

From Erotics to Poetics of Documentary

Remembering: Patricio Guzman's *Battle of Chile* (1979) and *Chile: An Obstinate Memory* (1997)

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Abstract: *After Haneke's The White Ribbon, cinema has freshly opened up the question of generational logic to understand historical events that refuse containment within the praxis of history-writing. How the psychological landscape participating in the event is shaped, or how the event shapes the next generation, is what this paper is deeply interested in. I shall try to understand the relationship between photograph and memory, truth and documentary cinema, situating its affective and conceptual force within Chile. Attempting to make sense of the political, memorial, and historical transformations between the rise of Salvador Allende and his subsequent murder in the coup, to the next generation separated by around twenty years, this paper tries to understand the long and troublesome process of coming to terms with the unseen, as captured and argued by two important documentary films by Patricio Guzman – Battle of Chile, and Chile: An Obstinate Memory. I shall try to unpack Guzman's journey to the point where he reintroduces a generation to its collective national past investigating the power of memory: the role consciousness plays in remembering, and whether human memory is truly obstinate in the act of remembering; or whether forgetting is always its preferred component, the 'other' we often overlook.*

Historical discourse does not follow reality, it only signifies it; it asserts at every moment: this happened, but the meaning conveyed is only that someone is making that assertion.¹

Situating the affective and conceptual force of documentary film within Chile, this paper tries to make sense of the political, psychological, memorial, historical and sociological transformations between the Popular Unity period, marked by the rise of Salvador Allende to Presidency and up to 11th Sept, 1973, when he died in the military coup, to the next generation separated by around twenty years. The next generation experienced a long and troublesome process of coming to terms with what they might have barely

¹ Roland Barthes, "Historical Discourse," in *Introduction to Structuralism*, ed. Michael Lane, 154 (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1970).

seen, but which was captured, punctuated and argued by two of the most important documentary films on Chile by Patricio Guzman – *Battle of Chile* in three parts, and *Chile: An Obstinate Memory*. It is within the larger political anxiety of the Chilean people that these films captured two different historical moments. My concern in this paper, through a careful study of Guzman's own journey alongside the journey of his two films and their increasing importance as documents of popular aspirations and convictions, is to argue for a tentative framework of the journey of a documentary film. In the setting up of a seemingly unmediated encounter with the political charge of the past, documentary cinema deploys two prominent dialogic modes that I call "erotics" and "poetics". The distinction indeed lies in the persuasive charge, the rhythmic quality of the document, the overspin rendered to its rhetoric, and the urge to tease out from the crevices of familiarity, the seduction of the unfamiliar. But perhaps, most obviously, it can be read through the two distinct soundtracks: one, raw and unmediated; the other, invoking the profound sadness of a valiantly but ruthlessly forgotten collective dream. I shall argue through Guzman's films that these two dominant modes are pre-arranged within a causality that overdetermines the future of documentary remembering, and navigates the cinematic urge through a channel set in the quest for the elusive truth of the past "as it unfolded" – exposed in its completely naked circuitry.

Documentary as Archive

The dependency of historians, limited within the confines of the archive, on what is available to them as evidence of historical events, also determines

how historical consciousness affects the constitution of the event within the archive, while it is alive, open to multiple approaches, discourses, ideologies, and therefore manipulations. Camera, as the defining tool “capturing” the moving-image document, becomes the instrument within which culminate all choices – conscious and unconscious – that determine the shape, size, and character of the archive². If the feeling that “we are living in a historical moment” guides the process, standards, and rigours of archiving, its eventual truth-claim is often a project brought from outside the archive in search of an answer to questions defined neatly and in a specific, and immediate time-space context which may have never existed at the moment of archiving. It is important, therefore, to separate the desire to archive from the quest for preserving “truth” for posterity, which is a quest perhaps born out of the intercourse between historical imagination and the archive, as we shall discuss in the next section.³

² One of the most recent events to have enlightened this debate has been Thomas Hoepker's photo of New Yorkers apparently relaxing as the twin towers smoulder. Jonathan Jones discusses the implications of the photograph in his Guardian article “The meaning of 9/11's most controversial photo” under the series “Framing the debate” (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/sep/02/911-photo-thomas-hoepker-meaning?fb=ative&CMP=FBCNETTXT9038>, accessed on 19/10/2011). Do we see in the photograph “an allegory of America's failure to learn any deep lessons from that tragic day, to change or reform as a nation”, as claimed by Frank Rich? Or shall we believe Walter Sipser, who identified himself in the photograph, and described himself as having been “in a profound state of shock and disbelief”? Jones supplies his answers by saying that “Well, you can't photograph a feeling. But another five years on since it surfaced in 2006, it seems pointless to argue about the morality of the people in the picture, or of the photographer, or his decision to withhold the picture from publication. It is now established as one of the defining photographs of that day – with the 10th anniversary of the World Trade Centre's destruction approaching, the Observer Review republished it this August as *the 9/11 photograph*... It has become a picture about history, and about memory. As an image of a cataclysmic historical moment it captures something that is true of all historical moments: life does not stop dead because a battle or an act of terror is happening nearby.”

³ In addition to this, after the advent of digital technology in the hyper-mediated world of today, the desire to archive has indeed transcended even the historical imagination as a determinant, for entering the digital neighbourhood has acquired a parallel and independent meaning of its own. Some of the footage in a Channel Four documentary on the ethnic cleansing of Tamil people should be seen in this light. What makes people, those on the brink of death as well as those committing genocide on official orders and therefore at the life risk of any evidence, shoot footage that could be used against them or may never serve them, remains a curious paradox of our times. However, the documentaries in focus

Despite multiple unsuccessful attempts at building a national cinema movement and utilizing the film media to work against imperialist ambitions, Latin America's preoccupation with the revolutionary character of cinema is evidently contextual. In the last months of 1972, when the third year of Allende's government was about to begin, the struggle to achieve a socialist state by peaceful means seemed seriously threatened, and socio-political confrontation began in the streets. A civil war was perceived as a likely eventual outcome of the situation. Guzman thought that Chile, then, represented a sort of twentieth century Paris commune where Chilean people had to practically confront the ideas of Lenin and Marx. He adds, in the interview with Julianne Burton:

"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 – all of it – was contained in the film. [...] 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. [...] The far reaching relevance of the political model then being tried in Chile was one of the factors that motivated us to make the film".⁴

Planned like a military campaign by the *Equipo Tracer Alfa*, which consisted of Jorge Muller, a cinematographer who was used by most directors of the period, and Guzman among others, *Battle of Chile* was begun with the intention to film a process that was developing rapidly. With borrowed equipment, a Nagra sound-recorder and an Éclair camera, and with the film

for this paper are surely not born out of the digital moment, therefore they need to be understood in their own context.

