internationalism that turned local experiment into a sense of continental solidarity and possibility, such topics recaptured the creativity and the “fiesta” aspect of the era without marginalizing the more familiar history of menace and catastrophe.<65>

Conclusion:

Regimes of state terror – in this instance a poldicide project, to kill off ways of understanding and organizing politically, and to create a new relation of society and the individual – bring forth a paradox. The terror creates memories of the unspeakable, too terrible and humiliating and indescribable to stare at or narrate, yet also too profound and intimate and formative to wish away or suppress forever. Transitions from the rule of state terror bring the paradox into sharp focus, politically and culturally. Since the 1990s, when human rights consciousness was a major force in international as well as national cultures, regimes of democratic transition under constraint – in countries as varied as Chile, South Africa, and Peru – have sought to promote a moral re-founding that contrasts the new society with the recent violent past.

But in creating a space that reckons with the past and promotes some form of social repair, the politics of transition also creates a space for artistic endeavor and critique of the transition. In the end, the artistic imagination proves as vital as sober factual research and narrative to appreciate the horror of the past, the lost moments of beauty hidden by accounts of atrocity, and the claims that heirs of the past must make on the present and future. The space that emerges for the important work of truth commissions also becomes an imperative for memory-art, whether a documentary organized with an artistic sensibility, or an imaginative story telling inspired by the real.

Against this backdrop, three additional points emerge when considering the staging of memory in Chile. First, some caveats temper analysis of the art-society connection. Each of the works considered here merits discussion in its own right on artistic terms, and cannot be reduced to a one-dimensional vision of the artist as a reflective “mirror of society.” The artist is not immune from social climate and context, nor from a political economy of artistic production, yet reaches for a creative expression that is universal and crosses boundaries. Social reductionism is dangerous. It negates the point of art, and its unexpected powers to move or communicate. It underestimates the imagination of artists as they invent new ways to connect with publics, or as they find themselves driven to creative expression regardless of effective social connection.

Second, precisely because reductionism is dangerous, methodological focus on cultural reception – regardless of intent or expectations of the artist – is revealing, especially for works of politico-cultural electricity during times of contentious memory, and especially for considering change over time. Cinematic art (and to an extent, popular

theater) is particularly relevant because audio-visual story telling has become such a powerful entertainment and literary commodity in Latin America.

At this level, the works considered here – whose release spanned some fifteen years – capture dramatic changes that occurred during a democratic transition often characterized as blocked or frustrated. The victim-survivor of atrocity as a living being whose suppressed moral claims must be addressed proved enormously difficult to assimilate in the Chile of 1990-1991. Dorfman's Paulina Escobar is an outsider. Her interior self is usually invisible and in a sense robbed of humanity. When a chance event allows it to roar to the surface, it can seem animal-like. The raw drive for justice or redemption or revenge runs rampant over the social lies, compromises, and conventions that make "normal life" possible.

The victim-survivors in Guzmán's generational self-portrait of 1997 are more reflective and appealing, perhaps even wise. The Leftist elders have something precious to remember about a time of dreams and possibility, and the youths know that something formative has been suppressed but must be remembered. The disaster that followed shaped them and their parents decisively. Yet the message of the elders is also limited. It is deeply moving but cannot break out of its niche. The delivery is burdened by the sense of having been cornered into an out-of-time declaration. Memory is obstinate, but it is also a fight against anachronism – against the politico-cultural currents that seem to rush so swiftly toward forgetting and an end to social dreaming. The struggle for memory and human rights has created a social geography of empathy more tolerant of the elder who treasures the time of dreams and the Left, but the willing public is still quite contained. Too many people still want to look away, too much self-censorship still feeds the impulse

to forget. Under the circumstances, the line between the film as nostalgia and yearning, and as socio-political autobiography and inspiration, can fade perilously.