⁴ Patricio Guzmán, and Julianne Burton, "Politics and Film in People's Chile: *The Battle of Chile*," in *Film & Politics in the Third World*, ed. John D. H. Downing, 221 (New York: Autonomedia, 1987).

stock donated by French filmmaker Chris Marker, the shooting began in February 1973. The screenplay became a map that was hung on the wall. They listed the key points of revolutionary struggle on one side of the room, what they had already filmed on the other. The theoretical outline was drawn on one side and the practical on the other. For seven months they filmed every day and accessed all sectors of society through various tricks, building an extensive archive of a unique class struggle. It is extremely important, therefore, to view *Battle of Chile* as an archive of the struggle it arrested within moving images. It is another matter, however, that later the film acquired a different meaning as the “true story” of what happened in “those years”.

Documentary as Truth

Contrary to the notion of “empty homogenous time” (Walter Benjamin’s term)⁵, every moment is filled with a materiality. Central to the question of truth is the concern of capturing the essence of this materiality so as to be able to identify, comprehend and reconcile it with what disappears with the moment. Truth is not merely what is, it is also what was, what will be. However impossible the ordeal, the charm of the exercise of knowing the past “as it really was”, is indeed endless. All knowledge revolves around knowing the truth – truth of the universe, truth of the future, truth of our condition, that of the supreme, that of the moment situated at varying distance in time and space, and so on. In an age in which it is actually possible, through multimedia technology, to record action as it unfolds, and then display it, as if,

⁵ As used in Benjamin’s essay ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’. The essay can be accessed online at - <http://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/CONCEPT2.html>, accessed on 19/10/2011.

without any mediation, the role of memory as opposed to technology, or in sync with it, is crucial. How does one look at a photograph as an object of remembrance? Is the presence of a character within a photograph, evidence enough that s/he was present at the site, even if s/he does not remember it as such? Or shall we say that memory and photographs or a moving image must reflect on the same fact in order to validate each other? Or perhaps we can acknowledge that both, like most things, have their fragilities, mark techniques of construction more than solid undeniable evidence. The materiality of the moment gone by cannot ever be arrested in totality.⁶ Technology has a claim to it just as memory does, but both are not foolproof for the simple reason that both must interact with the human mind, which is not free of conscious, or unconscious, defense mechanisms, of deliberate or ignorant ways of (re)constructions, the processes of which may not be available to anyone at all.

⁶ Yet, as Sadanand Menon writes in his Hindu article (<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/article2079413.ece>, accessed on 19/10/2011) on the mysterious absence of “the photograph” representing Osama Bin Laden’s death, “Freddy Alborta’s brutal photos of the slain Che Guevara, taken in 1967 in the laundry house of the hospital in Vallegrande in Bolivia, established that death. The 2004 pix of a slain Veerappan released by the Special Task Force, though controversial about the manner of his being killed, laid to rest any debate about his being alive. The 2009 Sri Lankan Army photos of Velupillai Prabhakaran’s seemingly severed head obligingly being held against his torso were gruesome indeed, but did not cause much of an international ripple. In each of the above cases, the respective photos are suspected to have been manipulated. Yet, it is interesting that despite being notoriously doctorable, the photograph today constitutes the sign of the “clinching” evidence. Osama’s death, however, seems to have been denied the historic necessity of the camera’s intervention... Under conditions of modernity, the photograph has come to substitute for the event to such an extent that it is now not merely a visual image awaiting interpretation; it in fact, constitutes the interpretation itself.”

For Marco Bohr though, the absence of the photograph leaves a visual vacuum which gives rise to plethora of creativity across the web. He concludes his essay (<http://visualcultureblog.com/2011/05/deconstructing-the-situation-room-photograph/#comment-12508>) by arguing: “Yet the lack of a visual representation of Osama bin Laden is also the ideological breathing ground for conspiracy theories. I would suggest that the spurt of creativity in response to ‘The Situation Room Photograph’ hinges precisely on the very lack of visual information on Osama bin Laden’s death. As the viewer of ‘The Situation Room Photograph’ reverts to imagining what those in the room are looking at, a small army of tumblebloggers rely on their imagination in creating spoofs which fill the visual vacuum left by the unrepresentability of Osama bin Laden’s death.”

Where do we place the film, then, in this debate? More appropriately, the documentary film for which, technology functions as “the sign of the occurrence of the real”⁷ and probably resurrects the relationship between film and theory. Philip Auslander argues in his book *Liveness*, “whereas mediatized performance derives its authority from its reference to the live or the real, the live now derives its authority from its reference to the mediatized, which derives its authority from its reference to the live, etc.”⁸ This is illustrated in the fact that the presence of a conscious camera recording selectively, moving shakily and making its presence ‘felt’, does not dilute the truth-claim, instead makes a stronger claim for it. Media, then, functions as a key arbiter of truth as well as a form of testimony. Documentary mobilizes three particular modes of representations – the event that happened in individual or collective memories, the media versions of the event that happened, and dramatization of the event. All three are constructed through editing: photographic, or newsreel evidence put together with an implicit and/or an explicit narrative. The collage could be linear, oscillating or a (un)conscious collapsing of two or more modes into one. The real as pure is not available to most of us, we think through the media, we imagine the big events through the eye of the camera more often than not. Few of us actually imagine the big sports events such as cricket or football matches, or press conferences, political meetings between heads of the nations etc., or the action in the world of crime or law, outside the mediatized images we come

⁷ Carol Martin, “Living Simulations: The Use of Media in Documentary in the UK, Lebanon and Israel,” in *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present*, ed. Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson, 74 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁸ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London, NY: Routledge, 1999), 39.

across in daily newspapers, magazine photographs, electronic media channels, cinema, or television broadcasts. The real of our everyday lives is fully saturated with the mediatized. Therefore, the subversion of the camera in a documentary is deeply connected to the transformed notion of the real itself, material or immaterial.

Even though we know the media constructs its data in the recording selection/elimination, and more concretely in editing, presentation, distribution and commentary, its truth claim is rooted in its property of liveness, which is where the evidentiary and theoretical converge, despite the knowledge that mediatized is always a construction. Therefore, a range of inquiry about liveness, technology, mediatization, the archive, and the political implications of documentary often come together in debates about documentary films, in which truth may have often been intruded upon by the camera, yet more often than not, documentaries are about the camera raiding the truth and capturing it for its own purposes. Creative treatment is a slippery slope, which is why the documentary claims are always met with excitement as well as suspicion. Despite the unmistakable connections to the reality of original events, a “pessimistic postmodern skepticism” often takes over. For Stella Bruzzi, “the documentary is predicated upon a dialectical relationship between aspiration and potential”⁹. Therefore, there is a need to see documentary not as a product, but a process of adjusting to this relationship, to find equilibrium between the aspiration and potential.

⁹ Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 6.

That is why it is important to acknowledge spectatorship – in no need of “signposts and inverted commas”¹⁰ to understand that documentary is a negotiation between reality, image, interpretation and bias – as integral to the process of documentary films. All non-fiction cinema, however misleading the nomenclature, is invested in the nature of its imagined audience, much more than its fictional counterpart. Janelle Reinelt argues that the reality is examined and experienced differentially and is produced in the interactions between the document, the artist and the spectator. However, it is never enough as desire outstrips what is or can be provided, for the document is thinly spread, mediation always suspect. Yet, “it has its measure of efficacy; it is a way of knowing”¹¹. Indeed, it would also be important at the same time, to understand that “it is not that the documentary *consists* of the structures of filmic fiction (and is, thus, parasitic of its cinematic ‘other’) as it is that ‘fictive’ elements *insist* in documentary as in all film forms”¹².

That documentary film is all about desire, we could argue, takes primacy over the real, which is beyond discourse. Truth may be the absent presence at the invisible centre, but in tangible terms desire is what it translates to, and applies its centrifugal force upon, so as to render it a dynamism that is integral to non-fiction cinema. Renov insists that the expressive capabilities of non-fiction forms, often overlooked, account for an aesthetic dimension which is constitutive on historical as well as conceptual grounds. This leads us to the

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Janelle Reinelt, “The Promise of Documentary,” in *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present*, ed. Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson, 23 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹² Michael Renov, “Introduction: the Truth About Non-Fiction,” in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov, 10 (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

affect of a documentary which is constituted by history as much as the notion of evidence itself, as Tagg argues,

The photograph is not a magical 'emanation' but a material product of a material apparatus set to work in specific contexts, by specific forces, for more or less defined purposes. It requires, therefore, not an alchemy but a history.... That a photograph can come to stand as *evidence*, for example, rests not on a natural or existential fact, but on a social, semiotic process. ...It will be a central argument of this book that what Barthes calls "evidential force" is a complex historical outcome and is exercised by photographs only within certain institutional practices and within particular historical relations. ...The very idea of what constitutes evidence has a history.¹³

The documentary, therefore, is not free of a contextually and culturally specific ideological expectation, a desired 'affect' of social change too, perhaps. This role of a documentary film, much like the above discussed category of evidence, is constituted by its own history. A certain kind of revolutionary potentiality has often been identified in the documentary that has brought together both its production and reception, under an ideological umbrella. Fernando Birri, in his very important essay *Cinema and Underdevelopment* (1962), posing a question around the typology of cinema the underdeveloped peoples of Latin America need, calls upon the social documentary to present a true image of the society to its own people, to testify to their shared reality and therefore reject it, to film underdevelopment with the optic of the people. Alea too, argues in favour of a "socially productive cinema" which is "genuinely and integrally revolutionary, active, stimulating, mobilizing, and – consequently – popular"¹⁴. While these may be summed up as "a naïve belief

¹³ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographs and Histories* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 3-5.

¹⁴ Tomás Gutierrez Alea, "The Viewer's Dialectic," <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays>, accessed on 19/10/2011.

in the camera's ability"¹⁵, it is this belief that later matured and further integrated into the Popular Unity period in Chile which is indeed, the focus of this paper.

Battle of Chile

Patricio Guzmán's heartbreaking probe of Chile's revolution, the Pinochet coup, and the long entangled aftermath will be considered in centuries to come one of the most eloquent and daring explorations of revolution and repression, hope and memory, to survive our sorry times.

- Ariel

Dorfman¹⁶

A country without documentary films is like a family without a photo album. When you see the photo, you remember your past, but the same photo also redefines your past. So there is a to-and-fro with memory. You return to a forgotten story, and in the process you rewrite that story.

- Patricio
Guzman¹⁷

The Battle of Chile: The Struggle of a People Without Arms is the most important film born out of its political moment, a film without which, "perhaps those years would not exist"¹⁸. This four-and-a-half hour three part film is a "panorama of the struggles and contradictions that riddled the last year of Allende government"¹⁹, a sober even austere depiction of contemporary history shot in black and white and without an ornate soundtrack or rigorous editing. It is minimally and tersely narrated, though still deeply invested in the

¹⁵ Ana M. Lopez, "At the Limits of Documentary: Hypertextual Transformation and the New Latin American Cinema," in *The Social Documentary in Latin America*, ed. Julianne Burton, 407-8 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990).