The 2004 reception of “Machuca” announced a break with the older taboos. The social ideals and experimentalism of the pre-1973 era failed, but their promoters proved admirable anyway – and they remain germane in the present. The school integration experiment brings to the fore suppressed yet formative memories of times that were at once creative and menacing, and whose significance transcends ownership by any particular political camp. The return to the past also announces a challenge to the geography of empathy and injustice within the present. Pedro Machuca and his mother still exist, and her words still haunt a Chile of vast social inequality: “The guilty ones, we’re always the same.”

Third, the staging of memory and the human rights question exposes not only a social geography of empathy and othering as its antithesis, but also a vision of authenticity. The relationship, however, between empathy and authenticity is subtle – uneven and at times even inverse. Guzman’s generation is unquestionably a voice of authenticity, a lost Chile whose roots in the national past run long, and whose political and social experiences connect to that which made the nation unique and genuine. The aesthetics of music and photos – the theme song of the Unidad Popular, the faltering but stubborn playing of Beethoven’s “Moonlight Sonata,” the juxtapositions of past and present images – draw out brilliantly the rootedness and the irony of displacement in the modern society of forgetting. But the yearning that attaches to authenticity is rather autobiographical, and in a film whose focus is generational it is not clear whether the elders are figures who spark sympathy over empathy. One may respect them and

appreciate their sorrow, but can one make the additional leap of imagination and identification? Are they both “authentic” and an “other” whose time is past? Could the same have been said of Dorfman’s Paulina Salas – so anchored in values of political solidarity that she did not break under torture in the 1970s, yet socially invisible and condemned to silent co-existence with perpetrators in the constrained democracy of the 1990s?

The complex tension of authenticity, empathy, and othering also come through in “Machuca.” As we have seen, the attention to authenticity is part of what gave the film such evocative power and appeal. Yet the narrative strategy creates a certain divide between empathy and authenticity. Gonzalo, the socially privileged child, provides the eyes of the film and disarms the political defensiveness of the middle-class public. Culturally, it is relatively easy to make a leap of faith, see the story through his eyes, and come to identify with his discoveries, loss of innocence, and grieving. Yet it is Machuca, Silvana, and their families who constitute the heart of *Chile profundo* – and of the yearning, heartache, and temptation to forget that have taken hold of Gonzalo’s soul. And lurking just offstage, as the unannounced premise of cultural authenticity and legitimacy, is the agrarian question. It is the inability of people to find lives of dignity in the countryside – to unlock themselves from the social role of “the guilty ones” – that had swollen the city with shantytown dwellers. The introductory image of Pedro Machuca’s community through young Gonzalo’s eyes includes a fleeting image of people working the land. Daily life in their community, if we were to see it more closely, would turn out to blur the line between the rural and the urban.

Fortunately, the gap between authenticity and empathy for the middle-class urban viewer in 2004 was not necessarily the last word. A society of divided memory and divided social classes can also twist the meaning equations in a new direction. Whatever the narrative strategy of the film director, the pobladores who staged an allanamiento on screen knew who constituted for them *Chile profundo* and knew with whose voices and lives they identified. When the staging of memory crosses social boundaries, meanings branch out.

Notas, sjs a sjs, sobre puntos que hay que recordar al volver a este ensayo y el proyecto mayor en el futuro:

1. For Dorfman, the question of the different editions, and field materials; also Dorfman, *Exorcising Terror*, 47-50; Sergio Rojas en Nelly Richard, ed., *Políticas y estéticas de la memoria*, 182-83; Nelly Richard, *The Insubordination of Signs*, esp. 18-21, 95-96; de la Parra, *La mala memoria*, 219-20; cf. Catherine Boyle, “The Mirror to Nature? Latin American Theatre in London, *Travesía* 1 (1992), 105-17.

2. Guzmán: files related to bk 3 of trilogy, ch. 4; set w/in overall arc of work; also post-script and retrospective in “El Mostrador,” www.elmostrador.cl, 27-IX-00, in U. of Oregon conference file.

3. Wood: files related to bk 3 of trilogy, ch. 6.

[end]