¹⁶ "The Battle of Chile (1975-78) Chile, Obstinat Memory (1997) The Pinochet Case (2001): Films by Patricio Guzman," (Icarus Films compilation on Guzman's three 'disturbing' and 'provocative' documentaries), http://www.icarusfilms.com/press/pdfs/guz_pk.pdf, accessed on 19/10/2011.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ J. Ruffinelli, *Patricio Guzman* (Madrid: Catedra / Filmoteca Espanola, 2001).

¹⁹ Guzmán, and Burton, *Film & Politics in the Third World*, 220.

class question and the relatively obvious class division across Chilean society. Although a deep yet underplayed sense of melancholia runs through the film, it remains an analytical documentary deliberately avoiding emotional punctuations and heavy-handedness. Guzman abandons a number of classic documentary modes, such as strict chronology, thematic compilation or a day-in-the-life approach. Instead, he “synthesized these methods in a dialectical style that combined their advantages”²⁰. Guzman’s early vision of the principle features of the project, as described to Chris Marker who supplied the film, was that it would be

“a free-form film, that will use journalistic reportage, still photography essay, the drama structure of a film, vertiginous editing and the sequence-shot, all this edited according to circumstances, according to the requirements of reality”²¹.

At the heart of the project is the feeling that history is being made and recorded. The conviction that they were recording the most extraordinary fight ever sustained by the people against the elite classes is evident in Guzman’s interviews as well as his film. The film focuses on key battlegrounds – the parliament, the economy, the universities, the media. Political analysis is mixed with on-the-spot filmmaking performed in the heat of the historic battle. Chile’s unique status as the first country to be moving towards socialism

²⁰ Robert Stam, and Ella Shohat, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London, NY: Routledge, 1997), 269.

²¹ Maria Luisa Ortega, “The Battle Of Chile,” in *Cinema of Latin America*, ed. Alberto Elena and Marina Diaz Lopez, 153 (London: Wallflower Press, 2006).

through elections is a huge motivational factor for the people. While left wing opposition to a capitalist state usually implies a rejection of “bourgeois legality”, here it was the socialist government defending the legality of constitution, legislative procedure and elections, while the right found that legality no longer served its purposes. As opposed to the police in leftist films representing an occupying army, here they guarantee the Allende administration and of democratic government. Strikers too, here, are elite accomplices of the bosses trying to undermine socialism by accepting money from the CIA.

The ordinary Chileans are movingly eloquent, living refutations of the clichéd phrase “inarticulate masses”, lucid about politics, passionate about changing the quality of their collective lives. There is no identification here with individual characters, there are no mini or even micro protagonists. Our identification is with a “community of aspiration”, a collective dream of the infinite masses. The drama is built into the events themselves, seized by intelligent and sensitive filmmakers who use their understanding of the political dynamics of events to know where to film, where to place the camera and microphone. Also, as a part of the design, the signs of the production process like the sound boom, calls for ‘cut’, are not eliminated to highlight its reflexivity. The music too, is only comprised of diegetic sounds like percussion played at marches and martial music for military parades. The film is edited in a low-profile style of montage favouring single-shot sequences with respect to spatio-temporal integrity of materials, and also that of the people who speak, either for or against the filmmakers’ beliefs.

What is written all over the film as a strategic obviousness is the imprint of class in the consciousness of camera: it is part of film's "undergirding social architectonics".²² Class differences inform all that we see: members of the elite class address the filmmakers as 'Sir', common people say *companero*; invariably the elite drive cars, common people walk or take trucks; elite women wear layers of makeup, working-class women dress simply; the elite overestimate their electoral chances, primarily because they owned the media which was anti-Allende, the people are simple, hopeful but also tentative. There is a strange tension running throughout the film, however, given that the outcome is foretold. Therefore, all images, interviews and narration seem to offer a direct access to history in the making, despite the distanced narration.

The most dreadful moment comes at the end of the first part, captured with Leonardo Henrichsen's camera²³. As we see through his camera, a soldier turns and faces the screen, lifts up his gun and shoots directly towards us. Henrichsen is shot, the image spirals slightly and we see him go down, his lens dropping to the pavement and the screen whiting out. We thus watch him film his own death. We are told by the narrator that the cameraman has recorded, two months before the final coup, the true face of the Chilean army.

²² Stam and Shohat, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, 271.

²³ Wikipedia entry on Henrichsen (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonardo_Henrichsen, accessed on 19/10/2011) thus describes the event: "On the morning of June 29, 1973, as Henrichsen had breakfast at the café in the Hotel Crillón (across La Moneda Presidential Palace in downtown Santiago), the sound of gunfire erupted outside, leading him and Sandquist to rush to cover the event. As he began filming, a detachment in a mutineering army regiment attempting to storm La Moneda Palace attacked protesters and bystanders nearby and, noticing him and his camera, the ranking officer, Corporal Héctor Bustamante Gómez shot his pistol at Henrichsen, prompting his men to fire, as well. Appealing to them that they cease firing at two journalists, Henrichsen was struck by the third shot (from an as yet unidentified conscript), causing him to collapse in Sandquist's arms while still filming. He was 33."

The footage was edited by Chile Films for its newsreel, in which Henricksen's film is presented twice- first, in its raw original form, then later in slow motion, seemingly frozen images providing a damning document against his killers. This footage was shown in Chilean theatres as well as on television screens around the world, of which Guzman acquired a copy shortly after the coup.

The confrontation of the camera with the gun "captures" a profoundly philosophical moment²⁴. We see through the camera and get shot, figuratively speaking, as we see Henrichsen get shot. The tactility of cinematic experience at the heart of documentary filmmaking, here, in this moment, captures the ultimate. In the capturing of one death, it captures infinite deaths. With every new spectator who watches Guzman's telling of the 'Battle of Chile', the filmic document expands its orbit of experiential death in a heightened political moment. The most dreadful moment, therefore, transcends us from the finite documentary experience to the in-finite. In the moment of seeing death, it forces us out of our voyeuristic passivity, refuses to let us be mere witnesses. We inflict on ourselves, in the process of innocent seeing, a wound that breaches the seamlessness of spectatorship with respect to documentary as opposed to fiction cinema. Therefore, Henrichsen's murder collapses the mediating agency of the camera as well as cameraman, thus enforcing a dreadful shock-encounter between the spectator and the

²⁴ It would be useful to highlight the contemporaneity of this encounter in the wake of a recent incident in Syria. See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jul/08/syria-lone-gunman>, accessed on 19/10/2011, for a rich analysis by Jonathan Jones for Guardian. The video footage emerged from Homs, Syria in which a man filming gunfire in the streets appears to be shot dead by a sniper. Keeping aside the immense value that youtube brings as a popular video sharing platform cutting across physical boundaries, the notion of "The angel of death has been caught on camera" deserves a closer investigation into the mediated encounter with death, as facilitated by camera, and made possible by an ethical-aesthetic commitment to documenting that exceeds the familiar range of rational choices.

spectacle, heightening the erotics of Guzman's documentary to the very peak.²⁵

Whereas part one paints a sociological portrait of political upheavals, part two is closer to a political film, in analytical devices as well as political accusations, though mere hypotheses that would be proved later, such as involvement of the CIA. Jorge Ruffinelli thinks the whole of Guzman's film incorporates all the elements of an expertly constructed narrative: struggle in part one, brutal outcome and failure in part two, and alternative end in part three, which does not even mention the coup. Ana M. Lopez has argued that the complex and contradictory textual operations of the film – in which direct and dramatized, immediate and mediated, modes of representation are constantly in tension – are shaped by the confrontation between the context in which the filming took place and the experience of the exile. It brings to the fore the balance between the urgency of the situation and the calm and steady view of the exile, as the moment of synthesis for the *Battle of Chile*, as opposed to the moment of genesis which Guzman articulates thus:

We all believed that in the event of a civil war, the popular forces would eventually win. We expected there to be a split in the armed forces which never actually occurred, given that the soldiers and sailors who were loyal to Allende were identified and purged before the September 11th military coup. [...] If the civil war was to result in a victory for the popular forces, we reasoned, our footage would be of great use to the workers and the

²⁵ Contrast this with Osama Bin Laden's death which was refused the right to be captured by the camera as exemplified by the "Situation Room Photograph". The American state decides to share with us Osama's death "in camera", not on camera (Menon's title for the Hindu article <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/article2079413.ece>, accessed on 19/10/2011). Menon writes, "The age of the photograph has 'parallelly' been an age of revolutions, assassinations and terrorisms of all kinds. Here, an "enemy" denied a "death by the photograph" is someone pushed out of the "frame" within which the state exercises its forcible dramaturgy of power." While Henrichsen's camera arrests his own death within the frame, American alpha state paternalistically forces Osama outside the frame to reinforce its privileged access to its own excesses, something Henrichsen managed to arrest in act of extraordinary bravery. Death, in both cases, remains the un-seeable that renders itself to political negotiations. It remains the "trophy", clinches the act of camera with a photo-finish.

peasantry, and to the Chilean left as a whole. When a civil war is won, and the first stage in the construction of a new socialist state begins, there is a transition period in which it is very important to analyze what has gone before. [...] If there was to be a *coup d'état*, as in fact there was, we knew that we had all the more reason to do what we were doing, since our footage would be a sort of commemoration and tribute to all that the Chilean people had accomplished in those years of democratic people's government.²⁶

As Guzman says in his interview with Burton, they were still in a state of shock when they arrived in Cuba after the coup wondering how it happened. To keep the moment of synthesis distinct from the genesis, then, editing was crucial. It was after a lot of discussion between a range of filmmakers and activists that they decided to keep it low-key and to promote unity over exclusivity, yet Guzman was aware that the film had turned out to be difficult, dry and cold, and made no concessions to the spectator, which is why the international acclaim came as a surprise to him. However, he refuses to dilute or compromise the impression that he had a personal commitment to the subject of the film, and held a nearly militant position within the struggle, so he shot reality dialectically: "what a minister says, what the workers say, what the minister answers, what the workers answer back, what the woman who lives near the factory says, and so on"²⁷. His team assembled the storyline, inasmuch as there is one, dialectically, following a "series of interwoven and often opposing threads"²⁸. Yet, the film is a compendium of passionate speeches, each given its due worth. Each of the speakers is charged by the political euphoria around. It seems that they are all driven by a defiant irrationality that sustains an obvious and direct risk to life and prospects. Yet, that there are millions of them shouting slogans, singing revolutionary songs,

²⁶ Guzman and Burton, *Film & Politics in the Third World*, 223-4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 244.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

marching in endless processions, hanging from windows, swinging in balconies, in spite of this, constitutes not just a collective dream but a very peculiar sort of erotics, enmeshed within politics, death, history and volume.

Battle of Chile conveys an excess of an unprecedented nature. Most significantly, it is not merely the repetition of the singular but genuine plurality of voices, that the camera seeks. Yet, even the omnipresent camera fails to contain the event within itself. To this extent, the event, in its raw nakedness, exceeds the possibilities of an audio-visual medium. Somewhere within the trajectory of the film, its affective magnitude refuses to comply with the camera and enters the realm of purely experiential. In this process, the event forces us to confront the absences in its framed version, and the locus of tension gradually shifts outside the frame, in what we cannot see but wish to see. Therefore, we are persuaded to stretch our respective imaginations to reach beyond the audio-visual confines of the framed and participate in a "disobedient act of seeing."²⁹ The overall sensory meaning, not unlike the act of sex itself, generates an excess which, however well captured, refuses to be contained within technology, and inspires disobedience. Indeed, it makes itself far more palatable to the "prepared" audience, to those who are ready to complete the affective circuit by letting the emotional charge of the event flow through themselves. It is in this sense that I must qualify my usage of the term "erotics". I use it to typify and highlight the film's affective vocabulary as well as meaning. It can also be used to comprehend why the film has sustained its appeal after all these years during which the proliferation and distribution of

²⁹ Sadanand Menon's term (<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/article2079413.ece>, accessed on 19/10/2011)

media images has grown manifold, and cinema has significantly scaled up its visual vocabulary. This issue of erotics of documentary remembering shall be taken up later in contrast with the poetics of a deliberately aestheticized form.

However, we must also take note of the long political crisis that led to the making of the film. Chilean politics was not only of great importance to Chilean people, it was a subject of deep anxiety all over the world for the Marxist intellectuals. In his essay, written after the coup, Sweezy argues that the electorally defeated bourgeoisie could not allow the process underway to continue once their own interests were threatened. Allende, therefore, according to this argument, should have known that time was on the side of an opposition that would inevitably gain strength as he lost it. In one way or another, Sweezy's argument underlines the consequences and potential dangers of Chile's "peaceful transition to socialism,"³⁰ so dependent on elections and so unable to control its powerful enemies, internal and external. Without going further into what options Allende had or how things could have turned out differently in Chilean politics, it is important to understand the stakes over which the *Battle of Chile* played out: emotional investments, risks to life, moral charge, historical significance, followed by proportionate disappointment. It should help us understand Guzman's return to Chile with the film, twenty-three years later, to a new nation, to a new generation, and to the fading memories and absent signs of a past he had meticulously recorded so as to remember, to preserve for the future.

³⁰ Paul Sweezy, and Harry Magdoff, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Chile* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

Chile: An Obstinate Memory

Twenty three years later, how would one imagine the state of affairs to be in Chile? What would Guzman have imagined Chilean people's anger, passion for a different kind of society, and eventual disappointment, to translate into? What happened to those thousands of people who spoke fearlessly to the camera after the coup? How did Chile and its people look at their individual and collective past? What did they make of it, how did they reconcile with it and what component of it did they pass on? What happened to the history Guzman was meticulously recording and what did it mean to the people after all these years? How had they preserved that history not having had access to *Battle of Chile*? How did the youth of now see the role of their earlier generation? What did they think of the sacrifices made, battles fought and prices paid?

To find answers to some of these questions, Guzman returns to Chile to show his seminal film to his homeland for the first time. As they watch the film, the survivors of the torture and disappearances reminisce, recognizing lost comrades and recalling their courage, and talk about the reign of terror that characterized the Pinochet regime until he was obliged to relinquish power. Twenty-three years is a crucial time period. For example, in India today, the Khalistan movement and the Kashmiri struggle for independence stand reinvigorated after around twenty years, as a generation has grown up listening to stories of the systemic subversion of a people's aspirations and of the individual and collective suffering under extreme brutality. In the case of

Chile however, discussions of the past became, in the words of Isabelle Allende, niece of Salvador Allende and a novelist, "in really bad taste"³¹. The insulation between two generations separated by the coup seems unbelievable. At a certain level, therefore, together the two films map out the crisis of sharing a revolutionary sentiment in the wake of what could be seen as a generational failure to handle its politics. Are we to see it as a consensus to forget, to not pass on a potentially dangerous memory, to bury the images of millions of people on the streets of Santiago marching for socialism, democracy, justice and the one who represented it all. Allende? How should we make sense of this slippage between history and memory: is it history which turned the collective memory obstinate, or memory itself turned its back on history thus hiding the faultlines in its crevices as secrets inaccessible to itself?

Perhaps, the answer lies in the middle, in that elusive and ambiguous zone of constructions, deconstructions and reconstructions, called memory. But how do we look at Guzman's own journey between the two films? Is it his search for a history he documented within the collective memory that brings him back home, or a search for the validation of his own memory in the history of Chile? He admits himself that he thought about the people in his film all the time, "This worker at that factory, what has happened to him? [...]My life has been dominated by the coup. ...I felt stunned by it, and I never could get rid of it. I think all exiled people have the same feeling. You eventually get by. But you

³¹ Claudia Dreifus, "Film; The New Battle of Chile: Keeping Memory Alive," (Interview with Patricio Guzman on New York Times) <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/09/06/movies/film-the-new-battle-of-chile-keeping-memory-alive.html>, accessed on 19/10/2011.

are marked your whole life.”³² Pinochet had become part of Guzman’s life. Moving from one country to another as a wandering filmmaker, he eventually returned to Santiago to film those who stood up to the dictatorship. Now, he says, his story had an end.³³ Therefore, it is important to not only see *Chile: An Obstinate Memory* as Guzman’s search for an end to the *Battle of Chile*, but also as the last leg of the long battle he fought with Chilean politics, people, their sacrifices and their final forgetting. In this last part, the implicit question may be about how memory operates across generations, the explicit question, however, is whether those who died, who lost their family members and survived torture and fear, who took a vow on the streets of Santiago to defend Allende and failed³⁴, suffered in vain?

Clearly, twenty-three years later, Guzman is not out on the streets of Santiago to re-prove the point he had tried to make in *Battle of Chile*. Going through various photographs and snippets from his own film, memory encounters its alter ego: the photographic document with a built in past-ness. People identify themselves, their friends who they marched with on the streets, and those who “disappeared”, in the photographs. There are emotionally loaded reconstructions of those closest to Allende walking with an empty car, intercut with the footage from *Battle of Chile* in which Allende meets his people standing in his car. It is followed by individual testimonies about the Allende

³² Ibid.

³³ “Films by Patricio Guzman,” http://www.icarusfilms.com/press/pdfs/guz_pk.pdf, accessed on 19/10/2011.

³⁴ “Allende! Allende! The people will defend you!” was a common slogan during the public protest marches. Its haunting presence, loaded with the knowledge of Allende’s death is present throughout the *Battle of Chile* and marks a collective promise they failed to fulfill to their beloved leader.

days, including a visit to Hortensia Bussi, the widow of Allende, who declares "Wanting to forget is self-defense, I want to forget." Another woman, having lost five family members, now old but identified by others in Guzman's film, cannot be sure whether it is her or not. Despite having gone through a lot, her memory has developed a shield. Guzman rolls blurred images of the protestors from *Battle of Chile* over a fixed profile shot of the old woman to establish what form a complicated past takes when viewed from a relatively comfortable present. How a cocooned present sterilized of passion distances itself from the past not only in terms of memory and time, but also in desire in general, is at the heart of *Chile: An Obstinate Memory*. Though Guzman is able to elicit a variety of intense responses, primarily from the younger generation, ranging from anger, self-righteousness, and dismissal from the military's supporters to sorrow, shock, and pride from its opponents, Guzman's overarching construction is in search of a poetic truth, a truth that encapsulates not merely the story of which he is trying to write the end, but also a larger story that repeats and reflects itself in all its parts.

How does this poetic truth manifest itself? How does Guzman construct it? Indeed, plurality is built into its very nature. Broadly, there are survivors of the Allende period and then, there is the young generation of people who were children when the coup happened. For the survivors, past is a dangerous subject but for the young, staging of *Battle of Chile* sets up the debate. A group of high school girls debates whether or not Pinochet's economic policies, which they deem successful, justify the murder of Chileans who opposed his rule. The majority appears to think they do. Some among the

young weep at the repression of popular will and the “disappearances” of so many of the supporters of the Allende regime. Others look about at the stability and prosperity of Chile and their own untroubled lives and see good in the coup, arguing that it anticipated and bypassed a far more destructive civil war between Chile's “haves” and “have-nots”. The most passionate denunciations of Pinochet’s abuse of human rights however, emerge from a gathering of young people who lost family members to the military repression. Overcome by emotion, some crying so bitterly they cannot even speak, they express the anger and bewilderment of the thousands of Chileans whose loved ones were imprisoned, tortured, murdered, or disappeared by the dictatorship. Guzman’s camera gently but consciously moves away from the crying subjects unlike in Lanzmann’s *Shoah* which deliberately breaches all notions of respectful distance and instead zooms into them. Also, on a gleaming Santiago day, Guzman hires a band of young musicians to play “Venceremos,” the anthem of Allende's Popular Unity party, in a downtown shopping mall to investigate the popular memory. This song hasn't been heard on Santiago streets in 23 years, and the various expressions on peoples' faces tell the entire Chilean story. Youngsters stare blankly. An older man holds up his fingers in a defiant “V”, while another well-dressed man sneers with disgust.³⁵

³⁵ Contrast this with Marianne Hirsch’s *Ghosts of Home*, where second generation returnees from Czernowitz bring their own embodied knowledge with them when they “return.” Hirsch writes, “Along with stories, behaviors, and symptoms, parents also transmit parts of their relationship to places and objects from the past to children raised among material objects in different and distant familial spaces. Descendants bring that knowledge with them and connect it to what they find there, on site. The spaces they encounter are then modulated and informed by what is being brought to them.” The interviewees’ mythic ‘home’ is constructed in their layered postmemory more than actually found through less than conclusive clues. Hirsch writes, “Although it is concretized in film and photographic images, neither the uncertainties nor the ambivalences surrounding it can ultimately be assuaged. Dominated as our narratives are by our own second-generation, backshadowing glance, they easily lose the modulations and ambiguities of survivor accounts such as Lotte’s. For second-generation returnees, the parents’

The subject of memory, then, has no unitary materiality emerging out of the film. For Allende's widow, self-defense against memory is paramount but another person, a professor, thinks there is a trap in the return journey of memory. The memory stores, he says, "like a lot of mirrors, all the important moments in life. But the trap is not being able to stop contemplating these images, and we start fiddling with these little mirrors, playing with them." The professor, himself a part of the crew for *Battle of Chile*, branding his generation as a "ship of dreamers"³⁶ propelled by a collective dream of justice, acknowledges the mistakes and failure of the people, and later in the film calls upon one and all to be the memory, living witnesses, for the young people in a moment when ideologies no longer have any value.

Conclusion

former home remains in the realm of the general and the symbolic, it cannot be fully particularized or fleshed out."

Marianne Hirsch, and Leo Spitzer, *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (Berkeley Los Angeles London: University of California Press, 2010), 298-99.

It goes on to suggest how overwhelmingly the political processes that mediate the generational gap and social premiums of remembering or forgetting determine how an event survives within the crevices of history, how it is rendered its meaning, and what kind of memory constitutes it for those who either revisit it or are re-visited by the event, the site, and the document that provides a mediated access to it.

³⁶ Quoted from the film *Chile: An Obstinate Memory* in which the Professor says, "The Popular Union was a 'Ship of dreamers', propelled by a collective dream propelled by a collective dream which ran aground. The dream was to carry along and unite the country. It was a dream of justice: the right to an education, good health and accommodation. Dreams that don't come true confirm the saying: "Don't believe in dreams as they are not nourishing". That's wrong. It was a noble dream. The failure of a dream is hard to take. Especially knowing you can't progress without dreams. Because dreaming is part of the way we apprehend life. In fact, well, we were beaten. We were mistaken. You cannot sacrifice the ends for the means. It's the big lesson to be learnt. What shocks and concerns me about this country is that we are given a false version of reality. Part of our youth has opinions based on distorted information."

There is a need to look critically at ideas like collective memory and the generational logic of the trajectory of memory. In Chile, the charge of the socialist revolution is over and people have got on with their lives within the political conditions of state repression. Instead of investigating a “national psyche” the end of Guzman’s story forces us to acknowledge that however collective the suffering may be, it is still endured individually. An individual must respond to the horror of his/her life on an autonomous basis, the relative uniqueness of his condition, as it is felt within, enforcing disintegration upon the category of “people”. Sharing the cause does not result in sharing the affect. Even though individual and collective memory both feed into each other, even manipulate each other, they maintain their relative autonomy. The distinctions may not be entirely clear to the subject, but one operates with a relatively clear notion of what separates the personal and the collective. A generation, then, may be a useful typology to analyse on a general basis, but it ceases to be of much significance when it comes to tracing back the causality. Two reticent individual subjects, at variance from each other in nature, reasoning and resolve, may inspire another individual to maintain a seemingly similar silence. Yet, if we are to make a meaning of it, the shared condition of a common response does not collapse the causal autonomy of the individual journeys leading up to the moment of reticence.

The obstinacy or fragility of every memory, however valid as a collectivity, has its own materiality, its own body, its own individuation. Each of these has its

own faultlines, their own resistances, varying capabilities to withstand etc³⁷. One needs to regard it as such in order to establish a commonality out of them instead of deriving the singular out of the collective. In *Chile: An Obstinate Memory*, however, the old footage from *Battle of Chile* acquires the “aura of truth” as opposed to its remnants in memory which it is intercut with. With every juxtaposed component, a small part of the fragile collective dream falls apart. Defeat or nostalgia has replaced the twenty-three year old charge that thousands of people marching and chanting in many shots of *Battle of Chile* remind us. Guzman, who narrates the film himself, is gentle yet probing. Love for Chile and its people has turned somewhat sour over these years, primarily because of a collective thanklessness he feels against all those who were exiled and have been wished away.³⁸ The disappearance of the class question too, in the investigation around memory, suggests the inability to enter the realm of analytics from within the poetic drive of the film. What happened to the stark divide between the working classes and the elite, and how they both now inhabit differently Chilean political economy is a marked

³⁷ Jonathan Jones, in his Guardian article (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/sep/02/911-photo-thomas-hoepker-meaning?fb=ative&CMP=FBCNETTXT9038>, accessed on 19/10/2011) on “the 9-11 photograph” as discussed in an earlier footnote, finally concludes by thus reconciling against the apparently spontaneous apathy of the New Yorkers: “The people in the foreground are us. We are the ones whose lives went on, touched yet untouched, separated from the heart of the tragedy by the blue water of time, which has got ever wider and more impossible to cross. A 10-year-old event belongs to history, not the present. To feel the full sorrow of it now you need to watch a documentary – and then you will switch to something lighter, either because it is painfully clear that too much blood has been spent around the world in the name of this disaster, or simply because changing channels is what humans do. The people in this photograph cannot help being alive, and showing it.”

³⁸ “So many Chilean artists, writers and filmmakers still live in exile,” Mr. Guzman said. “There is no work for us at home, and there's also a very negative attitude toward the exiles. When I visited, I felt that there were a lot of people who wished I wasn't there. Chile has gone back to being a very divided country, a very class-structured country, and that does not make me feel good. When the exiles come back, they are often treated very badly.” Quoted from an interview available online at - <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/09/06/movies/film-the-new-battle-of-chile-keeping-memory-alive.html?pagewanted=all>, accessed on 19/10/2011.

absence in *Chile: An Obstinate Memory* if one reflects on it from the analytical mapping point-of-view of the two films. The reconciliation within the class question evidently predates the second film, a choice the camera makes to forego what cannot be accommodated.

But how does one remember when remembering hurts? Memory is not without a decaying materiality, it grows weak and old, tired and passive, or indifferent altogether with the body that contains it, it can be overwritten upon, it can even be wiped out in a certain physio-psychological condition. An entire culture of forgetting or being silenced too, may emerge as a healing mechanism against the present-ness of the past. Poetic truths reside in the cracks emerging and propagating within the architecture of the desire that competes with the potentiality of every documentary film. If desire was in the centre of *Battle of Chile* and its emotional charge, *Chile: An Obstinate Memory* is a story of those cracks. Poetics of the latter emerge from the erotics of the former, or perhaps as a result of it. The contrast is as much a matter of what condition separates them as it is of time. The erotic charge may prolong the struggle to sustain itself, but it is condemned to release its charge eventually; poetics is the only high available thereafter. *Battle of Chile* was evidently incomplete, a story in search of an end approached insufficiently from three different sides in the three parts, only to eventually locate it with the help of absences, gaps and a naturalized decay of the desire of the documentary. The generational separation or the collective remembering merely become the site of this decay, like an aging body, like one material separated from the other, the previous.

The *affective* provides the documentary with an overall unity. Regardless of the nature and meticulousness of the construction or the orientation of the affect, every filmic document negotiates desire and potential. While there is no alternative to rigour on the part of filmmaker, as witnessed in the contrast between *Battle of Chile* and *Chile: An Obstinate Memory*, the methodology, and the approach to the affect, must change its nature in its accordance. The most moving shots of *Chile: An Obstinate Memory* therefore, are those of the past re-enacted on the stage of the present with camera focusing not on the bigger political picture, but on the poetic bits that were subsumed under the erotics of a political battle, best reflected in the anonymous hand on what would have been Allende's car window, moving slowly to the rhythm of Beethoven's symphony. The seductive charge of liveness that *Battle of Chile* rides on unsettles its form as it cannot be resolved; the search for a release of the erotic charge finally leads to the poetics of an aestheticized form of *Chile: An Obstinate Memory*. The ethics of uncertainty finally arrest the battle for Chile within a blind spot of language, within aporetic truths, and within cracks emerging on the erotic map. Guzman picks verses from the crevices of these cracks and sets them to a rhyme and meter to construct the poetic truth of remembering, the aesthetics of the fragile materiality of memory. Perhaps, it goes on to highlight larger issues about the curse of the documentary format itself, the insurmountability of conditions that the erotics of documentary lay down for themselves. These erotics are the centripetal force applicable on all activity around the direct search for "the truth", sitting ever so elusively at the centre, and can only be balanced by the poetic friction, perhaps.

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